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Logical Consequences: Toward an Integrative Theoretical Framework

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ABSTRACT

We offer an integrative definition of the parental construct of *logical consequences* (LC), with the aim of stimulating research on their role in child socialization. Based on an exhaustive review of theoretical and empirical literature, we propose that LC are non-need-thwarting (i.e., ranging from need-neutral to need-supportive) parental constraints that address problems created by children's transgressions. Embedded in problem solving, they are hypothesized to promote child compliance and internalization of rules simultaneously, thereby fostering responsibility and social integration. Empirical evidence regarding LC is still nascent, as past research has often conflated LC with other parental interventions. To increase conceptual clarity, we present historical background on LC followed by an integrative definition. Next, we provide an overview of the emerging empirical evidence supporting the use of LC, emphasizing their role in fostering child socialization. Then, we distinguish LC from other well-known disciplinary interventions, including mild punishments and reasoning. We conclude with potential avenues for future research.

1 | Introduction

Socialization refers to the process through which children learn rules, values, norms, and attitudes deemed essential to their integration into their communities (Grusec and Davidov 2010; Maccoby 1992). Successful socialization requires children and adolescents to *internalize* key rules and values and be able to *comply* with them when needed. While compliance is described as one's ability to follow external contingencies (e.g., rules and instructions issued by authority figures; Baumrind 2012), internalization refers to one's endorsement of the moral and social codes underlying these external contingencies, resulting in a more spontaneous and autonomous form of compliance (also called committed or willing compliance; Deci and Ryan 2008; Grusec et al. 2017; Kochanska et al. 2001). Both compliance and internalization are complementary, putative antecedents of child behavioral, psychological, and social adjustment (Grolnick et al. 1997; Grusec et al. 2017; Patterson and Fisher 2002).

How to support internalization and compliance *simultaneously*, especially in the context of repeated child and adolescent transgressions, remains understudied and is challenging for parents (Grusec et al. 2017). Most socialization research has focused on parenting practices that facilitate *either* compliance *or* internalization, with the most recommended practice to encourage compliance being mild punishments (defined as mildly aversive behavioral constraints; Dadds and Salmon 2003), and the most recommended practice to foster internalization being rationales/reasoning (defined as verbal interventions detailing the reasons underlying rules or requests; Baumrind 2012; Larzelere et al. 2013; Peterson et al. 1985). Recently, Mageau and Robichaud began studying constraints under the form of logical consequences (LC) as an alternative to mild punishments (MP) that could promote compliance while fostering, or minimally avoid hampering, child and adolescent internalization (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b; Robichaud

et al. 2020c; Robichaud et al. 2021, 2024). However, the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding LC limits their potential benefits, as LC are often confused or conflated with other well-known constructs in empirical studies, such as MP or natural consequences, which will be defined and contrasted with LC herein (Nieman and Shea 2004). With the goal of paving the way for upcoming research on LC, this article innovates by being the first to offer an integrative definition of LC and clarifying their potential role in child socialization. We begin by offering some historical background on LC and then detail their three distinctive features. Next, we provide an overview of the emerging empirical evidence supporting their potential impacts on child socialization, emphasizing their role in nurturing children's rule compliance *and* internalization. We then distinguish LC from related constructs, emphasizing shared commonalities and key distinctions, as well as explore areas for future research.

2 | Logical Consequences (LC) in Historical Perspective

In the past century, several theoretical works on child rearing have directly or indirectly discussed the concept of LC. LC were first developed within the Adlerian school of thought with the aim of offering an alternative parental intervention to *natural* consequences (i.e., consequences that naturally unfold as a result of children's misbehaviors, without parental involvement) when such consequences are deemed unsafe or not immediately apparent to children following a transgression (Adler 1927; Dreikurs and Grey 1968). In the 20th century, Adlerians advocated for parents to instill a *logic of communal living* (Dreikurs and Grey 1968, 70) through discipline that would ensure their integration in society, while keeping in mind that many transgressions come from children's and adolescent's self-regulation difficulties or need to be seen and loved (for more detailed information, see Dreikurs and Grey 1968). Dreikurs and Grey (1968) notably first coined the term *logical consequences* to distinguish consequences that are arranged by authority figures from those that unfold naturally. Both natural consequences and LC were described as potential alternatives to MP, which were recommended by the behaviorist school of thought.

In Dreikurs and Grey (1968)'s view, LC differed from MP in several ways: they were to be experienced by children as natural in the context of their misbehavior (rather than arbitrary), corrective (rather than retaliatory), concerned with remedying the current situation (rather than punishing the past), and offered with the possibility for children to correct the situation themselves (rather than being merely imposed by authority figures). Wright (1982) later clarified that LC, just like MP, are often implemented by parents against children's will and thus may be expected to create discomfort in children. To be beneficial despite such discomfort, Nelson (1985) stressed that LC needed to be characterized by three R's: related to the transgression at hand, respectful, and reasonable. Together, these theoretical frameworks encouraged socializing agents to address children's transgressions directly and in a way that is less punitive and more considerate of children's experiences than typical MP. Adlerians greatly contributed to the literature on LC by identifying a non-punitive parental intervention that could be used when natural consequences are inappropriate. Adlerians' recommendation to minimize aversion when exerting power was later supported by Diana Baumrind and her colleagues, who stressed the importance for parents to rely on *confrontive power* (i.e., interventions that are reasoned, rational, flexible, and goal oriented) rather than *coercive power* (i.e., interventions that are arbitrary and domineering; Baumrind 2012; Larzelere et al. 2013).

In parallel to Adlerian's writings on LC, Haim Ginott—a founder of the communicative approach to parenting programs whose parental educational philosophy is anchored in humanistic roots—proposed that when children transgress rules, parents should focus on addressing the *problem* created by such transgressions rather than relying on aversion to discourage future transgressions (Ginott 1965). By doing so, Ginott helped clarify a key distinction between LC and MP: LC, unlike MP, focus specifically on solving the problems that children's misbehaviors create.

Following Adlerians' and Ginott's theoretical propositions, LC have been included in many evidence-based parenting programs, although recommendations on how to use them tend to vary. While most empirically validated programs present LC as one possible response to children's transgressions alongside MP (i.e., Triple P, Sanders et al. 2000; Incredible years, Gardner and Leijten 2017; Parent–child interaction therapy, Thomas et al. 2017), others advocate for the *replacement* of MP with LC (e.g., *How to Listen so Kids Will Talk and Talk so Kids Will Listen*, Faber and Mazlish 2012; Positive discipline, Nelsen 1996). These latter validated programs tend to emphasize that MP distract children and adolescents from understanding the problems caused by their transgressions, thereby possibly hampering key aspects of their socialization process. Overall, parenting programs including (vs. not including) LC have been found to be more efficacious in reducing disruptive child behaviors, thereby highlighting their likely socialization value (Leijten et al. 2019).

Theoretical writings and parenting programs converge to suggest that LC in response to rule-breaking behaviors may foster the socialization process. There is also considerable overlap in how past authors have conceptualized LC: all define LC as parental constraints aimed at addressing children's transgressions directly and in a non-punitive way. However, two conceptual ambiguities remained, which may have blurred past findings. First, not all authors explicitly distinguished between constraints that are uniquely related to children's *transgression* (e.g., Nelson 1985) from those related to the *problems* created by these transgressions (e.g., Ginott 1965), which resulted in some misclassifications of parental constraints as LC vs. MP. Second, not all authors recommended the *replacement* of MP with LC, which prevented the estimation of the unique impact of LC in some studies. This lack of conceptual clarity in turn creates confusion about the efficacy of LC and how parents may skillfully respond to children's transgressions.

Guided by self-determination theory (SDT) and integrating key principles from past work on LC (Dreikurs and Grey 1968; Ginott 1965), Mageau and Robichaud began addressing this gap by clarifying the construct of LC and assessing their socialization role through a series of experimental and cross-sectional studies (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud

and Mageau 2020b; Robichaud et al. 2020c; Robichaud et al. 2021, 2024). In these studies, Mageau and Robichaud explicitly stated that to be LC, parental constraints needed to be linked to the problem created by children's transgressions, but also indirectly implied two other defining features of LC in their operationalization of the construct, namely (a) being behavioral constraints and (b) being non-need-thwarting. Building on the theoretical foundations that Mageau and Robichaud laid out, the present article explicitly describes for the first time the three fundamental features of LC, thereby offering an integrative definition that should prove useful to stimulate LC research and implementation.

3 | Logical Consequences (LC): An Integrative Definition

In line with Mageau and Robichaud's past operationalizations, we posit that LC are non-need-thwarting constraints that address the problems created by children's transgressions. Deeply rooted in problem-solving, LC are characterized by three fundamental features that distinguish them from other parental interventions: they are constraints, they have a strong problem-constraint link, and they are non-need-thwarting.

3.1 | Constraint

LC are constraints because they orient or limit children's behaviors. The word constraint thus refers to parental actions that take advantage of the fact that parents have greater control over resources than their children or adolescents to address transgression-induced problems (Baumrind 1967). Such parental actions may address transgression-induced problems directly (parent-led; e.g., removing a problematic object) or indirectly (child-led; e.g., guiding the child in finding a solution to the transgression-induced problem, waiting for the child to address the transgression-induced problem before moving forward with the day).

3.2 | Problem-Constraint Link

The second fundamental feature of LC is their strong problem-constraint link, which refers to the logical link that inherently exists between a transgression-induced problem and a constraint specifically implemented to address that problem. By defining LC as constraints that address the *problems* created by children's transgressions, we exclude constraints that are solely related to the transgression itself (e.g., not getting chocolate at the grocery store because the child ran in the alleys of the store is not a LC because it is unrelated to the problem created by the child's inappropriate behaviors, whereas leaving the store is; Robichaud et al. 2020c). We also exclude constraints that solely rely on making the child or adolescent mind to prevent future transgressions, thereby differentiating LC from MP (see the section on LC vs. MP; Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud et al. 2021; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b). Positing the problem-constraint link as a fundamental feature of LC is consistent with many examples of LC provided by Adlerians (e.g., Dreikurs and Grey 1968; Nelson 1985), but more specifically taps into Ginott's (1965) proposition that parenting interventions should focus on solving the problems created by children's misbehaviors.

To identify possible LC in rule-breaking situations, parents are encouraged to ask: What is the problem created by this behavior and what are the possible solutions to solve it? (Robichaud et al. 2021). Possible LC then correspond to the implementation of these solutions. This shift in perspective should help parents orient themselves toward empathic problem-solving, or more simply, toward *searching for solutions* to transgression-induced problems (Nelsen 1996), which are at the core of LC.

Solutions may be implemented by the child or adolescent, the parent or in collaboration. Although it is advisable to encourage children to take responsibility for transgression-induced problems (e.g., offer reparation, change their behavior), children's participation in problem solving is not a defining feature of LC (Mageau et al. 2018). When children appear uncooperative, parents can instead offer their assistance in addressing transgression-induced problems or delay LC to a more opportune moment. If transgression-induced problems need immediate attention, parents can also address such problems themselves (e.g., removing a dangerous object or removing the child from an inadequate environment) while children experience the changes that are required to do so (e.g., withdrawal of privileges; change in schedules or plans; being removed from a situation). We propose that the optional nature of child collaboration in LC—child collaboration is desirable but not mandatory for constraints to be LC—contributes to making LC sufficiently flexible and potent to ensure compliance in a large array of situations or with more defiant children. Whether LC are implemented by the child, the parent or in collaboration, LC's emphasis on addressing the transgression-induced problem is argued to help children understand, on an experiential level, the ramifications of their transgressions, thereby promoting rule internalization while simultaneously addressing the transgression-induced problem (Mageau et al. 2018).

3.3 | Non-Need-Thwarting Nature

In addition to having a strong problem-constraint link (and being constraints), LC are non-need-thwarting in nature, which means that they can only range from need-neutral to need-supportive. This third fundamental feature, implicit in all Mageau and Robichaud's examples of LC, refers to the absence of characteristics that may negatively impact children's basic psychological needs. SDT suggests that children have three basic psychological needs, namely the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan and Deci 2000). Competence refers to the need to feel capable of achieving one's goals (Deci and Ryan 2013; White et al. 1997), relatedness to the need to feel connected to significant others (Deci and Ryan 2013; Richer and Vallerand 1998), and autonomy to the need to feel volitional and agentic, which occurs when one's behaviors are concordant with one's interests and values (Deci 1975; Deci and Ryan 2013). Within SDT, autonomy is possible at any age because it specifically refers to one's endorsement of one's behaviors, which can occur whether one is acting independently or within a supportive relationship (Soenens et al. 2007). Social environments that actively thwart any of these needs are consistently linked to negative

psychological outcomes (Gunnell et al. 2013), making them inherently highly aversive. As such, need-thwarting behaviors may be assumed to act as aversive deterrents to future misbehaviors, which makes them incompatible with LC. By defining LC as non-need-thwarting, we exclude all excessive, developmentally inappropriate, disrespectful, demeaning, degrading, vengeful, judgmental, intrusive, dominating, controlling, pressuring, or coercive constraints (Baumrind et al. 2010; Dreikurs and Grey 1968; Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009), regardless of their problem-constraint link. For example, searching through a teenager's phone or belongings to address concerns for teenagers' safety (e.g., through knowledge of their whereabouts and friends) is a form of constraint with a problem-constraint link, but its intrusive nature makes it need-thwarting and not a LC. Similarly, physical punishments such as spanking or hitting are also need-thwarting, in addition to being unrelated to the transgression-induced problem, and can never be LC (Ateah et al. 2003; Burnett 1988; Rote et al. 2022).

This is not to say, however, that constraints must be need-*supportive* to be considered LC. LC can range from need-neutral (or non-need-satisfying) to need-supportive (Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al. 2021; Vansteenkiste and Ryan 2013). For example, calmly removing a child from play when they are overly excited and letting them resume play once they have calmed down represents a need-neutral LC. This parental intervention is indeed a parental constraint (feature #1) that directly addresses the transgression-induced problem (e.g., hurting other children; feature #2) without being need-thwarting (e.g., rejecting, critical or coercive; feature #3). Need-thwarting examples of this parental intervention would be to roughly remove children from play (autonomy thwarting) while complaining about their personalities (relatedness thwarting), pointing out their inadequacies (competence thwarting) or threatening them with negative outcomes (autonomy thwarting). Any of these need-thwarting characteristics of parental constraints would thus disqualify them to be LC, even though the intervention remains a constraint (feature #1) and addresses the problem created by the transgression (feature #2). In addition to being non-need-thwarting, our first example cited above is also non-need-supportive (e.g., it does not include emotional support or choices of feasible solutions). A need-supportive example in this same scenario would be to remove children from play while staying close and available (e.g., to actively help them regulate their excitement; relatedness support), communicating confidence that they can calm down (competence support), or letting them decide when they feel calm enough to resume play (autonomy support). Although they are expected to be beneficial, these secondary need-supportive characteristics are not part of the definition of LC. In other words, for parental constraints to be considered LC, it is sufficient for parents to be non-need-thwarting, that is to avoid harming (but without necessarily satisfying) their children's sense of relatedness, competence, and autonomy (i.e., no rejection, criticisms or coercion; see Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009, for more details on coercive vs. structuring parenting behaviors).

We posit that LC can foster child internalization even when they are need-neutral or need-supportive because LC are hypothesized to derive part of their socialization value from actually addressing the problem created by child transgressions. By engaging in (or witnessing) the corrective behaviors necessary to remedy a problem or offer reparation, children are made aware of the contingencies between their behaviors and their effects on their environment, which they can then internalize. Although we expect need-supportive LC to be more beneficial than more neutral non-need-supportive CL, our position is that need-neutral LC should nevertheless promote internalization through problem-solving (or the vicariant experience of problem-solving).

The idea that LC would be *more* beneficial when they support children's psychological needs may appear inconsistent with traditional social learning and operant conditioning frameworks (e.g., Bandura 1977; Skinner 1938), which posit that "unpleasant" experiences following undesirable child behaviors tend to reduce their occurrences while pleasant ones can increase them. Our proposition is more consistent with humanistic approaches to parenting (e.g., self-determination theory; Deci and Ryan), which posit that child internalization, and thus behaviors, largely depend on the extent to which children evolve in need-supportive environments. According to SDT, focusing on deterrence as a socializing tool can be counterproductive because adding arbitrary "unpleasant" experiences following child behaviors (or threatening to do so) can feel need-thwarting to children, resulting in submission but also anger and defiant behaviors (Soenens et al. 2015). The negative effects of need-thwarting are proposed to outweigh the benefits of deterrence when it comes to socialization. The fact that *milder* punishments are associated with more positive child behaviors than harsher ones (Baumrind 2012), despite being less potent as negative reinforcements, supports this proposition. Accordingly, and in line with SDT principles, we expect more need-supportive LC to be more beneficial even if their value as deterrent is reduced. It is possible that, in line with behaviorist principles, more need-supportive LC reinforce cooperative child behaviors, in part, through channeling parental attention away from the problematic behavior and toward problem-solving behaviors.

In sum, our operationalization of LC integrates and extends past propositions by emphasizing that LC (a) are parental constraints, (b) have a strong logical link with the transgression-induced problems, and (c) are non-need-thwarting (ranging from neutral to need-supportive, as defined by SDT; Rote and Flak 2022, Robichaud et al. 2024). Table 1 presents examples of LC at different developmental stages whereas Table 2 summarizes this article's main theoretical propositions.

4 | Emerging Empirical Evidence on the Benefits of LC

Empirical evidence of the benefits of LC is only emerging, although past research provides meaningful evidence on the socialization benefits of other non-need-thwarting parental disciplinary interventions (Baumrind 2012; Dunlea and Heiphetz 2021). Mageau and Robichaud were the first to operationalize LC as having a strong problem-constraint link and the first to specifically compare LC to other disciplinary interventions (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b; Robichaud et al. 2020c; Robichaud et al. 2021, 2024). These authors

began this investigation with a series of experimental studies in which they tested the impact of different combinations of disciplinary interventions on parent and child or adolescent perceptions using hypothetical rule-breaking scenarios. They then examined the correlates of LC in real-life settings using cross-sectional and daily diary designs.

TABLE 1 | Examples of LC for transgressions concerning non-personal issues at different developmental stages.

Transgression	Possible problem	Possible LC[a]	Age range
Spilling milk on the wood table	– The milk could damage the wood table; – Milk gets sour when left on a table; – Time required for parents to clean or replace spilled milk.	– Observing parent pick up the spilled milk while helping with (or simply holding) a cloth	T
		– Helping pick up the spilled milk	T; C
		– Picking up the spilled milk	C; A
		– Replacing the milk carton (if needed and distance permits)	A
Repeatedly hitting sibling	– Lack of trust between siblings; – The other sibling being hurt or dysregulated; – Violent behaviors being normalized.	– Keeping sibling at a safe distance until child shows appropriate behaviors	T; C; A
		– Finding a way to repair the bond with parental help (e.g., offer a drawing)	T; C
		– Apologizing to the sibling	T; C; A
		– Participating to a formal problem-solving session	T; C; A
		– Restricting access to violent media (video games, movies, social media, etc.) until youth shows appropriate behaviors	T; C; A
		– Being placed in charge of finding a way to repair the bond (e.g., offer a drawing, doing sibling chores)	C; A
Breaking a piece of furniture	– The cost of the furniture; – The lack of respect for the familial environment; – Time required for parents to replace or repair the piece of furniture.	– Restricting access to certain furniture or areas of the house until child shows appropriate behaviors	T; C; A
		– Observing parent repairing the furniture while helping with (or simply holding) a tool	T; C
		– Assisting the parent in the process of repairing the furniture (going with them to buy the necessary material, handing tools, etc.)	C; A
		– Having parent repair the furniture and giving back parent's time by doing another task	C; A
		– Being placed in charge of repairing the furniture (or parts of it), with parental help	A
		– Contributing financially to the material's cost	A
Running in the street when coming home from the park *When older*, not respecting curfew	– The safety of the child could be compromised; – Lack of trust in the child; – Parents being worried; – Effects on youth's state in the morning (being very tired).	– Holding parent's finger or stroller	T
		– Being required to sit down in the stroller	T
		– Restricting access to the park after dinner until child shows appropriate behaviors.	T; C; A
		– Parent coming to get child from the park	C
		– Wearing a wristwatch with an alarm	C; A
		– Parents calling 30 min before curfew	A
		– Youth texting parents when running a bit late	A
		– Participating to a problem-solving session	T; C; A

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Transgression	Possible problem	Possible LC[a]	Age range
Not respecting screen time limitations	– Lack of time to develop other skills or to have quality family time; – Social isolation; – Lack of time for homework; – Effects on youth's state in the morning (being very tired).	– Restricting access to screens before or after certain times each day[b]	T; C; A
		– Organize family outings without screens[b]	T; C; A
		– No screens during meals[b]	T; C; A
		– Organize sports or outings with friends without screens[b]	T; C; A
		– Help set up online video games with school or neighborhood friends or family members	C; A
		– Restricting access to screens until homework goals for the day are reached	C; A
		– Restricting access to screens after a certain time each evening	T; C; A
		– Set up limitations on wifi access after a certain time each evening	T; C; A
Not coming on time for the family dinner	– Loss of quality family time; – Additional work related to dinner (e.g., putting food in containers; washing additional dishes).	– Parent reminding child in person	T; C; A
		– Parent helping child finish (or put aside) what they are doing	T; C; A
		– Helping set the table and serve dinner; child is then present when dinner is ready	C; A
		– Restricting access to some activities responsible for the delay until after dinner and until child shows appropriate behaviors	C; A
		– Setting the table	C; A
		– Helping prepare and serve dinner; youth is thus present when dinner is ready	C; A
		– Changing the scheduled time for dinner	A
		– Being responsible for reheating dinner and cleaning dishes—Scheduling other quality family time	A
		– Participating to a problem-solving session	T; C; A

Abbreviations: A, adolescent of high school age; C, children of elementary school age; T, toddlers.
[a]These are mere examples without prescriptive value; no LC applies to all situations or all children.
[b]Parents model restricting their own screen time (e.g., for emergencies only during outings).

In a first experimental vignette-based study, Mageau et al. (2018) invited 215 parent–child ($M_{age} = 10.42$) dyads to rate their anticipated emotional and behavioral responses to hypothetical scenarios presenting different, experimentally manipulated, parental interventions. Participants were presented with fictitious vignettes of child transgressions, where each vignette was presented multiple times in counterbalanced order, manipulating the parental disciplinary intervention (LC, MP or no constraint) and the disciplinary interpersonal climate (need-supportive [acknowledgement of feelings and reasoning] vs. need-thwarting [threats and criticisms]). The results suggested that mothers and children perceived LC as more acceptable than MP, despite both interventions being viewed as at least equally efficacious to prevent future transgressions. This pattern of differences was similar for children regardless of the interpersonal climate in which the disciplinary interventions were used, that is, regardless of the presence of other need-supportive (vs. need-thwarting) parenting behaviors. For mothers, differences between LC and MP were *more* pronounced in a need-supportive climate, with LC being associated with higher ratings of acceptability and efficiency to prevent future transgressions than MP. Following this study and using the same sample, Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c) explored the children's anticipated emotional responses to LC and MP. They found that children anticipated being less angry and more empathic toward their parents' perspective in the LC condition compared to the MP condition. These findings strengthen the idea that LC could be perceived more favorably than MP by children. These perceptual differences are important because parenting interventions that are perceived as more acceptable and as generating more positive reactions in children have been associated with greater child internalization (Grusec et al. 2017).

In a second vignette-based study, Robichaud et al. (2020c) presented four disciplinary interventions (LC, MP, reasoning only, and permissiveness) to 214 adolescents ($M_{age} = 15.28$) in a counterbalanced order. To create the LC and MP conditions, the same parental constraints were presented twice but in alternating transgression contexts: once as a LC—in a context that created a strong problem-constraint link—and once as a MP—in a context where no problem-constraint link was apparent. These transgression contexts were then switched so that the constraint that was originally a LC or a MP respectively became a MP or a LC in the second context. This manipulation ensured that each child transgression and each constraint would be presented in the LC and MP conditions, just in different combinations, thereby controlling for potential confounds related to their inherent characteristics. Despite these added controls, results showed that adolescents also evaluated LC as more acceptable than MP, and as similarly efficacious to prevent future transgressions. Moreover, younger (but not older) adolescents in this sample reported more anticipated autonomous and less controlled reasons to comply following LC compared to MP (i.e., relative internalization index, defined as complying more for internalized reasons than because of external contingencies).

In a subsequent study relying on the same 214 adolescents, Robichaud and Mageau (2020b) focused on a rule-breaking situation entailing both personal and non-personal facets, based on Smetana's social domain theory (Smetana 1988). Within social domain theory, personal facets refer to matters that are strictly of personal preference as they primarily affect the self (i.e., wearing a nose ring at a friend's house), whereas non-personal facets entail social or moral expectations that regulate behaviors that could affect others (i.e., stealing money from your parents). They found that when adolescents judged the transgression as a non-personal issue, they, again, rated LC as more acceptable than MP. In contrast, when adolescents judged the same transgression as a personal issue, they considered all constraints (i.e., LC and MP) as equally less acceptable than reasoning or no parental intervention. When it comes to transgressions entailing personal issues, such as a teenager's choice of hairstyle, friends or clothing, even non-need-thwarting LC can *feel* controlling and intrusive for some adolescents, which may cancel their potential advantages over other forms of constraints.

Building on these experimental findings, Robichaud et al. (2021) addressed one of their important limitations by investigating LC in real-life (rather than hypothetical) settings. They asked adolescents to report on their perceptions of the problem-constraint link of their parents' constraints in general and on a daily basis for a 14-day period. Results were consistent across levels of generality, showing that the more adolescents reported a high problem-constraint link (LC), (a) the less they reported parent-youth conflicts (indicator of compliance), (b) the more they rated parental interventions as acceptable (indicator of internalization), and (c) the more they complied autonomously to parental demands (indicator of internalization). These results were obtained while controlling for the general harshness of the parents' constraints and their communication style (autonomy-supportive vs. controlling), which helped isolate the independent associations between the problem-constraint link and youth outcomes (Robichaud et al. 2021). Though limited by its correlational design, this study nonetheless supported the internal and external validity of LC.

Expanding on Baumrind's (2012) recommendation to combine reasoning with MP in situations of repeated transgressions (Larzelere et al. 2013), Robichaud et al. (2024) explored whether constraint quality (LC vs. MP) could moderate the association between reasoning and children's compliant behaviors (i.e., tendency to follow house rules) and autonomous compliance (i.e., tendency to follow rules for autonomous reasons). They relied on two cross-sectional studies at different levels of generality: the same global study used in Robichaud et al. (2021) with youth self-reports ($N = 437$, $M_{age} = 15.91$) and a situational study where the presence of parental reasoning and constraints were prompted in a particular situation and recalled using an open-ended question. Adolescents' open-ended responses were then coded as LC or MP by independent judges ($N = 65$, $M_{age} = 12.45$, $K = 0.82$). Results revealed significant interactions at both levels of generality. Simple effects generally favored LC over MP: when parents tended to use LC, parental reasoning positively predicted adolescent autonomous compliance. In contrast, when parents tended to use MP, reasoning was less strongly or non-significantly associated with autonomous compliance. Similar patterns were observed for adolescent compliant behaviors.

Lachance et al. (2026) suggested that preschoolers could also benefit from LC. In this study, a sample of 351 parents of three- to five-year-olds wrote down their most frequently used constraints in response to a series of common preschooler transgressions and rated the problem-constraint link of their typical constraints. Parents also reported on their child's general compliance to each of these rules, as well as the extent to which their child's compliance was committed (i.e., internalized) and situational (i.e., non-internalized; Kochanska et al. 2001). Results showed that parents whose written constraints tended to be coded as LC (vs. MP) had children whose compliance was less situational and more frequent. Parents' own assessment of their constraints' problem-constraint link predicted more committed compliance. Although these findings are cross-sectional, they nonetheless underscore the potential importance of considering the problem-constraint link in early childhood.

Overall, Mageau and Robichaud's novel line of research has systematically shown that for non-personal repeated transgressions, LC are perceived as more acceptable than MP. They are also rated as more efficacious than reasoning and at least as efficacious as MP to prevent future transgressions, suggesting that LC could promote compliance and internalization simultaneously. These perceptual differences were observed using experimental vignette-based designs in three age groups (mothers, children, and adolescents) and in real life settings with preschoolers and adolescents using cross-sectional and diary designs. Combining reasoning with LC, rather than MP, was also associated with more positive socialization outcomes in two cross-sectional studies of varying levels of generality (global vs. situational). Whether hypothetically or in real life, LC thus seems to be a promising alternative to MP in a wide range of age groups, from early childhood to adolescence, calling for further investigation on LC.

5 | Measurement of LC

Future research on LC can rely on three complementary assessments of LC, which are fully described in their original studies

cited above. In summary, most studies manipulated LC vs. MP using vignette-based experimental paradigms. Standardized scenarios depicting distinct parental reactions to child and adolescent transgressions may be found in Mageau et al. (2018);

TABLE 2 | Summary of theoretical propositions.

Propositions		Empirical support
P1	LC are non-need-thwarting parental constraints with a strong problem-constraint link that yield more favorable socialization outcomes than constraints that are need-thwarting, have a weak problem-constraint link, or both.	Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c); Robichaud et al. (2021, 2024)
P2	Both child-led and parent-led LC yield more favorable socialization outcomes than constraints that are need-thwarting, have a weak problem-constraint link, or both.	Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c); Robichaud et al. (2021, 2024)
P3	LC yield more favorable socialization outcomes than constraints that are merely linked to children's transgression (rather than to the actual problem, e.g., targeted vs. general confiscation of electronic devices; leaving the grocery store when children ran in the alleys vs. refusing to buy certain treats).	Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2024)
Outcomes		
P4	LC yield greater child internalization than MP or permissiveness.	Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c); Robichaud et al. (2021, 2024)
P5	LC yield greater child empathy and less anger than MP.	Robichaud et al. (2020a)
P6	LC yield similar or slightly lower levels of child internalization than reasoning.	Robichaud et al. (2020c)
P7	LC yield a mixed pattern of motivations to comply (i.e., both autonomous and controlled) whereas reasoning uniquely prompts autonomous motivations to comply.	Robichaud et al. (2020c)
P8	LC and MP yield similar levels of immediate compliance. However, LC lead to higher levels of child compliance in the long run because of its advantage on internalization.	Short term compliance: Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020c)
P9	In response to repeated transgressions, LC yield greater child compliance than reasoning or permissiveness.	Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c); Robichaud et al. (2021, 2024)
P10[a]	Corresponding hypotheses may be formulated for correlates of child internalization (e.g., child mental health) and compliance (absence of delinquent behaviors).	
Mechanisms		
P11[a]	LC yield greater child internalization than MP through children's greater awareness of the contingencies between their behaviors and their problematic effects on their environment, greater empathy, and needs satisfaction, as well as lesser anger, lesser reactance, and needs frustration.	Empathy and anger: Robichaud et al. (2020a)
P12[a]	LC and MP yield greater child compliance via different mechanisms: LC increase compliance through increased awareness and internalization of external contingencies, the promotion of child collaboration, the development of problem-solving skills, and the prevention of child need-thwarting, anger, and reactance; MP increase compliance through fear and motivation to avoid aversion.	

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

Propositions		Empirical support
Moderators		
P13	LC is effective in promoting child internalization and compliance simultaneously across all age groups.	Early childhood: Lachance et al. (2026) Elementary school children: Mageau et al. (2018); Robichaud et al. (2020a) High school children: Robichaud et al. (2020c); Robichaud et al. (2021, 2024)
P14	LC yield more favorable socialization outcomes than MP only for non-personal issues (i.e., moral, safety, and conventional issues; Smetana 2005); no difference is expected for personal transgressions (e.g., appearances, friendships, privacy issues).	Robichaud and Mageau (2020b)
P15	Parental reasoning is more strongly related to adolescent autonomous compliance when parents generally implement LC rather than MP.	Robichaud et al. (2024)
P16[a]	Need-supportive LC (i.e., embedded in relatedness, competence, and autonomy support, such as including emotional support, parent–child collaboration, and choices of feasible solutions) yield more favorable socialization outcomes than more neutral (but non-need-thwarting) LC.	
P17[a]	LC yield more favorable socialization outcomes for repeated child transgressions than for non-repeated ones.	
LC vs. other parental constructs		
P18[a]	Natural consequences yield greater child perceptions of parental disengagement than LC, which in turn can lead to relatedness thwarting among children.	
P19	LC correlate strongly with classic autonomy-supportive behaviors.	Robichaud et al. (2021)
P20[a]	LC correlate strongly with the authoritative parenting style.	
Obstacles to LC		
P21	Parents' perceptions of the transgressions' seriousness are related to greater use of MP (vs. LC).	Gagnon et al. (2024)
P22[a]	Increasing knowledge transfer on the effects of LC result in socialization benefits for children.	
P23[a]	Parents' limited resources reduce their disposition to use LC.	

[a]Theoretical proposition never empirically tested.

Robichaud et al. (2020a); Robichaud et al. (2020c), respectively. In each study, LC were perceived as more logical than MP by informants, thereby supporting their discriminant validity. Robichaud et al.'s (2021) then developed the problem-constraint link scale, which evaluates the quality of parental constraints (i.e., CL vs. MP) by assessing the problem–constraint link, that is, the extent to which adolescents perceive that their parents' constraints are (a) logically related to, (b) stem directly from, and (c) allow to address the problems caused by their transgressions. This scale has shown satisfactory internal consistency (α ranging from 0.77 to 0.83). A third approach relies on qualitative coding of parent and child open-ended descriptions of parental constraints following specific transgressions. Robichaud et al. (2024) developed a validated coding system that enables trained coders to classify constraints as either LC or MP, based on their link to the problem created by the child transgression and their non-need thwarting nature. This coding system has yielded excellent inter-rater reliability ($\kappa = 0.91$) in past studies and is positively related to youth reports of the problem-constraint link (Robichaud et al. 2024). Together, these studies offer reliable and valid tools for capturing LC across informants and contexts, providing a solid foundation for future measurement development.

6 | LC in Applied Research

In applied research, we found only one study providing evidence on the socialization value of LC per se. In their meta-analysis, Leijten et al. (2019) investigated the potential value of including

different parental practices within evidence-based parenting programs. Comparing 26 parental practices within 386 studies assessing the impact of over 30 parenting programs, only three practices were found to be associated with significant increases in the likelihood of a program to reduce disruptive behaviors following interventions: logical or natural consequences, positive reinforcement, and praise. LC and natural consequences stood out as the only forms of parental constraint linked to such improvements (in contrast to strategies like timeouts or ignoring misbehaviors). Although another meta-analysis suggested that consistent responding, and to a lesser extent timeouts, could enhance the efficacy of parenting programs in reducing disruptive behaviors, logical and natural consequences were not considered as alternative constraints in these analyses (Kaminski et al. 2008). Studies published after these meta-analyses corroborate the efficacy of programs that include LC in their curriculum. For example, the *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* program, which replaces punishments with LC, has been found to promote parental autonomy support and reduce externalized problems in elementary school children within the general population, compared to a waitlist control condition (Joussemet et al. 2025; Joussemet et al. 2014; Mageau, Joussemet, Robichaud, et al. 2022). These findings suggest that LC (combined with empathic limit setting or other parenting components taught in such programs) could be associated with reductions in disruptive behaviors in children. However, the *relative* efficacy of LC compared to other forms of constraints remains understudied in applied settings.

7 | Specificity of LC

To further understanding of LC and their relative impact on children's socialization and development, it is crucial to distinguish them reliably from other parental constructs and compare them empirically. To date, LC have been explicitly compared to MP, reasoning, and permissiveness. To foster conceptual clarity, we distinguish LC from these related constructs by highlighting their commonalities, differences, and available empirical evidence comparing their socialization effects (see Table 3). All evidence presented in this section is derived from the aforementioned body of research; some redundancies may thus be expected.

7.1 | LC Versus MP

Anchored in behaviorist principles, MP are constraints implemented to create a mildly aversive experience for children, with the aim of preventing future transgressions (Baumrind 2012; Dadds and Salmon 2003). To act as deterrents, these constraints must be aversive enough to reduce the probability that children will reproduce the misbehavior (Grolnick 2012; Larzelere et al. 2013).

MP are similar to LC in that they can take several forms such as restrictions on outings, forfeiture of objects, time out, additional chores or withdrawal of privileges (Grusec and Goodnow 1994; Grusec et al. 2017). However, MP differ from LC in that they rely on aversion to elicit compliance rather than directly addressing the transgression-induced problem. They typically have a weak problem-constraint link. For example, time-outs, when specifically used as deterrents, can be given following any misbehaviors (e.g., aggressive behaviors; breaking objects; swearing). However, to be considered LC, time outs would only be used when they inherently address the transgression-induced problem (e.g., a child is disrupting play). Their length would also depend on problem resolution (e.g., child being ready to resume cooperative play) rather than being arbitrarily set.

The presence of a strong problem-constraint link is expected to foster child internalization, both directly and indirectly via different mechanisms such as child emotions. In line with these theoretical propositions, CL tend to trigger less anticipated negative emotions (e.g., less anger, more empathy; Robichaud, et al. 2020a) and are associated with more well-internalized reasons to comply than MP (Robichaud et al. 2020c; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b). Both of these child outcomes, in turn, have been identified as key facilitating factors of the internalization process (Baumrind 2012; Larzelere et al. 2013). In contrast, negative emotions tend to promote situational (i.e., non-internalized), but not committed (i.e., internalized), compliance (Kochanska et al. 2001). Importantly, and contrary to Baumrind's (2012) recommendation to combine reasoning with MP, the shortcomings of MP relative to LC tend to hold true (and are sometimes even exacerbated) when parents combine them with other autonomy-supportive behaviors (e.g., reasoning; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b; Robichaud et al. 2020c; Robichaud et al. 2024). These findings call into question the notion that negative emotions serve as the primary driving force behind the socialization process. Alternatively, we have proposed herein that a key driving force behind the socialization process lies in drawing attention to the contingencies between the child's behaviors and their consequences—whether on others, themselves or possessions. In this regard, LC may play a pivotal role.

7.2 | LC Versus Reasoning

Reasoning consists of verbal interventions that detail the reasons underlying rules and requests, with the aim of helping children grasp their importance for others' welfare and their own (Peterson et al. 1985). Reasoning is similar to LC in several ways. First, they both provide information on the transgression-induced problem and the underlying importance of the broken rules. With verbal reasoning, parents describe the connection between a transgression and the problems it creates. With LC, parents highlight such connections by directly addressing the problem the child created. Second, part of their socialization benefits can be attributable to the fact that they closely match the social issue at hand (Nucci 1984). Finally, both are non-need-thwarting interventions (Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009). Results indicating that LC and reasoning do not differ significantly in promoting some indicators of child internalization (e.g., autonomous compliance; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud et al. 2020c) provide some empirical support for their similar nature. Reasoning also differs from LC by being *verbal interventions*. They provide explicit or theoretical knowledge about the consequences of children's misbehaviors (e.g., learning about the value of a broken object by hearing information about its importance). In contrast, LC refers to *behavioral constraints*

TABLE 3 | Common and distinctive features of related parenting constructs.

	Logical consequences	Mild punishments	Reasoning	Natural consequences	Permissiveness
Link to problem	High	Low or high[a]	High	High	Low
Role of child	Active or passive	Active or passive	Passive	Active or passive	Passive
Presence of behavioral constraint	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Need-thwarting	No	Yes (autonomy and relatedness)	No	Potentially (Relatedness)	Potentially (Relatedness and competence)
Aim of the intervention	Solving the transgression-induced problem	Aversion for transgressor	Clarifying the transgression-induced problem	Exposing child to the natural consequences of their transgression	Minimizing child negative emotions
Socialization processes mainly promoted	Compliance and internalization	Compliance	Internalization	Compliance	None

[a]Although mild punishments tend to be unrelated to the transgression-induced problem (low link), any parental constraints that present need-thwarting characteristics are categorized as mild punishments, whether they have a low or high link to the problem.

that provide implicit or experiential information about the transgression-induced problems and the impact of misbehaviors (e.g., learning about the value of a broken object by repairing it).

These commonalities and differences make LC and reasoning complementary, especially in the context of repeated transgressions. LC are perceived by youths as more efficacious and acceptable than reasoning to obtain compliance following repeated transgressions (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud and Mageau 2020b), all while inducing similar levels of internalized (autonomous) compliance as reasoning (Robichaud et al. 2020c). Yet LC, potentially due to its constraining nature, also tend to prompt non-internalized (more controlled) forms of compliance, which is not the case for reasoning (Robichaud et al. 2020c; Robichaud et al. 2024). Reasoning is also more effective than LC to address personal issues (Robichaud and Mageau 2020b). These findings suggest that reasoning and LC complement each other in situations of repeated transgressions, with LC being a flexible, yet potent, last resort practice when reasoning is not sufficient to obtain compliance.

7.3 | LC Versus Permissiveness

Permissiveness describes a parenting approach marked by high acceptance and low behavioral control. Parents using this style tend to minimize demands, offer considerable freedom in decision-making, and refrain from directing, enforcing standards or modifying their child's behavior (Baumrind 1967). Some authors have argued that LC may resemble permissiveness when they are used with non-collaborative children or in response to serious transgressions (Gallagher 2004), as addressing problems created by transgressions may seem more difficult or not aversive enough for children to grasp the extent of the seriousness of the problems created by their transgressions. Contrary to this point of view, we argue that LC differ from permissiveness for several reasons. First, LC are defined as behavioral constraints, which stands in contrast with more permissive approaches characterized by the absence of parental actions to enforce rules. Second, as discussed earlier, parents can address transgression-induced problems with LC whether or not children are in a collaborative disposition, as long as they do so in a non-need-thwarting way (e.g., removing a dangerous object without aggressivity, rejection or criticisms). The possibility to use LC without child collaboration guarantees that parents can enforce rules even with more defiant children. When parents address problems themselves, children experience the changes that are required to do so (e.g., withdrawal of privileges). Third, we have argued that the action of addressing the transgression-induced problem is what helps children understand the contingencies between their behaviors and their impact on others, themselves or possessions, resulting in the internalization of parental interventions and rules. This process, set in motion by LC, is hypothesized to occur regardless of the transgression's seriousness, thereby differentiating LC from permissiveness. We believe that the confusion between LC and permissiveness rests on the false premises that LC cannot occur without children's collaboration or that negative emotions are the main driving force behind socialization (Nelsen 1996).

Robichaud et al.'s studies support this hypothesis in showing that adolescents rate LC more favorably than permissive parental interventions (e.g., repeating the rule) in context of repeated transgressions (Robichaud and Mageau 2020b; Robichaud et al. 2020c). LC also prompt higher levels of autonomous, but also controlled, reasons to comply compared to more permissive approaches (Robichaud et al. 2020c). In light of this emerging evidence, we posit that LC differ from permissiveness.

In sum, LC may be differentiated from other related parenting constructs as they uniquely combine the notions of behavioral constraints, non-need-thwarting interventions, and the problem-constraint link. Emerging empirical evidence consistently suggests that LC, as defined by Mageau and Robichaud,

have distinct socialization correlates compared to MP, reasoning, and more permissive forms of parental interventions. Additional research is still needed to fully capture the added value (or lack thereof) of LC compared to these related parental interventions across different contexts and developmental levels.

8 | Implementation of LC

Based on this integrated framework, we recommend the following sequence of actions to socialization agents who wish to implement effective LC. (a) Establishing the need for LC while keeping in mind that the efficacy of LC has only been established for repeated transgressions and, importantly, non-personal issues (i.e., issues related to morality, safety or social conventions). For non-repeated transgressions or personal issues (e.g., appearance, friendships, privacy), reasoning without LC is preferable. Socialization agents are also invited to pick their battles to avoid the accumulation of controlled motivations to comply that can occur with numerous constraints. (b) Identifying the problem created by the transgression (e.g., what issue arises when my child disregards a rule? Lack of sleep, loss of trust, hurt feelings?). (c) Selecting a LC that can address the identified problem (e.g., could this be resolved through a problem-solving discussion?, what changes can be temporarily implemented until trust is restored?). (d) Reflecting on the chosen LC to make it more need supportive (suggesting feasible and scaffolded solutions; communicating confidence in children's problem-solving abilities; encouraging children to find solutions and implement them themselves; with momentarily uncooperative or defiant children, parents addressing the problem themselves to reduce coercion). (e) Ensuring that the chosen LC does not undermine the child's psychological needs (e.g., does it make the child feel incompetent or incapable [competence], rejected or unliked [relatedness], or controlled or violated [autonomy]?). (f) Committing to the LC that best addresses the identified problem, while remaining mindful of whether or not the problem is solved. LC can be removed as soon as children have convinced parents that they will comply with the rule or on the contrary, LC may need to be adjusted when problems continue. (g) For those parent-led LC that provoked child anger, reasoning can be implemented when cooperation has returned, by debriefing with the child about the LC and its purpose, linking the repeated transgression, its consequences, and the implemented LC. If the LC is still there, invite children to propose alternative solutions. Adding reasoning (before or after LC) can reinforce the socializing value of the LC by highlighting the contingencies between children's behaviors and their effects on their environment.

9 | Areas for Future Research

Emerging research on LC has been conducted using experimental vignette-based designs, which could ascertain how family members perceive different hypothetical disciplinary practices, and cross-sectional designs, which could verify proposed associations between the perceived constraint-problem link and child socialization outcomes. Although child perceptions are ultimately what determine child outcomes (Soenens et al. 2015), further research is direly needed to further understand the role of LC. Studies should investigate whether observed associations hold in longitudinal and observational designs, which would limit common method and perceptual biases. Future studies could also focus on developmental outcomes other than compliance and internalization, such as prosocial behaviors, responsibility-taking, the quality of parent–child relationships, family functioning, child psychological and social adjustment, as well as school (or career) readiness and achievements throughout the life span. Valuable insights could also be gained by comparing the socializing outcomes of LC (vs. MP) in parent–child dynamics other than situations of repeated transgression. For example, would informing children in advance about the possibility of LC help prevent transgressions, or would it instead be experienced as need-thwarting by implying a lack of confidence in them? Future studies should aim at addressing one major limitation of the present LC literature, which is the lack of experimental research designs that test the impact of randomly assigned, but non-hypothetical, LC and MP on child behaviors. Although past RCTs that included LC yielded promising results (Joussemet et al. 2025; Mageau, Joussemet, Paquin, and Grenier 2022; Mageau, Joussemet, Robichaud, et al. 2022), such studies did not isolate the unique effects of LC from those of other parenting strategies.

The secondary characteristics of LC and their effects across developmental stages also merit further investigation. Although children and adolescents alike rate LC more favorably than MP, we know very little about the secondary characteristics of LC that may make them most appropriate either generally or in specific situations. For instance, past research on scaffolding suggests that parents should tailor their interventions and guidance to their children's developmental level, yet no research has systematically compared different LC across developmental stages (see Table 1 for proposed age-appropriate example).

The benefits of LC could also be investigated in more diverse samples, as current studies mostly focused on non-clinical, neurotypical, western children from middle to high socioeconomic status families. Although children's collaboration at home may be more difficult to obtain with children from clinical samples, we argue that children with special needs may benefit even more from LC, relative to MP, as only the former consistently highlights the contingencies between their behaviors and their impact on the world around them. The heightened benefits of LC (vs MP) may be especially true for children presenting punishment insensitivity traits, as they tend to respond poorly to aversive parental interventions (Dadds and Salmon 2003). Future research should consider the possibility that LC may be perceived differently by children from different cultural backgrounds (Soenens et al. 2015).

In addition to providing more robust evidence for the proposed socialization benefits of LC across developmental stages and samples, future research is needed to (a) clarify the distinctions between LC and yet other well-established parental constructs (i.e., natural consequences, and authoritative parenting), (b) identify the psychological mechanisms responsible for the associations between LC and child internalization and compliance, and (c) explore LC's facilitating factors and obstacles. We now discuss these additional research avenues with the hope of providing new insights and further clarifying the conceptualization of LC.

9.1 | LC Versus Other Parental Constructs

9.1.1 | Do LC and Natural Consequences Differ in Their Socialization Benefits?

LC have sometimes been confused or conflated with natural consequences (e.g., Burnett 1988; Leijten et al. 2019; Marois 2019; Nieman and Shea 2004; Spencer 1885; Webster-Stratton and Reid 2018). However, natural consequences diametrically differ from LC in that they require parents to let transgression-induced problems go unresolved so that children may suffer their negative impacts (Nieman and Shea 2004). The term *natural*, thus, refers to consequences that will occur naturally, *without* parental interventions (Nelsen 1996). These natural consequences in turn discourage future transgressions. Natural consequences have been widely taught in parenting programs and seem to effectively reduce misbehaviors in circumscribed circumstances (Dreikurs and Grey 1968; Leijten et al. 2019). Natural consequences are limited, however, in that they are unwarranted when they risk causing immediate or future harm (e.g., injuries, cavities, malnourishment, lack of hygiene, poor academic achievements, etc.; Edwards 2003). Dreikurs and Grey (1968) described LC as an essential, distinct solution for instances when natural consequences are impractical.

Research has yet to compare the effects of natural consequences and LC on child socialization and overall adjustment, but we anticipate that differences in the level and nature of parental engagement they imply would impact children differently. With LC, parents do not solely inform children of potential problems, they assist in addressing them, thus modeling problem-solving and communicating engagement. In contrast, natural consequences require parents to step back and witness children experiencing unpleasant experiences. The potential drawback of this approach is that children may perceive such passivity as a form of parental disengagement, which could thwart their need for relatedness. This perception of parental disengagement may be especially present when the aftermath of natural consequences is more intense than children had foreseen. As such, LC may be preferable to natural consequences in situations where children are unable to foresee their behaviors' consequences or face self-regulatory challenges.

9.1.2 | Are LC a Practice Better Understood as Part of the Authoritative Parenting Style?

Similarities may also be drawn between LC and the broader parenting construct of authoritative parenting (Baumrind 2013). Based on Baumrind's (1966) framework, the authoritative parenting style is characterized by a balanced combination of responsive and structuring parenting behaviors. Authoritative parents thus promote a caring parent–child relationship while maintaining high structure. Within this parenting style, parental structure is implemented with confrontive power (i.e., reasoned, rational, flexible, and goal oriented), rather than coercive power (Baumrind 2012). Because LC tend to be goal-oriented (i.e., they address transgression-induced problems) and flexible (i.e., any solution is acceptable as long as it addresses the transgression-induced problem in a non-need thwarting way), we expect them to be an integral part of the authoritative parenting style. Despite this conceptual alignment, empirical studies have yet to examine the extent to which LC are actually employed within authoritative parenting or how their use is associated with authoritative dimensions such as warmth and responsiveness. Available research suggests thus far that parents who adopt more autonomy-supportive behaviors, a set of behaviors that is consistent with the authoritative parenting style, tend to rely on LC to a greater extent than MP (Robichaud et al. 2021). At the same time, however, researchers discussing ways to implement authoritative parenting have often recommended that parents combine reasoning with MP (Larzelere et al. 2013), raising questions regarding a potential association between authoritative parenting and LC. Future research will help situate the role of LC within the authoritative parenting style.

9.2 | What Are the Psychological Mechanisms of LC's Socialization Benefits?

Future research could also explore the psychological mechanisms that may account for LC's differential effects. For instance, we have argued that LC yield socialization benefits over MP because they highlight the contingencies between child behaviors and their impacts on others, themselves or possessions. However, the role of this potential psychological mechanism remains to be tested empirically.

Another explanatory factor for the different socialization effects of LC and MP may be that they differently impact children's psychological needs (i.e., a key antecedent for internalization and healthy development; Vansteenkiste et al. 2020). LC's focus on addressing transgression-induced problems could help children endorse their parents' intervention, which would protect their psychological needs. MP's reliance on aversion may hamper their potential to be implemented in collaboration with children compared to LC, which could limit children's perceptions of autonomy and competence. Parents' availability to help and offer guidance to their children when implementing LC could further nurture children's perceptions of relatedness. Future research will determine whether the differential effects of LC and MP may be explained by their differential impact on children's psychological needs.

LC could also yield socialization benefits because they model an empathic and collaborative approach to problem solving (Hill 1995; Saw 2016), which in turn could foster problem solving cognitive skills in children and/or encourage less reactance or vengeful behaviors (Deci and Ryan 2008; Larzelere et al. 2013; Mageau et al. 2018). Research exploring such potential psychological mechanisms would increase our understanding of LC as well as shed light on the processes involved in their aptitude to promote internalization and compliance simultaneously (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud et al. 2021; Smetana et al. 2014).

9.3 | What Are the Obstacles to Parent's Use of LC?

Although only emerging, research on LC suggests that resorting to this intervention may not be natural for many parents. For example, when asking adolescents to report on their transgressions and their parents' interventions in the scope of a diary study,

Robichaud et al. (2021) found that only 58 out of 213 reports of parent-adolescent interactions involving a rule-breaking situation included a description of a parental constraint. Of these 58 constraints, only 19 (32.76%) were perceived by youths as addressing the transgression-induced problem at least "moderately" (i.e., 4 or more on a 7-point scale). Although additional research is needed to help establish the prevalence of LC, these findings nevertheless suggest that some factors are likely to interfere with parents' use of LC.

9.3.1 | Knowledge

One possible explanation for the lower prevalence of LC is that research on this form of constraint remains preliminary and is still too recent for knowledge on its benefits to have reached a substantial number of parents from the general population. Although various parental programs have alluded to LC (Leijten et al. 2019), many have described LC as a complementary intervention to MP rather than as a *replacement* to them (e.g., Triple P, Sanders et al. 2000; Incredible Years, Gardner and Leijten 2017). In addition, the outreach of these programs is sometimes limited to at-risk families such that many parents may not have access to this parental knowledge. As the prevalence of LC seems rather low, one can assume that LC do not come intuitively to all parents. Increasing knowledge transfer on the effects of LC and its outreach to the general population could thus yield noteworthy benefits.

9.3.2 | Capacity to Identify the Transgression-Induced Problem

Gagnon et al. (2024) explored yet another potential explanation for the low prevalence of LC, namely parents' ability to identify the transgression-induced problem. These authors proposed that parents may favor MP over LC because they experience difficulties identifying the problem that child transgressions are causing. A common misconception when identifying LC may indeed be to confuse the transgression-induced problem with the transgression itself, which could divert attention away from problem solving and toward applying deterrents. Contrary to expectations, however, results showed that many parents who demonstrate ease in identifying transgression-induced problems anticipate implementing MP regardless of the identified problems (Gagnon et al. 2024). The tendency to rely on MP rather than on LC was rather predicted by parents' perceptions of the transgressions' seriousness. The more children broke important rules, the more parents anticipated using MP. Future research will determine whether MP could present an added value over LC for more serious offenses or if, on the contrary, the urge to rely on MP is greater for parents but with similar, suboptimal child effects.

9.3.3 | Parent Resources

Another potential obstacle to LC is that this type of constraint may require some degree of reflection, creativity, flexibility, and adaptability from parents to address each unique transgression-induced problem, as illustrated in Table 1. Addressing problems and involving children in the problem-solving process are also likely to require a significant amount of parental investment and monitoring in the short term. Given that a large range of parental pressures have been identified to significantly restrict parents' available psychological resources to interact optimally with their children in various settings (Grolnick 2003; Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2010), such pressures could also hamper parents' ability to identify and use LC. The parental investment and monitoring that LC require may be particularly taxing for disadvantaged families, whose lesser access to resources and increased parental stress (Conger et al. 2010) may further limit their ability to seek out the necessary parenting support to skillfully implement LC. Equity-informed approaches are thus needed to address these additional challenges and promote parenting quality for all families.

Although addressing each unique transgression-induced problem can be a challenge in many families, investing in the implementation of LC should be profitable in the long term, as LC seem to foster rule internalization to similar levels as reasoning in response to repeated transgressions (Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud et al. 2020c), potentially leading to greater responsibility-taking and social integration. When the solution to a transgression-induced problem is not readily apparent to parents, a likely scenario in most families, Ginott (1965) recommends brainstorming with children to identify a solution that may be acceptable to all concerned parties (after a cool-down period). Research is needed to determine whether such delayed LC are as effective as immediate LC (or MP).

10 | Theoretical and Practical Implications

The implications of this article are sixfold. First, by clearly defining LC as behavioral constraints, this article identifies a flexible and potent parental intervention that can replace MP and complement reasoning to directly address problems in situations of repeated child transgressions. Second, by emphasizing the need for LC to present a *problem*–constraint link, rather than a *transgression–constraint* link, this article orients parents toward solution-oriented constraints, encouraging them to prioritize collaborative problem-solving when faced with repeated transgressions. Third, by explicitly situating LC within SDT's basic psychological needs framework, this article highlights the importance of keeping parental constraints non-need-thwarting, that is ranging from neutral to need-supportive. Although implicit in Mageau and Robichaud's work, this fundamental feature of LC had never been explicitly stated, which led to some confusion as to the types of constraints that could be considered LC. With this precision, we assert that protecting children's psychological needs should take precedence over behaviorist principles of punishment when it comes to child socialization. Fourth, by considering compliance and the internalization of rules simultaneously when assessing the efficacy of parental interventions, this article promotes a comprehensive perspective on socialization, namely one that recognizes both compliance and rule internalization as central and essential aspects of the socialization process. Five, by proposing step-by-step guidelines on how to implement LC, this article offers concrete recommendations to parents and experts aiming to foster the use of this strategy. Finally, by clarifying LC's definition and measures and by proposing auditable theoretical propositions regarding their outcomes, mechanisms, antecedents, and moderators (see Table 2), this article enhances conceptual precision and provides

a solid foundation for coherent and replicable future studies that will determine the value and applicability of LC.

11 | Conclusion

The concept of LC has been proposed more than a century ago, yet LC remains a widely understudied and ill-defined construct. In this article, we address these issues by proposing an integrative definition of LC based on a comprehensive review of the literature of the last decades and discussing avenues for future research. We propose that LC are non-need thwarting parental constraints that address the problems created by transgressions. Emerging empirical evidence consistent with this operationalization suggests that LC could be a promising avenue to foster compliance and internalization simultaneously. Findings have been highly consistent in showing that children, adolescents, and their parents alike rate LC as more acceptable than MP and as equally or more effective to prompt compliance; they are also positively associated with healthy socialization outcomes in samples of preschoolers, children, and adolescents (Lachance et al. 2026; Mageau et al. 2018; Robichaud, et al. 2020a; Robichaud et al. 2021). Future research is needed to further establish the socialization value of LC, to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying their benefits, and to identify their antecedents and moderators.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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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