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Exploring the self in adolescent depression: neural mechanisms underlying social evaluations and self-views from a parent-adolescent perspective

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EXPLORING THE SELF IN ADOLESCENT DEPRESSION

Neural mechanisms underlying
social evaluations and self-views
from a parent-adolescent perspective



Lisanne van Houtum



Lisanne van Houtum (1991) is a neuroscientist with an interest in development and psychopathology within a family context. In her thesis, Lisanne focused on identifying (dysfunctional) neural mechanisms underlying social evaluations and self-views from a parent-adolescent perspective, which may relate to (daily) parent-adolescent interactions as well as adolescent depression. Within the context of the RE-PAIR study, a NWO Vici project rewarded to her doctoral supervisor Prof.dr. Bernet Elzinga, she used ecologically valid functional magnetic resonance imaging tasks, to assess affective and neural responses to praise and criticism about the adolescent child, as well as neural responses to reliving positive autobiographical memories. Her studies show that particularly criticism about the child seems to be highly salient to parents and adolescents, activating the salience network and decreasing mood. Both praise and reliving positive autobiographical memories activate areas important for self-referential processing in adolescents, which might reflect the representation of a 'positive self'. Aberrant self-related processing when reliving autobiographical memories and increased sensitivity to parental criticism might be key underlying neural mechanisms in adolescent depression. By feeling more negatively, viewing the self as more negatively, interpreting the environment as more negatively, memorizing past experiences in a more negative way, and focusing on negative events more often, adolescents with depression seem to have multiple negativity biases. These negativity biases are likely to negatively impact social relationships, and in particular the parent-child relationship, potentially further reinforcing negative feelings, a negative self, and associated biases. Interventions exploring and strengthening the positive self, in particular the positive self that still aligns with the current self, might be useful for treating, or even preventing adolescent depression.