

# The socializing role of logical consequences, mild punishments, and reasoning in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues

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## Abstract

Experimental studies focusing on the socialization role of parental authority exertion in persistent rule-breaking contexts involving non-personal issues have recently shown the advantages of using logical consequences over alternative strategies (mild punishments, reasoning, and no-authority). Using an experimental vignette approach and a sample of 214 adolescents ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.28$  years), the present study extended these findings by comparing the same parental interventions in a rule-breaking setting involving a multifaceted issue. Specifically, and based on research anchored in social domain theory, we evaluated how adolescents' perceptions of the issue underlying the multifaceted transgression (personal vs. non-personal) moderated the effects of authority exertion strategies on socialization indicators. When adolescents perceived the transgression as a non-personal issue, past results were replicated and enhanced. Adolescents rated the logical consequence as at least as effective as the mild punishment to prevent future transgressions (i.e., more so than reasoning and no-authority) and as the most acceptable strategy. Furthermore, contrary to the mild punishment, they did not perceive the logical consequence as more autonomy-thwarting than reasoning. In contrast, adolescents who categorized the transgression as a personal matter rated the logical consequence less favorably, leaving reasoning as a preferred form of intervention. Implications for optimal parenting are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

adolescence, conflict, parents/parenting

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent parenting research has sought to identify optimal authority exertion strategies in rule-breaking contexts (e.g., Mageau et al., 2018; Robichaud, Lessard, Labelle, & Mageau, 2019; Robichaud, Mageau, & Soenens, 2019). This line of work has suggested that, in order to foster socialization when adolescents persistently transgress rules, parents should exert constraints that are logically related to the problem created by youths' misbehavior (i.e., logical consequences), rather than constraints whose link to the problem is weak (i.e., mild punishments) or other authority strategies (i.e., reasoning and no-authority). Although promising, these studies were limited in scope, as they looked at transgressions solely involving non-personal issues (e.g., moral and conventional issues, Smetana, 2011). This is an appreciable limitation for a majority of parent–youth conflicts occur in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues (i.e., issues that may also be perceived as personal matters, Smetana, 1988; Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

The goal of our study was to address this limitation. To do so, we compared the effects of authority exertion strategies (logical consequences, mild punishments, reasoning, and no-authority) in a multifaceted rule-breaking context, and investigated the moderating role of adolescents' perceptions of the transgression (personal vs. non-personal issue) on socialization indicators (acceptability, effectiveness, and autonomy-thwarting beliefs).

### 1.1 | Socialization and authority exertion

While experts in parenting agree that it is vital for children's development that parents establish clear rules (Grusec, Danyliuk, Kil, & O'Neil, 2017), determining how to optimally intervene when these rules are broken is a difficult puzzle to solve. This difficulty originates in part from the fact that authority exertion has the potential to both foster and hamper children's emission and internalization of socially appropriate behaviors. Indeed, when children of all ages perceive that their parents' interventions are acceptable, they are more likely to internalize the values underlying these interventions (and hence comply autonomously, Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In contrast, children who perceive parental interventions as unacceptable are likely to fail to see the relevance of these interventions. As a result, they may not perceive valid reasons to comply and thus feel, if required to follow the rule, that their need for autonomy is thwarted (i.e., that their sense of agency and volition is compromised, Ryan & Deci, 2017). Given that autonomy-thwarting is negatively associated with indicators of future compliance and internalization (Van Petegem, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers, 2015), identifying factors fostering children's acceptance of parental interventions is essential to the promotion of optimal socialization. According to social domain theory, children's disposition to accept parental authority depends on their perceptions of the issues underlying their presumed transgressions.

### 1.2 | Authority exertion and social domain theory

Social domain theory postulates that humans categorize their behaviors (and transgressions) according to their impact on themselves and their environment (Smetana, 2011). Behaviors that affect another person's welfare or rights (e.g., stealing) belong to the moral domain, while those concerning established social norms (e.g., removing one's shoes when entering someone's house) pertain to the conventional domain. When children of all ages and their parents categorize a transgression as involving such non-personal issues, they tend to attribute it as an aspect of "wrongness" and, consequently, believe that it is acceptable for parents to intervene and exert their authority (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

In contrast, certain behaviors are regarded as personal matters (e.g., choosing which music to listen to when using earphones). These behaviors, which are a subpart of the psychological domain (Smetana, 2011), are considered to be (a) neither right nor wrong and (b) unharmed to the self in terms of health and safety (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). According to social domain theory, children (and especially adolescent children) strive to satisfy their need for autonomy through such behaviors and, claiming personal jurisdiction over them, tend to reject parental authority (Helwig, 2006).

While some behaviors clearly correspond to a specific issue (e.g., hurting a sibling is a moral issue), other behaviors (e.g., children refusing to clean their bedroom) are more ambiguous, as they entail personal facets (e.g., the choice of sleeping in an untidy room) and other facets that arguably concern non-personal matters (e.g., the imposition of an unpleasant sight on others). Social domain theory proposes that people may acknowledge the multiple facets of these behaviors, yet will ultimately categorize them as personal issues or non-personal ones (Smetana, 2011). Consequently, children's acceptance of parental authority in rule-breaking settings involving *multifaceted* issues may greatly depend on which issues (personal vs. non-personal) are rendered most salient.

### 1.2.1 | Authority exertion regarding personal and non-personal issues

Parents and children agree that parents should not exert their authority in situations solely involving personal matters, as these situations represent an opportunity for children to develop their own identity (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Accordingly, research has mostly investigated parental authority in settings clearly involving non-personal issues, where it has high legitimacy and is typically exerted. Recent experimental parenting research conducted in these settings has identified three authority exertion strategies preferable to the absence of authority, namely logical consequences, mild punishments, and reasoning. Logical consequences are constraints that require children to take responsibility for the consequences related to their misbehavior. Because this constraint strategy necessarily addresses the problem created by the transgression, it has a strong *problem-constraint* link. In contrast, mild punishments are constraints that aim at making children live a sufficiently aversive experience so that they avoid repeating the undesirable behavior. Consequently, this strategy tends to have a weak problem-constraint link. Finally, reasoning is a verbal intervention prompting compliance and internalization through explanations regarding the importance of the broken rule (see Mageau et al., 2018; Robichaud, Lessard et al., 2019; Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019, for further details on these strategies).

Research comparing the effects of these interventions in persistent rule-breaking contexts involving non-personal issues systematically found across samples, ages, designs, and indicators of internalization that logical consequences were most likely to foster compliance and internalization concomitantly, while mild punishments hindered internalization (e.g., by being rated less acceptable than logical consequences) and reasoning elicited compliance less effectively (Mageau et al., 2018; Robichaud, Lessard et al., 2019; Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019). Although these results may be useful to guide future research and interventions in such settings, they do not, however, provide information on the relevance of logical consequences and other authority exertion strategies in rule-breaking contexts involving *multifaceted* issues. This limitation is especially important for parent-adolescent interactions, given that during adolescence, multifaceted issues become recurrent, yield the most conflicts between parents and youth, and thus require the most frequent parental interventions (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

### 1.2.2 | Developmental changes in adolescence impacting parenting in contexts involving multifaceted issues

As children mature into adolescents, they develop cognitive abilities that enable them to reflect more elaborately on rules (Helwig, 2006). They also seek to establish their identity and move toward greater independence (Wray-Lake, Crouter, & McHale, 2010). However, because full cognitive and emotional maturity has yet to be reached

at this stage, adolescents may be ill-prepared to take on all the responsibilities associated with the independence they seek, and hence still require their parents' guidance.

Unfortunately, these developmental processes can hinder youths' disposition to accept parental guidance, especially with respect to multifaceted issues. Indeed, adolescents' independence and identity formation goals, paired with their developing cognitive abilities, have been argued to heighten their disagreement with parents' perspective regarding multifaceted issues (with parents still seeing those as non-personal matters, and adolescents now seeing them as personal ones; Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005). Furthermore, during discussions about such issues, adolescents' still-developing cognitive capacities can lead them to adopt an egocentric perspective (i.e., a tendency to center their reflections on their own point of view), which may limit their ability to consider their parents' opinion (Frankenberger, 2000).

### 1.2.3 | Authority exertion and multifaceted issues

Although socializing adolescents in settings involving multifaceted issues may be challenging for parents, intervening is nevertheless essential. Indeed, failing to exert authority in such settings is associated with maladjustment in later adolescence (Smetana et al., 2005). Youths, despite their egocentric and independence-seeking tendencies, also seem to recognize the value of a certain amount of parental authority in situations involving multifaceted issues that they consider as personal matters. Specifically, while adolescents evaluate constraints as less appropriate than no-authority in these situations, they rate parents' usage of reasoning as equally appropriate as an absence of authority (Padilla-Walker, 2008).

Although these recommendations are valuable, the problem-constraint link was never considered in rule-breaking studies on multifaceted issues, leaving its role undocumented. It thus remains possible that a strong problem-constraint link would increase the acceptability of constraints even when adolescents perceive their transgression as personal, making logical consequences also a recommendable strategy. However, given youths' active claim of their jurisdiction over personal issues, the restrictive aspect of constraints may be too salient and lead to the rejection of all constraints, independently of their problem-constraint link (Benson, Buehler, & Gerard, 2008).

## 1.3 | Present research

The goal of our study is thus to examine the socializing role of logical consequences in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues. To do so, we use an experimental vignette methodology to assess if adolescents' perceptions of a transgression (i.e., personal vs. non-personal issue) moderate the effects of authority exertion strategies (i.e., logical consequences, mild punishments, reasoning, and no-authority) on indicators relevant to such settings (i.e., effectiveness, acceptability, and autonomy-thwarting beliefs).

Evaluating effectiveness and acceptability beliefs provides evidence of adolescents' disposition to comply with the rule and internalize its non-personal facets (Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019), in addition to assessing the generalizability of previous findings to rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues. As a complement to these socialization indicators, we also examine autonomy-thwarting beliefs, as this other precursor of youths' disposition to comply and internalize is particularly likely to vary according to their transgression perceptions (Helwig, 2006).

### 1.3.1 | Hypotheses

We predict a significant interaction between authority exertion strategies and adolescents' transgression perceptions on all socialization indicators. First, we expect to replicate past findings with adolescents who will perceive the multifaceted transgression as a non-personal issue (Mageau et al., 2018; Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019). Specifically, logical consequences should be evaluated as the most acceptable strategy, while remaining at least as effective as mild punishments to prevent future transgressions (and more so than reasoning and no-authority).

We also anticipate that logical consequences will have an advantage over mild punishments in terms of autonomy-thwarting. Indeed, the orientation of mild punishments toward aversiveness should make this strategy more at odds with adolescents' individuality and thus most autonomy-thwarting. In contrast, logical consequences' orientation toward problem-solving should minimize its constraining aspect and hence have a more limited impact on adolescents' need for autonomy.

For adolescents categorizing the transgression as personal, however, we expect that they will evaluate logical consequences and mild punishments as the two less acceptable and most autonomy-thwarting strategies. In contrast, we predict that they will perceive reasoning as more acceptable than both constraint strategies (i.e., to a similar extent than no-authority) and less autonomy-thwarting. Finally, we expect that the unacceptability and autonomy-thwarting aspects of constraints will hinder their effectiveness to prevent future transgressions, compared to reasoning and no-authority (Van Petegem et al., 2015).

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants

A total of 214 high school adolescents, aged between 14 and 18 years old ( $M = 15.28$  years,  $SD = 0.79$  years; 102 girls), participated in this study. Participants were part of a larger research on parenting and, as such, they also took part in Robichaud, Mageau et al. (2019)'s study, although different manipulations and variables were examined. About two thirds (64.4%) of the sample were born in Canada, while the rest originated from countries in Africa (16.6%), the American continents (9.8%), Europe (6.8%), and Asia (2.4%).<sup>1</sup> In comparison, less than a third of adolescents' parents were born in Canada (mothers = 31.3%; fathers = 26.2%); the remainders originated from different countries around the globe. Regarding their education, roughly half of them had a university certification (mothers = 56.1%; fathers = 50.9%), 19.2% had another post-secondary diploma, and the rest had a high school diploma as their highest certification (mothers = 14.0%; fathers = 18.2%) or had not finished high school (mothers = 10.7%; fathers = 11.7%). Because the majority of adolescents (65.4%) did not know their family's revenue, we could not include this variable in the study.

### 2.2 | Procedure

#### 2.2.1 | Questionnaire

We asked adolescents to complete a two-part questionnaire at their high school. In the first part of the questionnaire, adolescents read comic strips illustrating mother–youth interactions in a persistent rule-breaking situation previously validated as involving a multifaceted issue (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). More precisely, the depicted adolescents (a girl or a boy, depending on participants' gender) decide to wear a nose ring to go to their friend's house, although their mothers disagree, based on non-personal concerns (i.e., the untidy look it gives and the offensive impact it may have on others). In line with past procedures (e.g., Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019), each participant read four comic strips illustrating this situation, and reported their beliefs regarding the different authority strategies presented in the comic strips (i.e., effectiveness to prevent future transgressions and acceptability) and their impact on their need for autonomy. In the second part, demographics and scales that were part of the broader study on parenting were presented.

#### 2.2.2 | Experimental manipulation

We manipulated authority exertion strategies by presenting in each of the four comic strips a different parental reaction to the depicted transgression. In the first three images of the comic strips, mothers remind the rule to their adolescents in an autonomy-supportive way. Specifically, they state their disagreement ("I do not agree with

wearing a nose ring"; all conditions), acknowledge their adolescents' perspective ("I know that you find your piercing pretty and that you like wearing it"; all conditions), offer a rationale for their concerns ("It looks untidy"; all conditions except the no-authority condition), and assert their expectations regarding adolescents' behaviors ("I expect that you remove it before going to your friend's house"; constraint conditions only).

In the last image of the comic strips, adolescents decide that they will not remove their nose ring, and their mothers react. In the no-authority condition, mothers do not intervene and drive their adolescents to their friend's house, even though they keep their nose ring. In the reasoning condition, they provide another rationale ("Some persons can also be offended, especially if they are not used to seeing one") and drive their adolescents to their friend's house, again without imposing compliance. In the mild punishment condition, mothers emit a constraint that is unrelated to the problem created by their adolescents' misdeed; they withdraw youths' privilege to watch television, and drive them to their friend's house (weak problem-constraint link). Finally, in the logical consequence condition, mothers exert a constraint in a way that addresses the transgression-induced problem: they state that they will drive their adolescents to their friend's house another evening, when they will have removed their nose ring (strong problem-constraint link).

### 2.2.3 | Validity

To ensure the validity of our manipulation, we included two verifications: one to confirm that the problem-constraint link was stronger for the logical consequence than for the mild punishment, and one to ensure that the impact of the problem-constraint link's strength would not be confounded with a difference in constraints' harshness (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). To increase the external validity of our results and maximize the probability that participants' reactions to the comic strips would resemble their reactions in real-life settings, we followed Aguinis and Bradley (2014)'s recommendations. Notably, we (a) used a counterbalanced repeated measure design (where each participant was exposed to all authority exertion strategies), so that individual covariates would be equally represented across experimental conditions, (b) added images to the text and matched the comic strips' characters to participants' gender to favor their immersion in the scenario, and (c) limited the length and number of comic strips to minimize fatigue. Figure 1 presents the logical consequence's comic strip. Table 1 presents the stories for the other conditions.

## 2.3 | Measures

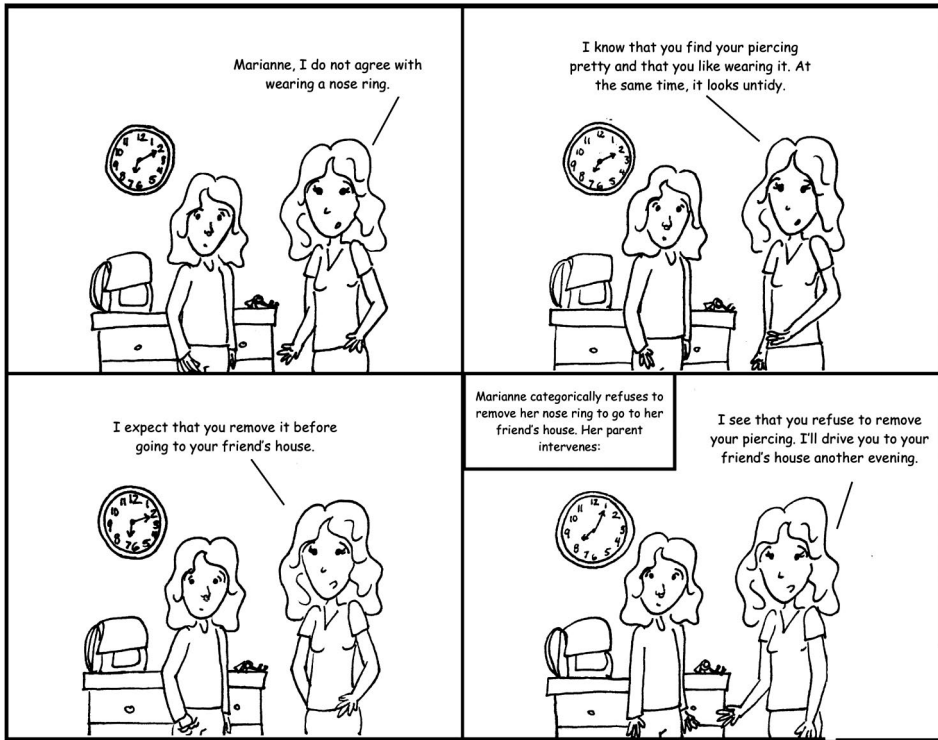
### 2.3.1 | Problem-constraint link

We evaluated the problem-constraint link's strength by asking participants to indicate to which extent they believed that each constraint strategy was logically linked to the problem created by the transgression. More precisely, participants reported after reading each constraint comic strip their level of agreement with the following statement: "In my opinion, the parent's intervention is logically related to the adolescent's behaviour," using a 5-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all* to 5 = *Completely agree*). This question has differentiated logical consequences from mild punishments in research reporting significant differences between both constraint strategies (Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019), suggesting good validity.

### 2.3.2 | Harshness of constraint strategies

To evaluate the harshness of the constraint strategies, we asked participants to indicate after reading each constraint comic strip their level of agreement with the following statement: "In my opinion, the parent's intervention is harsh," using a 5-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all* to 5 = *Completely agree*).

Marianne recently got her nose pierced. Although Marianne finds her piercing pretty, her parents do not like it. This evening, before going to her friend's house, Marianne chooses to wear her piercing. Her mother says:



**FIGURE 1** Comic strip for the logical consequence condition

### 2.3.3 | Transgression perceptions

We used Smetana and Asquith (1994)'s procedure to assess participants' perceptions of the issue underlying the depicted rule-breaking behavior. Precisely, we asked participants to indicate after reading the logical consequence scenario which of the three following categories they believed the transgression belonged to: (A) always wrong, whether or not the parent says so (moral issue), (B) wrong only if the parent says so (conventional issue), or (C) not an issue of right or wrong—up to the individual (personal issue). Categorizing a rule-breaking behavior in (A) or (B) implies that participants perceive the transgression as a non-personal issue. Categorizing it in (C) indicates that they perceive it as a personal one. This procedure discriminates with validity transgression perceptions (Robichaud, Mageau et al., 2019; Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

### 2.3.4 | Effectiveness

For each comic strip, we evaluated the effectiveness of the different authority exertion strategies to prevent future transgressions by asking adolescents to report their level of agreement with the following statement: "In my opinion, the parent's intervention is effective in preventing this situation from repeating itself," using a 5-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all* to 5 = *Completely agree*). This item was successfully used in previous studies (e.g., Mageau et al., 2018) and demonstrated good validity.

**TABLE 1** Stories for the comic strips. Context: Marianne recently got her nose pierced. Although Marianne finds her piercing pretty, her parents do not like it. This evening, before going to her friend's house, Marianne chooses to wear her piercing. Her mother says:

Condition	Story
Logical consequence	This story is depicted in Figure 1's comic strip.
Mild punishment	Image 1- Mother: Marianne, I do not agree with wearing a nose ring. Image 2- I know that you find your piercing pretty and that you like wearing it. At the same time, it looks untidy. Image 3- Mother: I expect that you remove it before going to your friend's house. Image 4- Marianne categorically refuses to remove her nose ring to go to her friend's house. Her parent is leaving to drive her and intervenes: Mother: I see that you refuse to remove your piercing. Since you refuse to remove it, you are no longer allowed to watch television!
Reasoning	Image 1- Mother: Marianne, I do not agree with wearing a nose ring. Image 2- Mother: I know that you find your piercing pretty and that you like wearing it. Image 3- Mother: At the same time, it looks untidy. Image 4- Marianne categorically refuses to remove her nose ring to go to her friend's house. Her parent is leaving to drive her and intervenes: Mother: Marianne, wearing a nose ring looks untidy. Some persons can also be offended, especially if they are not used to seeing one.
No-authority	Image 1- Mother: Marianne, I know that you find your piercing pretty and that you like wearing it. Image 2- Mother: At the same time, I do not agree with wearing a nose ring. Image 3- Marianne categorically refuses to remove her nose ring to go to her friend's house. Her parent is leaving to drive her and does not intervene: Mother: It's time to go to your friend's house. Image 4- Marianne takes her bag and leaves.

### 2.3.5 | Acceptability

For each comic strip, we measured the acceptability of authority exertion strategies by asking adolescents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: "In my opinion, the parent's intervention is acceptable," using a 5-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all* to 5 = *Completely agree*). This item was also used and validated in past studies using similar experimental settings, detecting differences in interpersonal climates and authority exertion strategies (e.g., Robichaud, Lessard et al., 2019).

### 2.3.6 | Autonomy-thwarting

We assessed the role of authority exertion strategies on autonomy-thwarting beliefs using one item of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS, Chen et al., 2015). After reading each comic strip, youths indicated to which extent they thought their need for autonomy would have been thwarted by the parental intervention if they had been the adolescent in the story ("I would have felt forced to do something I wouldn't have chosen to do"), using a 5-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all* to 5 = *Completely agree*). We chose this item based on its higher factor loading and adaptability to rule-breaking contexts. The autonomy-thwarting subscale of the BPNSFS



is reliable ( $\alpha$  ranging from 0.71 to 0.77) and valid, being negatively related to life satisfaction and positively to depressive symptoms across cultures (Chen et al., 2015).

## 2.4 | Plan of analyses

Prior to conducting the main analyses, we examined whether there was notable missing data (i.e., more than 5%, Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). We also confirmed the validity of our comic strips by verifying that, independently of participants' perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression, (a) the logical consequence had a stronger problem-constraint link than the mild punishment (*t*-test) and (b) both constraint strategies were judged as equally harsh (*t*-test). Finally, we ensured that sufficient variation occurred between participants' transgression perceptions to test an interaction effect (i.e., ratio inferior to 90:10, Rummel, 1970).

For the main analyses, we performed a MANOVA to verify the presence of a significant interaction effect of authority exertion strategies and transgression perceptions at the multivariate level. We then conducted three repeated-measures' ANOVAs adjusted for potential deviations of the sphericity assumption with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction, followed by Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons, to evaluate the impact of authority exertion strategies (i.e., logical consequence, mild punishment, reasoning, and no-authority) as moderated by adolescents' perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression (i.e., personal vs. non-personal) on effectiveness, acceptability, and autonomy-thwarting beliefs. Given that the only between-subject variable involved in the study (i.e., participants' perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression) is a moderator of within-subject differences, we did not include any covariate in the analyses.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Preliminary analyses

#### 3.1.1 | Missing data

Less than 5% of the data were missing (i.e., 1.69%), such that they were considered to be missing completely at random. Missing data were not further treated.

#### 3.1.2 | Transgression perceptions

About 61.30% of the participants categorized the issue underlying adolescents' transgression as non-personal (moral or conventional), while the rest (38.70%) categorized it as personal. This variation being sufficient for moderation analyses, we proceeded with our investigation.

#### 3.1.3 | Problem-constraint link and harshness of constraint strategies

Results first showed no significant interaction between participants' transgression perceptions and the type of constraints (i.e. logical consequence vs. mild punishment) on participants' evaluation of the constraints' problem-constraint link and harshness level, both  $p \geq .332$ . Paired *t*-tests then confirmed the validity of our manipulation by showing that adolescents perceived the logical consequence ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) as having a stronger problem-constraint link than the mild punishment ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ),  $t(205) = 4.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.38$ , without however perceiving differences in terms of harshness (logical consequence,  $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ; mild punishment,  $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $t(208) = 0.45$ ,  $p = .655$ .

## 3.2 | Main analyses

### 3.2.1 | Multivariate effect

We first observed a significant interaction effect at the multivariate level, Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.83$ ,  $F_{\text{exact}}(6, 175) = 6.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.17$ , and thus proceeded with analyses at the univariate level for each dependent variable. Means and standard deviations for each dependent variable in each condition are presented in Table 2. Significant mean differences reported in the main analyses have  $p$ -values below .05.

### 3.2.2 | Effectiveness

There was a significant interaction effect between authority exertion strategies and adolescents' transgression perceptions on effectiveness beliefs,  $F(2.77, 809.41) = 3.192$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ . For adolescents who categorized the transgression as non-personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was observed,  $F(2.88, 492.05) = 40.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.26$ . Replicating past findings, adolescents rated both constraint strategies (logical consequence,  $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ; and mild punishment,  $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) as more effective than reasoning ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), which was in turn more effective than no-authority ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Although adolescents rated the logical consequence as more effective than the mild punishment, this difference was marginally significant rather than statistically significant,  $p = .078$ .

For adolescents who categorized the transgression as personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was also found,  $F(2.48, 327.35) = 8.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$ , although the pattern of differences changed. More precisely, adolescents still rated no-authority ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) as significantly less effective than all other strategies, but did not perceive significant differences in terms of effectiveness between the logical consequence ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ), the mild punishment ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ), and reasoning ( $M = 2.15$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

### 3.2.3 | Acceptability

We observed a significant interaction effect between authority exertion strategies and adolescents' transgression perceptions on acceptability beliefs,  $F(2.55, 1,010.49) = 17.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$ . For adolescents who categorized the transgression as non-personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was observed,  $F(2.61, 560.15) = 14.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$ . Replicating once again past results, adolescents believed the logical consequence to be the most acceptable strategy ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ), differing significantly from the mild punishment ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and reasoning ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ), which in turn did not differ from each other.

**TABLE 2** Means ( $SD$ ) of adolescents' perceived effectiveness and acceptability of the employed authority exertion strategies and autonomy-thwarting beliefs according to their perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression

		No-authority	Reasoning	Mild punishment	Logical consequence
Effectiveness	Non-personal	1.53 (1.08) <sup>a</sup>	2.22 (1.19) <sup>b</sup>	2.78 (1.36) <sup>c</sup>	3.16 (1.41) <sup>c</sup>
	Personal	1.52 (1.11) <sup>a</sup>	2.15 (1.22) <sup>b</sup>	2.28 (1.33) <sup>b</sup>	2.49 (1.37) <sup>b</sup>
Acceptability	Non-personal	2.17 (1.35) <sup>a</sup>	2.75 (1.37) <sup>b</sup>	2.83 (1.12) <sup>b</sup>	3.18 (1.35) <sup>c</sup>
	Personal	3.05 (1.61) <sup>a</sup>	2.74 (1.36) <sup>a</sup>	2.14 (1.20) <sup>b</sup>	2.44 (1.36) <sup>ab</sup>
Autonomy-thwarting	Non-personal	2.44 (1.45) <sup>a</sup>	2.97 (1.37) <sup>b</sup>	3.35 (1.36) <sup>c</sup>	3.22 (1.35) <sup>bc</sup>
	Personal	2.53 (1.60) <sup>a</sup>	3.21 (1.55) <sup>b</sup>	4.00 (1.134) <sup>c</sup>	4.00 (1.31) <sup>c</sup>

Note: For each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$ .

Exerting no-authority ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) was perceived as the least acceptable strategy, being significantly lower than all other strategies.

For adolescents who categorized the transgression as personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was also found,  $F(2.45, 450.34) = 6.48$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$ , but the pattern of differences changed. In this context, the mild punishment ( $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) was perceived as the least acceptable strategy, differing significantly from reasoning ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and no-authority ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ), the two latter not differing from each other. The logical consequence ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) was situated in between the mild punishment and the other strategies but did not statistically differ from any conditions.

### 3.2.4 | Autonomy-thwarting

Finally, we found a significant interaction effect between authority exertion strategies and adolescents' transgression perceptions on autonomy-thwarting beliefs,  $F(2.67, 531.09) = 3.67$ ,  $p = .016$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ . For adolescents who categorized the transgression as non-personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was observed,  $F(2.76, 339.72) = 17.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$ . Adolescents believed that the mild punishment ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) was the most autonomy-thwarting strategy, being evaluated as significantly more frustrating than reasoning ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) which was in turn more frustrating than no-authority ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ). The logical consequence ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) was situated in between the mild punishment and reasoning but did not significantly differ from either.

For adolescents who categorized the transgression as personal, a significant simple effect of authority exertion strategies was also found,  $F(2.46, 187.09) = 23.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$ , but the pattern of differences changed. In this context, both constraint strategies (logical consequence,  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ; mild punishment,  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) were perceived as equally more autonomy-thwarting than reasoning ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ), which in turn was more thwarting than no-authority ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ).

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The goal of our study was to extend past work on the socializing role of logical consequences to rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues. To do so, we asked adolescents to read comic strips depicting parent-youth interactions in a multifaceted setting. We then assessed how adolescents' perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression (i.e., personal vs. non-personal) influenced the effect of logical consequences and other parental authority exertion strategies (i.e., mild punishments, reasoning, and no-authority) on effectiveness, acceptability, and autonomy-frustration beliefs.

### 4.1 | Authority exertion in response to transgressions categorized as non-personal

Results first showed that adolescents' transgression perceptions moderated the impact of authority exertion strategies on all variables. When adolescents categorized the transgression as a non-personal issue, past results were replicated and enhanced. Adolescents rated the logical consequence as at least as effective as the mild punishment to prevent future transgressions (i.e., more so than reasoning and no-authority) and as the most acceptable strategy of all. Furthermore, contrary to the mild punishment, they did not perceive the logical consequence as more autonomy-thwarting than reasoning. However, neither did they perceive it as differing from the mild punishment.

The unexpected absence of difference between the logical consequence and the mild punishment on autonomy-thwarting calls for further investigation. Indeed, because acceptability beliefs are argued to be negatively associated with threats to autonomy (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994), one could expect that logical consequences' greater

acceptability would result in less autonomy-frustration feelings than mild punishments. However, it is possible that adolescents consider logical consequences as more acceptable than mild punishments even though both constraints thwart their autonomy because, with logical consequences, youths are more actively involved in successfully improving others' welfare or family harmony, which in turn could foster acceptability beliefs through increased perceptions of competence and affiliation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It may also be possible that adolescents' salient concerns for independence and identity formation in settings involving multifaceted issues make them particularly sensitive to autonomy-thwarting feelings, even when they categorize the transgression as non-personal (Helwig, 2006). Consequently, they may fail to see how logical consequences and mild punishments could differentially impact their autonomy. Given that adolescents' perceptions of parental interventions are the ultimate determinant of the ensued socializing impact of these interventions (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Petegem, 2015), future research should examine the role of constraints on additional aspects of adolescents' experience to clarify their effects on autonomy.

#### 4.2 | Authority exertion in response to transgressions categorized as personal

Adolescents who categorized the transgression as a personal matter perceived the logical consequence and the other strategies differently. Indeed, they rated the effectiveness of constraint strategies to prevent future transgressions rather poorly (i.e., only as highly as reasoning), and clearly evaluated them as the two most autonomy-thwarting interventions. Furthermore, they perceived them as less acceptable, with the logical consequence not statistically differing from any strategy and the mild punishment being evaluated as the least acceptable strategy. These results extend previous research by showing that the harmful effect of exerting constraints in response to transgressions perceived as personal issues does not appear to vary according to the problem-constraint link strength. Because teenagers claim personal jurisdiction over their behaviors in such situations and tend to adopt an egocentric perspective, they may solely focus on the hindering impact that constraints have on their goals and reject all constraint strategies consequently, making the problem-constraint link strength irrelevant. The potential impact of constraints on others' welfare may also be less salient in these settings, such that emitting any constraint would be unlikely to contribute to adolescents' sense of competence or affiliation.

Compared to constraints, reasoning seemed like a preferable intervention to address personal issues. More precisely, while keeping in mind that youths' appreciation of constraints and reasoning was fairly low (e.g., their effectiveness and acceptability scores ranged from 2.14 to 2.75 on 5-point scales), adolescents perceived reasoning as equally effective to elicit future compliance as both constraint strategies, in addition to rating them as less autonomy-thwarting and as generally more acceptable. Furthermore, although they judged reasoning as more autonomy-thwarting than a complete absence of authority, they rated it as equally acceptable and as more effective to prevent future transgressions than no-authority. Hence, by providing rationales in multifaceted settings categorized as personal issues, parents may be able to offer guidance to adolescents without overly thwarting their need for autonomy, thereby preventing the impeding effects of constraints or a lack of authority (Padilla-Walker, 2008; Smetana et al., 2005).

#### 4.3 | Authority exertion in response to transgressions involving multifaceted issues

Taken together, these findings highlight certain general tendencies in adolescents' evaluation of authority exertion in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues. Indeed, our results suggest that, regardless of adolescents' transgression perceptions, parents may elicit future compliance more effectively through verbal and constraint interventions than through an absence of authority, although the former strategies (and especially constraints with weak problem-constraint link) may come across as more autonomy-thwarting than the latter one. Yet, adolescents seem to acknowledge the relevance of authority exertion in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues, as certain interventions (i.e., reasoning and logical consequences) were systematically rated as at least as acceptable as no-authority.

In addition to underlying these general tendencies, the results also underscore the importance for researchers to consider adolescents' perceptions of the issues underlying transgressions when they examine the role of authority exertion strategies in rule-breaking contexts involving multifaceted issues. Indeed, assessing these perceptions offered relevant insights into the varying socialization impact of logical consequences and other strategies, which in turn can contribute to provide practical authority exertion guidelines to parents.

## 4.4 | Limits and directions for future research

### 4.4.1 | Methodology

While the present results do offer interesting insights, they also come with noteworthy methodological limitations. First, the findings are based on comic strips depicting solely one transgression, consequently reducing the confidence in the reliability and content validity of the results. Of particular importance, the depicted multifaceted transgression was based on a conventional issue (i.e., the social acceptability of wearing a nose ring), leaving unknown adolescents' perceptions of authority in multifaceted settings involving other non-personal issues (e.g., prudential ones). Future research is thus needed to examine whether adolescents' perceptions of the issues underlying various multifaceted transgressions similarly moderate the socializing role of authority exertion strategies.

Second, although experimental vignette methodology offers the advantage of testing causality, it has the disadvantage of assessing anticipated reactions to hypothetical situations, leaving adolescents' actual reactions to real-life parental authority unknown. While adolescents' evaluations of hypothetical parent-youth interactions and responses to actual interactions with their parents are similar (e.g., Van Petegem et al., 2015), future research should nevertheless evaluate the role of logical consequences in real-life settings to establish whether the observed anticipated effects translate into corresponding reactions.

### 4.4.2 | Single items

Another limitation of our present study pertains to the use of single items. Indeed, in addition to sometimes failing to measure psychological constructs reliably, single items may not grasp the full nuances of constructs, and hence limit the validity of the results (Diamantopoulos, Sarstedt, Fuchs, Wilczynski, & Kaiser, 2012). This limitation has particular implication for our assessment of autonomy-thwarting. Indeed, the item we chose was behaviorally oriented (i.e., "I would have felt forced to do something I wouldn't have chosen to do") rather than cognitively or emotionally oriented (e.g., "I would have found it difficult to feel that I could be myself"). As a result, it may have inflated the differences between the constraint conditions and the other conditions. Specifically, because the constraint conditions were the only one where mothers explicitly stated their expectations regarding adolescents' behaviors (i.e., "I expect that you remove [your nose ring] before going to your friend's house") and required them to behave in specific ways (i.e., by emitting constraints), logical consequences and mild punishments may have received higher scores on this specific behavior-oriented item (reasoning and no-authority potentially lower scores) than they would have received if they had answered an autonomy-thwarting item tapping more specifically on adolescents' internal experiences. Hence, a more comprehensive measure of autonomy-thwarting should be used in future research aiming to clarify the effect of logical consequences on youths' need for autonomy.

### 4.4.3 | Stating expectations

Future studies could also investigate whether stating expectations regarding youths' behaviors may, on its own, play a valuable socialization role. Given that expectation stating provides structuring information to adolescents, this may well be the case (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). Such research could also look at how various combinations and order presentations of expectation stating and other strategies (e.g., reasoning and logical consequences)

may influence their socializing effectiveness. For instance, it may be sound to suppose that, because constraints are restrictive, youths would be more willing to endorse them if, prior to being subjected to such interventions, they were given verbal information (reasoning) and guidance (expectations) to address the transgression-induced problem on their own. Yet, in contexts where youths already know their parents' expectations and understand the impact of their transgression, hearing this information again could be interpreted as lecturing rather than helpful (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004). In such settings, directly addressing the problem created by the transgression could be more beneficial. By determining how various factors influence the relevance of different interventions, research can empower parents to select authority exertion strategies based on their knowledge of their children and the situation (Soenens et al., 2015).

#### 4.4.4 | Problem-constraint link and harshness

Future studies could also investigate potential interactions between the problem-constraint link and other characteristics related to constraints that are known to influence socialization. It would notably be interesting to assess how various levels of harshness affect logical consequences' and mild punishments' socializing potential. It is possible that mild punishments' reliance on aversiveness renders this strategy dependent on a minimal level of harshness to foster compliance. In contrast, logical consequences' focus on problem-solving may not necessitate (and even be more profitable without) harshness to prevent future transgressions. Establishing that constraints solely require a certain amount of harshness to prompt compliance when the strength of the problem-constraint link is weak would provide further arguments in favor of logical consequences, as harshness has been repeatedly and negatively associated with internalization indicators (e.g., acceptability beliefs, Benson et al., 2008).

In a similar vein, future research could examine whether logical consequences that are less harsh have some beneficial socialization effects in settings involving a multifaceted issue perceived by adolescents as personal. It is possible that adolescents would perceive logical consequences as more acceptable and less autonomy-thwarting at lower levels of harshness (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994), and as a result be more likely to comply. Such findings would offer another way to parents to exert their authority in these situations.

#### 4.4.5 | Factors influencing transgression perceptions

Another avenue for future research would be to investigate what leads adolescents and parents to focus on either non-personal or personal facets of transgressions involving multifaceted issues. Considering that most parent-youth conflicts arise as a result of a disagreement on whether behaviors pertain to personal or non-personal matters, and that conflicts between adolescents and their parents have been associated with adolescents' increased levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (Chung, Flook, & Fuligni, 2009), identifying factors enhancing adolescents' disposition to recognize the non-personal facets of transgressions, and the personal facets of parents, would be important. Indeed, such factors could help each member of the dyad consider the other's perspective when selecting or evaluating the acceptability of authority exertion strategies, thereby potentially reducing parent-youth conflicts.

Scholars interested in this topic could look at factors related to adolescents' and parents' characteristics, such as their empathic disposition. Because adolescents (and parents) who are more empathic tend to adopt a less egocentric perspective (Frankenberger, 2000), one could postulate that empathic feelings would render youths (and parents) more sensitive and attuned to the other's internal state and perspective, thereby greatly easing parent-youth communication about the non-personal and personal aspects of the multifaceted issue. Other studies could examine how parents' (or adolescents') interpersonal communication style influences adolescents' (or parents') perceptions of the issues underlying multifaceted transgressions. Research conducted among pre-adolescent children suggests that parents who communicate rules in an autonomy-supportive manner rather than in an autonomy-thwarting one increase children's empathy and acceptance of their interventions (e.g., Robichaud,

Lessard et al., 2019). If this effect persists in adolescence, it may well in turn foster youths' disposition to perceive the non-personal facets of their transgression. Similarly, adolescents who adopt an autonomy-supportive communication style when expressing their disagreement toward a given rule could also facilitate their parents' understanding of their perspective and hence reduce conflicts.

#### 4.4.6 | Authority across issues

Scholars could also consider evaluating if and how adolescents' assessment of logical consequences (or other authority exertion strategies) varies across issues that are (a) clearly non-personal, (b) multifaceted, and (c) clearly personal. For example, research could investigate whether the observed disadvantages of logical consequences in situations involving multifaceted issues perceived as personal are even greater in situations that arguably do not contain any non-personal aspects (e.g., listening to music in earphones that is contrary to parents' musical preferences). In such context, parental authority's legitimacy may well be rejected with further assurance by adolescents, making logical consequences even less acceptable.

Likewise, future research could evaluate if adolescents' appreciation of logical consequences is superior in response to transgressions clearly established as involving non-personal issues, compared to multifaceted ones that are perceived as non-personal. Such results would be coherent with past research showing that children's perceived obligation to obey to moral and conventional rules remains the same when they reach adolescence, but globally declines for rules concerning multifaceted and personal issues (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Because multifaceted issues contain facets that are disputably personal, adolescents may be inclined to consider them in their evaluation of parental authority even when they categorize the issues as non-personal.

Preliminary insights on this matter can be offered by comparing our results with adolescents' perceptions of logical consequences' effectiveness and acceptability in Robichaud, Mageau et al. (2019)'s non-personal rule-breaking study. Descriptive statistics reveal that adolescents evaluate logical consequences as more effective in clear non-personal rule-breaking situations ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) than they do in a multifaceted one perceived as non-personal ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ). Similarly, adolescents perceive logical consequences as more acceptable in response to clear non-personal transgressions ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) than to a multifaceted one perceived as non-personal ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). These results suggest that, although adolescents prefer logical consequences to alternative strategies in both contexts, they may value this strategy (and potentially alternative strategies as well) less favorably in response to multifaceted issues they categorize as non-personal, compared to issues clearly established as non-personal.

#### 4.4.7 | Factors influencing adolescents' perceptions of authority exertion strategies

Finally, in addition to considering the moderating role of adolescents' perceptions of the issues underlying transgressions in their evaluation of authority exertion strategies, the role of other individual differences could also be investigated. For example, adolescents from different socio-demographic backgrounds or with different personality traits could be more (or less) inclined to notice subtle distinctions between different types of constraints. Such perceptual differences in turn could enhance (or decrease) the socializing value of the problem-constraint linkage.

### 4.5 | Conclusion

In sum, authority exertion in persistent rule-breaking contexts is a socialization tool that requires precautionous use. Previous research had established the relevance of exerting logical consequences in response to transgressions clearly established as non-personal issues, but had yet to assess the role of this strategy in settings involving multifaceted issues. The present study addressed this gap and showed that, even if parents feel that they have the legitimacy to exert their authority in these situations, they need to adjust their interventions to their adolescents'

transgression perceptions in order to optimally foster socialization. Adolescents categorizing the multifaceted transgression as non-personal rated the logical consequence as more preferable to alternative authority exertion strategies. However, adolescents focusing on the personal facets of the same transgression rated all forms of constraint as suboptimal, leaving reasoning as the preferred intervention. These results are important because they offer concrete (although preliminary) recommendations on how and when to exert authority to promote adolescents' development. Future research is now needed to assess the relevance of logical consequences of different harshness levels in various hypothetical and real-life rule-breaking situations.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Participants' age,  $t(204) = 0.04, p = .971$ , gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.45, p = .501$ , and ethnicity (i.e. Canadian vs. elsewhere),  $\chi^2(1) = 1.40, p = .236$ , were not related to their perceptions of the issue underlying the transgression (i.e., non-personal vs. personal).

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