

# What keeps you awake at night?

## Entrepreneurs, pop stars, lottery winners: Who deserves to be rich – and who doesn't?

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*By Rainer Zitelmann*

Who are you most likely to think deserves to be rich? An elite athlete, an entrepreneur, a pop star or maybe even a lucky lottery winner?

“Which, if any, of the following groups of people do you personally believe deserve to be rich?” was the question put to 1,002 representative Britons by public opinion researchers from Ipsos MORI for a new study, [The Rich in Public Opinion](#).

Among the study's key findings are that the British are most likely to think that entrepreneurs (47 percent) deserve their wealth, followed by the self-employed (43 percent), creative people and artists, such as actors or musicians (36 percent). At the bottom of the pile: Senior bankers, who only 11 percent of Britons think deserve to be rich.

### Who deserves to be rich?

*Percentages correspond to the percentage of Britons who believe the group 'deserve' their wealth*

- Entrepreneurs (47 percent)
- Self-employed people (43 percent)
- Creative people and artists, such as actors or musicians (36 percent)
- Lottery winners (27 percent)



- Top athletes (24 percent)
- Financial investors (19 percent)
- Senior level managers (17 percent)
- Property investors (17 percent)
- Heirs (13 percent)
- Senior bankers (11 percent)
- None of these: (27 percent)
- Don't know: (2 percent)

## Massive differences between younger and older Britons

There are, however, huge differences between younger and older Britons.

For example, one in three respondents under the age of 30 raises no objection to the wealth of financial investors, in stark contrast to just 13 percent of those aged over 60. And 27 percent of younger Britons have no problem with senior-level managers' rich rewards, compared to only half as many older Britons (14 percent).

The difference is similarly large when it comes to property investors, who deserve to be rich according to 27 percent of younger Britons but only 13 percent of older Britons. And while only five percent of Britons over 60 say senior bankers deserve to be rich, this contrasts sharply with almost four times as many (19 percent) of those under the age of 30.

Younger Britons are also much more likely to agree that elite athletes, creative people and artists deserve to be rich.

## Enviers do not begrudge lottery winners their fortunes

The study developed a social envy scale to categorise respondents according to the extent to which they envy the rich.



Based on interviewees' responses to a range of questions, three groups emerged: Social enviers; non-enviers; and a third group, the ambivalents.

It is noticeable that social enviers are more likely to think that lottery winners deserve their wealth than people who experience little or no social envy. Among social enviers in Great Britain, 32 percent believe that lottery winners deserve to be rich, compared to just 23 percent of non-enviers.

The same question was also asked in three other countries (Germany, France and the United States).

In each country, social enviers are most likely to believe that lottery winners deserve to be rich. In fact, the difference between enviers and non-enviers in these European countries was even more striking than was the case in the United States.

Take Germany for example: 61 percent of social envious in Germany agree that lottery winners deserve their wealth – significantly more than deem the self-employed (49 percent), creative people (48 percent) or entrepreneurs (33 percent) deserve to be rich.

The figures for non-envious in Germany are quite different, with 71 percent agreeing that the self-employed deserve to be rich, 68 percent saying the same of entrepreneurs and 53 percent feeling positively disposed toward rich creative people. Lottery winners rank only fourth among non-envious, at 49 percent.

### The lottery paradox

The fact that social envious are most likely to say that lottery winners deserve to be rich may seem surprising at first glance and certainly needs some explanation.

After all, other rich groups are vehemently criticised for the alleged discrepancies between how long and hard they work and their wealth. This is an opinion held, for example, in relation to senior-level managers: 62 percent of social envious in Great Britain (but only 19 percent of non-envious) agree with the statement “I think it is inappropriate for managers to earn so much more as they do not work so much longer and harder than their employees”.

It certainly seems paradoxical: Why do social envious doubt that managers deserve their wealth, while at the same time believing that lottery winners whose only real “achievement” was randomly filling out a lottery ticket correctly, do?

As the sociologist Helmut Schoeck has tellingly observed, envious people are most likely to think that advantages are deserved when the advantages are the result of luck and chance rather than of achievement and merit.

After all, if someone else has gained an advantage through luck or chance – unlike when the advantage is based on achievement – it does not lead to the nagging question of why one does not have the advantage oneself.

Mr Schoeck even cited lottery winners as an example. The random selection process of a lottery ensures that the winner is not envied: “A wife will not nag her husband for not having bought the right lottery ticket ... No one could seriously suffer from an inferiority complex as a result of repeated failure.”

In terms of self-esteem, it is therefore easier to accept the good fortune of a lottery winner without envy than it is to come to terms with the success of an entrepreneur or a senior-level manager. Moreover, people who play the lottery think there is even a remote chance that they could join the ranks of the lucky winners themselves at some point.

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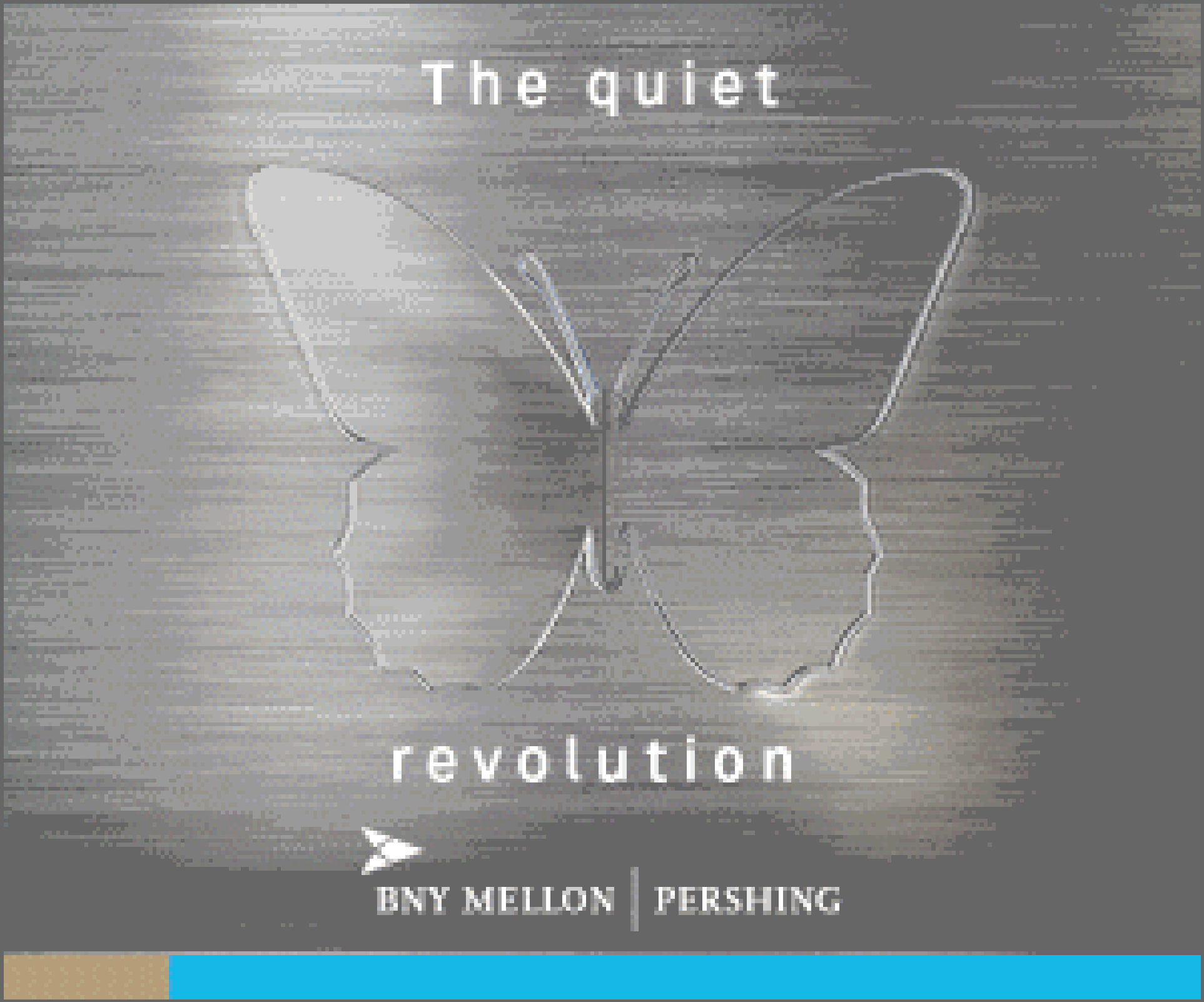
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