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Acceptance, rejection, and the social brain in adolescence : toward a neuroscience of peer relations

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PROPOSITIONS

*accompanying the public defense of Geert-Jan Will's dissertation
"Acceptance, Rejection, and the Social Brain in Adolescence" on June 4, 2015.*

1. Chronic peer rejection during childhood is associated with a heightened neural reactivity to social exclusion during adolescence (this thesis)
2. Adolescents who were chronically rejected during childhood exhibit heightened control-related brain activity when they forgive peers who excluded them, which suggests they have to exert more cognitive control to refrain from retaliation. (this thesis)
3. The capacity to put oneself into the shoes of another person is important for a range of prosocial behaviors, including forgiveness of excluders, helping a victim of exclusion, and sharing resources with strangers (this thesis).
4. A developmental cognitive neuroscience approach provides valuable insights into the affective, regulatory, and socio-cognitive processes that underlie behaviors thought to play a role in the emergence and maintenance of peer rejection (this thesis)
5. Theories on functional and structural brain development need to be updated through incorporating the socialization experiences that shape a developing brain.
6. Although the 'shared representation' theory of social and physical pain has inspired research that has significantly advanced our understanding of the neurobiology of social exclusion, the current body of evidence suggests that social pain is nothing more than a metaphor.
7. Bullying can only be attacked through adopting a multi-level approach: from the fundamental study of mechanisms underlying behavior to evidence-based classroom interventions and back.
8. Learning how to effectively communicate research to both the scientific community as well as to the general public should be part of every PhD student's training.
9. Science may never grow up as long as the lives of scientists remain so similar to those of high school students: most of the resources go to those who are liked (i.e. cited) the most and their lives basically revolve around acceptance by peers (who review their articles).
10. In the long run, cooperation will prove to be a more powerful driver of scientific progress than competition.