

## **Fiche biblio n° 2. Le conformisme des souvenirs**

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Selon les résultats d'une enquête menée en Australie (Paterson & Kemp, 2006), la présence d'au moins deux témoins sur les lieux d'un crime est une situation courante (86 % des cas). Ces témoins discutent souvent des faits, ce que confirme une étude réalisée sur le terrain au Royaume-Uni (Skagerberg & Wright, 2008).

Depuis environ une dizaine d'années, plusieurs équipes de recherche ont commencé à analyser les effets de ces discussions entre témoins. Elles ont notamment découvert qu'un témoin pouvait de cette manière influencer les déclarations d'un autre témoin en lui suggérant des informations erronées. En conséquence, leurs souvenirs des faits finissent par se ressembler et peuvent faire croire qu'ils se corroborent. Les chercheurs ont appelé ce phénomène la contagion sociale ou conformisme des souvenirs.

L'enquête sur l'attentat d'Oklahoma City, en 1995 aux États unis, fournit l'un des exemples parmi les plus connus de conformisme des souvenirs. Au cours de l'enquête, un employé de l'entreprise ayant loué le véhicule utilisé pour l'attaque a convaincu deux de ses collègues que Timothy McVeigh, l'auteur présumé de l'attentat, s'était présenté en compagnie d'un autre homme. Pourtant, à l'origine, ces deux témoins n'avaient aucun souvenir d'une telle information. La recherche du complice a été déclenchée, mais s'est révélée infructueuse. L'homme en question était vraisemblablement un autre client en rien impliqué dans l'affaire.

Trois raisons sont généralement évoquées pour comprendre l'origine du conformisme des souvenirs (Wright, Memon, Skagerberg & Gabbert, 2009). Certains témoins peuvent accepter les informations d'un autre témoin parce qu'ils ne veulent pas afficher leur désaccord : c'est l'influence normative. D'autres peuvent le faire parce qu'ils estiment que l'autre témoin serait plus compétent et détiendrait de meilleures informations : c'est l'influence informationnelle. Enfin, les suggestions d'un témoin peuvent modifier les souvenirs d'un autre témoin, conduisant ce dernier à former un nouveau (faux) souvenir de la situation. Ce sont les distorsions de la mémoire.

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Les ajouts sont précédés du signe \*

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