Project title: A new wave in child police interviewing: Improving police interviewing by using virtual child avatars

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Function: Assistant Professor

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Proposal (250 words):

Introduction: Children are increasingly involved in legal cases as witnesses or victims of a crime. In such cases, children are often interviewed by the police about what ostensibly occurred. In many countries, the police receives training about how to interview children. The problem here is that such training is time-consuming and costly. In this research, we will test whether we can improve police interviewing techniques by making use of virtual avatars. One group of police interviewers will be trained by using a webtool in which they have to ask questions to virtual child avatars about a certain case (e.g., on an alleged sexual abuse experience). The interviewers will receive feedback when they use the wrong set of questions (e.g., suggestive questions). Other groups of interviewers will not be trained.

Hypothesis and Objectives: The main hypothesis is that such a training using virtual avatars will improve police interviewing tactics. The idea is that multiple papers will be written on various aspects related to this topic such as papers on possible improvements in the use of asking the correct set of questions and papers on field studies in which will be examined whether this training will also improve the police when they work on actual cases.

Setting and Methods: The research will be done in the Netherlands. Dr. Otgaar (the Netherlands) and Prof. Santilla (China) are experts on child interviewing. We will use a webtool that uses virtual avatars that can be used in both universities and ideally in police settings as well.

Impact: Research shows that police interviewing is often suboptimal in that oftentimes, suggestive questions are asked to victims and eyewitnesses. The use of such can lead to false accusations and wrongful convictions. The current research will lead to better interviewing tactics and might reduce the chance of false accusations.

Requirements candidate: Highly motivated student with good English communication skills and proactive and resolute attitude.

Keywords: Interviewing, Police, Victims, Eyewitnesses, Virtual Avatar, Memory

Top 5 selected publications:

1. Otgaar, H., & Baker, A. (in press). When lying changes memory for the truth. *Memory.*
2. Otgaar**,** H., Muris, P., Howe, M.L., & Merckelbach, H. (2017). What drives false memories in psychopathology? A case for associative activation. *Clinical Psychological Science, 5,* 1048-1069.
3. Otgaar, H., Howe, M.L., Smeets, T., & Brackmann, N. (2016). The malleability of developmental trends in neutral and negative memory illusions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 145,* 31-55.
4. Otgaar**,** H., Scoboria, A., & Mazzoni, G. (2014). On the existence and implications of nonbelieved memories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23,* 349-354
5. Otgaar, H., Scoboria, A., & Smeets, T. (2013). Experimentally evoking nonbelieved memories for childhood events. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory & Cognition, 39,* 717-730.