

RESOURCE 6.3A

'Soft atheism' among European millennials: features and explanations [reduced]

David Herbert and Josh Bullock interviewed 67 non-religious people in their 20s-30s, across 25 European cities. These interviewees were mostly 'engaged unbelievers' – active in overtly non-religious organisations/networks.²

Read extracts from the interviews on Resource 6.4 online. Match the statements below to any of the interviews in which you can see evidence to back up these statements.

1 34% of interviewees express 'PSMS' beliefs – those connected with the paranormal, superstitious, magical, and supernatural.	2 Some participants expressed belief that there is a sense of moral order in the universe.	3 Religion and non-religion differ from each other, but sometimes non-religion <i>mirrors</i> or <i>imitates</i> religion (e.g. life-cycle rituals, youth work, hospice work).
4 Religion and non-religion are not opposites; they are <i>entangled</i> in people's attempts to make sense of and relate to the world.	5 16% of participants talk of karma as kind of cosmic justice. 25% talk of karma in a sense that being nice to people will attract the same in return.	6 'Soft' atheism is open to non-materialist ways of thinking (e.g. karma, luck, superstition etc.).
7 Participants seem able to hold 'hard' atheist ideas at the same time as holding PSMS beliefs.	8 Some participants try to explain PSMS beliefs using scientific explanations.	9 The researchers suggest that PSMS and other non-religious beliefs help us think we have significance, and give a sense of control in an uncertain world.
10 Some participants see the universe as 'on our side' – it sets things up helpfully for us so that good things happen.	11 Belief that the universe is 'on our side' may reassure us, give us hope and encourage us to choose to act well towards others.	12 Science may explain why you are feeling unbalanced in life but cannot reassure us that the universe cares for us.
13 Some participants create their own rituals; others continue with religious rituals shaped for their non-religious worldview.	14 Some interviewees refer to stories or films that help them make sense of the world and express meaning.	

² David Herbert & Josh Bullock (2020) 'Reaching for a new sense of connection: soft atheism and 'patch and make do' spirituality amongst nonreligious European millennials', *Culture and Religion*, 21:2, 157-177 (Taylor & Francis)