

EDUCATING AND PUNISHING THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

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Abstract

The American Psychological Association submitted an *amicus curiae* brief in the US Supreme Court case, *Hodgson v. Minnesota* (1990), arguing that given that adolescents had similar cognitive skills as adults, they should not be required to notify their parents before having an abortion. Yet, a brief in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005) was submitted arguing that since science had demonstrated that adolescent brains were not as developed as adult brains, they lack the ability to take moral responsibility for their decisions. Justice Scalia and many commentators found these positions inconsistent. Other commentators (Steinberg 2009) have attempted to reconcile the differences by claiming that *Hodgson* raised issues of cognitive capacity, whereas *Roper* addressed matters of emotive control. Yet, things are not quite so simple, especially if we recognize the complex interplay between the cognitive and the emotive. This not only has legal implications, but also educational ones. Are there ways to more effectively integrate the cognitive capacities and so-called emotive short-comings of adolescents? Or are we asking the wrong questions? To better deal with these issues, we need to seriously consider the implications of neuro-scientific claims about the adolescent brain. The problem may be as educators and parents that we do not recognize, encourage, and facilitate the cognitive capacities of young people to make moral judgments at a very early age.

Keywords: Abortion, Adolescents, Brain Development, Cognitive Ability, Moral Responsibility.

