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From Black Pedagogy to Bleak Pedagogy: Unveiling Adultcentrism and the Lacking Roots of Misapplied Power in Disciplinary Practices

Eleonora Florio[1] | Nicola Palena[2] | Dalila Vitali[3] | Ilaria Castelli[1] | Letizia Caso[3]

[1]Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Bergamo, Italy | [2]Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, Amsterdam, the Netherlands | [3]Department of Human Sciences, Libera Università Maria SS. Assunta (LUMSA University), Rome, Italy

Correspondence: Eleonora Florio (eleonora.florio@guest.unibg.it)

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ABSTRACT

Since family is the first relational context experienced by the child, and the relationship between the child and the primary caregivers is a main aspect in the child's development, the present study delves into the application of Adultcentrism (AD)—the implicit adult-centered paradigm of thought—and Black Pedagogy (BP)—its practical, coercive derivation in disciplinary practices—in the context of the parent–child relationship, similarly to what has been already done in respect to the pupil–teacher relationship for both constructs.

Specifically, the objectives were to assess the suitability of the AD and BP scales on a sample of parents, to compare the positions of mothers and fathers on the two constructs, and to analyze the association between them. To achieve the objectives of this study, the AD and BP Scales were administered to a sample of 3448 parents. The main analyses show the overall validity and usability of both measurements: CFA confirmed the factorial structure of the BP Scale (RMSEA = 0.073, CI 0.072–0.075, SRMR = 0.076); in contrast, the AD Scale exhibited a better fit with a bifactorial structure (RMSEA = 0.062, CI 0.060–0.063, SRMR = 0.068). A SEM analysis revealed that AD is associated with BP in its values and methods. Moreover, the model tested proved to be invariant for territorial areas and parents' gender.

Results are discussed in light of their implications for new research lines and for deepening our understanding of AD and BP constructs; in fact, a new label is proposed for the latter one: "Bleak Pedagogy." Limitations and applications of the study are also presented.

1 | Introduction

1.1 | The Adult–Child Relationship as a Core Component of the Developmental Context

Human development, as both a product and a process of interaction with the environment, finds its first relational context in the family [1]. These interactions are bidirectional, since children actively construct their own reality, whereas the family context can in turn influence their development, positively or negatively, across all domains [1, 2]. The fact that the parent–child relationship plays a crucial role as part of the developmental context has been widely demonstrated in the literature [1–3], as exemplified by studies on the bond of attachment [3–5]. This focus was further elaborated through constructs such as maternal sensitivity [6], reflective function [7, 8], and Mind-Mindedness (MM) [9], which mainly describe properties of relational experiences in the first years of life and their impact on the child's future development. Such constructs and theories are fundamental, yet the enduring importance of relationships with parents—or with other significant adults—makes it necessary to consider new combinations and

perspectives depending on the lens of observation. For example, considering children as developing systems [10] entails that the overall organization of their behavior must be understood in connection with intertwined developmental aspects and with the multiple levels of the system in which they live. A first consequence of these systemic lenses is that children's characteristics and behaviors cannot be seen as entirely their own, but also as emerging within environmental objective and subjective dimensions, such as family systems' interactions, meanings, structure, and dynamic organization [11–13]. The representations parents hold about how the child should be educated and raised may therefore be regarded as integral components of the family microsystem [13]. Such representations may contribute to shaping some traits and behaviors of the child throughout development and, in turn, may also influence how adequately parents respond and attune to the child's own needs and demands. In particular, if applied to parents' representations concerning the skills and active role of children in their own development, these may give rise to certain styles and practices enacted by parents in order to guide their child's upbringing. A similar reasoning has also been developed in the context of the teacher–pupil relationship: according to Pianta [10], one of the greatest errors an educator can make is to assume that a certain competence is an intrinsic property of the child. By contrast, children's competences should be regarded as developing according to the opportunities provided by the context.

From this perspective, the practices through which adults educate and raise children—both in professional settings such as schools and in the natural context of the family—should be oriented towards creating a sensitive environment that fosters all aspects of children's development, supports their ability to adapt to evolutionary challenges, and acknowledges the mutual contributions and reciprocal nature of the adult–child relationship. In line with this, Coldren and Hively [14] showed that the interpersonal teaching style (authoritative vs. authoritarian) is a crucial feature of the developmental context, as it shapes the relational environment in which students learn, relate to others, and construct meanings of their world. Although their study focused on teaching styles, the same conceptual framework applies to the family context, where parents' styles and disciplinary practices—such as harsh parenting—play a central role.

1.2 | Parental Disciplinary Practices and Their Roots in the Family System

Family disciplinary practices can be initially examined through maternal and paternal dynamics, before widening the focus to family functioning and power relations, thus setting the background for introducing Adultcentrism (AD) and Black Pedagogy (BP) constructs. In fact, when narrowing the focus to the parent–child relationship, starting from maternal and paternal differences becomes particularly relevant given the longstanding predominance of research on the mother–child relationship, compared with the relatively less investigated father–child relationship, which has attracted greater attention only in recent decades, with several areas still underexplored [15–18]. Against this background, it has been highlighted that the role of fathers' emotional socialization behavior increases as children grow older: for instance, the social competence of middle school–age children showed a stronger association with fathers' emotional socialization compared with mothers [18]. Father involvement has also been identified as a correlate of children's future adjustment [19], and positive father–child relationships contribute to building social resilience among children who experience maltreatment by other perpetrators [17]. In particular, the quality of father–child relationships has been observed to buffer against internalizing and externalizing problems among adolescents exposed to maltreatment perpetrated solely by their mothers [17].

Beyond fathers' unique contributions, the quality of coparenting—reflecting the extent to which both parents work cooperatively and supportively in child-rearing—has been negatively associated with both internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children [18]. In turn, the quality of coparenting itself is embedded in the family system and its subsystems, such as the marital relationship and previous generations' childrearing values and practices [20, 21]. Nevertheless, parental cooperation does not invariably guarantee positive outcomes: in fact, recent meta-analytic evidence has shown associations between coparenting and dysfunctional forms of parenting, such as coercive or harsh practices, psychological control, and even child abuse potential, all of which represent dysfunctional parenting [22].

Specifically, harsh parenting encompasses disciplinary practices characterized by coerciveness and a negative emotional tone [23, 24]. Differences between mothers and fathers have also been investigated in relation to harsh parenting [23, 25, 26], which negatively affects children's development—particularly the acquisition of behavioral, social, and emotional skills [24, 27, 28]. For instance, Hogye ey al. [27] explored the relationship between harsh parenting and bullying involvement in children aged 3–6 years within a longitudinal birth cohort study. The authors highlighted an effect of fathers' harsh parenting on children's risk of becoming perpetrators of bullying. In contrast, mothers' harsh parenting could either increase or decrease children's risk of being targets, depending on their levels of inhibitory control problems [27]. Overall, studies on harsh parenting have demonstrated detrimental effects on children's development, with important consequences for aggressive behavior [28]. In families characterized by harsh discipline, children learned that aggression could be used as a tool for managing social situations [27]. Conversely, other studies have emphasized the centrality of inductive reasoning—such as giving explanations and using mild behavioral contingencies—to foster a positive discipline that encourages the development of emotion regulation skills, prosocial behaviors, and perspective-taking [29–31].

Taken together, these findings point to the relevance of parenting styles, particularly as described in Baumrind's formulation [32–35], which captures different ways of combining warmth and control in the family context. The authoritative style, with its integration of warmth and structure, allows children to better develop their cognitive, emotional, and social skills [36–38]. By contrast, the authoritarian style, characterized by high demands combined with coldness and rejection, has been associated with the emergence of developmental difficulties in children [39–42]. There is also a third parenting style, defined as permissive, which stands in opposition to the authoritarian style: It is

characterized by very low or almost absent levels of demands and control, combined with high responsiveness to children's emotional needs [36, 43, 44].

Parenting styles are influenced by various factors such as cultural norms and expectations, parenting styles of previous generations, and the meanings and values shared by parents in relation to the image of childhood and of the individual child [2, 45–50]. Since parenting style is embedded in the parent–child relationship, this relationship is also shaped by the feelings that parents have towards the child, as well as by parents' awareness of the reasons behind those feelings [51]. Moreover, such parental feelings can also be influenced by the "meaning of the child" [52, 53], which refers to the psychological significance that the child holds for the parents. In conclusion, although it is relevant to investigate differences between mothers and fathers in parenting behavior, such analyses inevitably open the way to further layers of complexity since "parental style relies on patterns of family functioning and together with them creates a specific unit" [54]. This perspective is consistent with evidence on intergenerational transmission patterns, showing that authoritarian style appears more salient across generations and is expressed, among other manifestations, through harsh disciplinary practices [45]. The higher hierarchical status of the parental subsystem has been discussed as essential both for meeting children's nurturing needs and for ensuring the proper functioning of the family system [55, 56]. Moreover, the structure of family functioning relies on transactional patterns maintained by a set of constraints, including the universal principle that a power hierarchy must exist between parents' and children's subsystems, although this hierarchy does not always follow the expected direction of parents holding all the authority [57, 58].

Within this multifaceted framework, which inevitably encompasses power dynamics and asymmetries intertwined with family functioning, the present work focuses on AD and BP. The definition of these constructs rests on such imbalance within the adult–child relationship and gives rise to specific conceptions of child-rearing and of authoritarian disciplinary practices—most notably the misuse of parental power through harsh parenting—to be adopted.

1.3 | Adultcentrism (AD)

AD is a construct that makes it possible to bring to light the representation that parents have of the child's world in terms of competence, autonomy, and specificity. It is defined as a paradigm, a tacit and subtle *forma mentis*, an implicit perspective that is rooted in a sociocultural matrix [59–62]. As the term suggested, the main idea is a dichotomic vision in which adults are seen as complete and fully human, whereas, in comparison, children and young people are scaled and rated as incomplete, incompetent, and passive recipients of adults' teachings [62, 63]. However, these beliefs and representations are unconscious and implicit: adults with an adultcentric vision are confident to act in the children's best interest, yet in practice, they provide inadequate or distorted responses to children's needs [62]. The risk is to confuse a child's real needs with something else, which is shaped by adults' interpretation and values. This occurs not only at the level of the parent–child dyadic interaction or specific family context, but also in the way in which the adult world in general responds to and acknowledges children's rights, needs, and skills. Indeed, Campbell described AD as an "inherent feature of the social fabric" [64]. It could be important to recognize that children's culture exists as well—and that it may be very different from that of adults—with its own priorities, knowledge, characteristics, and modes of transmitting certain skills. Instead, an adultcentric perspective highlights images of children that recall innocence and their essentially needy nature, in contrast to wise and expert adults, who must transmit their competencies and knowledge to empty recipients, namely children [65, 66]. From this vision emerges the conviction that adults "have the moral authority to control youth" [67] and consequently, the asymmetry of power in the adult–child relationship is reinforced. To perceive children as immature and incompetent automatically leads adults to feel the right to fully decide for them. Therefore, the power linked to this hierarchical position also entails the duty to raise children, educate them and turn them into respectable members of society [66, 68, 69]. The adultcentric perspective is based on the asymmetry of adult–child power, which is "physiological" up to a certain level, but which can degenerate into abusive educational forms similar to the concept of BP [70].

1.4 | Black Pedagogy (BP)

When polarization of power in favor of adults manifests through concrete practices such as physical and psychological violence, control, surveillance, oppression, and punishment, this falls within the construct known as BP [71, 72]. Indeed, the primary objective pursued through methods of BP is to shape the child's character according to the ideal values of parents, caregivers, and society at large [71]. Therefore, if AD refers to a set of meanings that contributes to sustaining the previously described forma mentis, BP consists of practices characterized by disciplinary methods that often extend into physical and psychological maltreatment. Notably, physical discipline or verbal intimidation for educational purposes is the most common form of violence against children, and often, this is not the result of an intentional disciplinary choice, but rather of anger, frustration, or a lack of awareness of nonviolent alternatives [73]. In such situations, most adults do not realize they are behaving in a harmful way, since they are convinced that acting in children's best interest may require slapping, yelling, or humiliating them as necessary methods to promote healthy and robust growth. According to Miller [74], the concept of BP, from a psychological point of view, has its roots in the mindset of those responsible for children's upbringing and manifests itself through its consequences on children.

Before delving into the placement of these practices within our culture, revisiting the origins of the term "Black Pedagogy" is essential for clarifying the meaning of the construct. In her original publication, Miller [74] used the label "Schwarze Pädagogik", which has been translated into Italian while maintaining the reference to the color black [72, 75]. Therefore, this terminology does not refer to Black students or to their education [76, 77], and it is important to clarify that the choice of the term was made solely to preserve semantic adherence to the originally coined expression.

It seems useful to start from this construct when reflecting on disciplinary practices in our culture, because even today some methods that may be harmful to children's well-being are not always recognized as such. In this perspective, looking at jurisprudence is particularly informative: case law shows that it can be difficult to determine when an educational behavior qualifies as abusive, and this ambiguity helps contextualize the issues addressed in the following section.

1.5 | The Shifting Boundaries of Violence Across Time and Generations

The following jurisprudential overview is not intended as a legal digression, but rather as a necessary normative framework to clarify how the boundaries of what is considered licit or illicit in disciplinary practices have historically shifted in Italy, and why constructs such as AD and BP are needed to capture forms of violence that remain culturally tolerated.

The World Health Organization defines maltreatment as any action that "involves actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity, in a relationship of responsibility, trust, and power" [78]. The Italian Criminal Code [79] defines the crime of "abuse of means of correction and discipline" (e.g., Art. 571 C.P. [79].) when licit disciplinary measures exceed permissible limits. Means of correction are meant as corrective practices considered acceptable by sector regulations and with some support in the professional or academic literature (e.g., temporary exclusion from activities or obligation of reparative conduct). Their use has disciplinary, didactic, or educational purposes, and it is appropriate when applied in response to a violation (or negligence) in a proportionate manner to its gravity. Consequently, in any context, use that goes beyond accepted practices or conditions by a person holding a role of authority or care, constitutes misuse and abuse under the law. This offense is punished with up to 6 months of imprisonment if it causes risk of harm to body or mind, with increased penalties if it results in personal injury or death.

However, what is deemed licit evolves with scientific and cultural progress, linked to advances in child-rearing methodologies, pedagogy, new scientific knowledge, social customs, and civic consciousness [80]. Recent jurisprudence has therefore broadened the notion of abuse in correction and discipline, which is now represented by behaviors, including omissions, that humiliate or devalue, thus causing harm. Specifically, the Supreme Court [81–83] stated that all forms of physical and psychological violence cannot be considered licit means of correction or discipline, and therefore, some forms that were once tolerated can no longer be used for educational purposes.

It is worth pointing out that the systematic use of unlawful means against a family member, a cohabitant, or a person under one's authority or care constitutes the crime of maltreatment (e.g., Art. 572 C.P. [79]). The intent of such use is not relevant; therefore, an educational intention does not rule out this offense [83, 84], which is punished with imprisonment from 3 to 7 years. This is because the use of any form of violence automatically excludes the lawfulness of the means. Moreover, if systematicity is lacking, a single episode may fall within the crime of personal injury (e.g., Art. 582 C.P. [79]), which applies when harm causes a physical or psychological impairment, with penalties ranging from 3 months to 3 years.

Although today the boundaries of the offense "abuse of means of correction and discipline" appear clearer, in the past the legal classification of certain disciplinary actions under this offense was not always straightforward. One example concerns the case of a middle school teacher in Palermo, accused after forcing a student to write the phrase "I am an idiot" 100 times, leading to therapeutic intervention for the minor. In the first instance of an abbreviated proceeding, the judge of Palermo Court acquitted the teacher due to insufficient factual basis. However, the Palermo Court of Appeal found the teacher guilty, a decision later confirmed by the Supreme Court [85]. This ruling, dating back to 2012, shows a tension with subsequent supreme court pronouncements [82–84], which have clarified that acts of psychological violence cannot be considered licit means at all, and therefore may fall under a different offense in the current legal framework.

Such a framework aligns with the Convention on the Rights of the Child [86], which recognizes the minor as a subject of rights and not a simple object of protection, and makes it clear that violent methods are never tolerated, including when used for educational, corrective, or disciplinary purposes. Nevertheless, parents who reproduce detrimental child-rearing practices received in childhood [75] may not be fully aware that the current legal framework explicitly includes subtler forms of physical and psychological harm under the notion of "violence." If such practices are culturally reproduced through generations, the current legal understanding of violence may not translate into common sense, so that behaviors no longer acceptable today may continue to be perceived as normal and enacted in everyday family life. This tension between normative clarity and cultural reproduction of practices highlights why constructs such as AD and BP are particularly relevant in family dynamics. In fact, as claimed by Perticari [87], this specific kind of child abuse is a contemporary problem that is difficult to recognize and identify, and for this reason deserves particular attention. This further underlines the importance of considering AD and BP—together with their possible overlap—as interpretative lenses to conceptualize and operationalize such subtle phenomena related to disciplinary practices culturally deemed as acceptable but detrimental to the child [59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 87–89].

1.6 | Empirical Background

In recent years, both the AD and the BP constructs have been operationalized through the development of self-report questionnaires, which have been validated with samples of university students and parents [61, 89]. Subsequently, these measures have been used to explore the persistence of detrimental disciplinary practices and their impact on educational contexts [70]: AD was found to significantly predict endorsement of BP among Italian primary school teachers, with higher scores on both scales associated with a lower ability to recognize subtle forms of maltreatment in classroom interactions. Moreover, when considered together with a measure of MM—defined as the caregiver's capacity to take into account children's mental

states and refer to them appropriately when commenting on the child's conduct [9]—in primary school teachers, the results showed a more nuanced picture: AD was not significantly related to how teachers described their pupils, whereas agreement with BP and a controlling teaching style were associated with less detailed descriptions. Interestingly, teachers who recognized the persistence of BP practices tended to describe their pupils in richer terms, with more mental attributes [90]. Comparing the results of these studies highlights the importance of using the two instruments together: AD predicted BP in one study [70], whereas in the other it showed no direct association with MM, which may reflect its more abstract nature compared with the more practice-oriented construct of BP [90]. Recent findings also showed that teachers' agreement with AD and BP was associated with the quality of student–teacher relationships and with perceptions related to specific learning disorder diagnosis [91].

Despite the initial focus on the school environment, the scales were never intended for this context alone. Indeed, the AD Scale has also been used in a study involving parents: it was validated in Hungary (with a bidimensional structure), where it is use with a sample of parents revealed associations with parenting practices and parental perceptions of children's participation in decision-making [92]. Moreover, at the theoretical level, the AD Scale has been discussed in connection with childism, which has been proposed as a framework to counter adultcentric norms and advance children's participation rights in Nordic contexts [93]. In comparative and interdisciplinary debates, AD and BP have also been theoretically linked with misopedia, underscoring the importance of examining their interconnections in order to better understand cultural forms of adult domination across different relational contexts [94]. In this regard, the recent development of the Perceived Adultism Scale [95] further strengthens the conceptual distinction between AD and adultism, with the former referring to a paradigm of thought and the latter capturing its harmful practical implications; notably, in this study young respondents were asked about adults in general rather than only parents or teachers.

Taken together, the empirical findings and the theoretical framework presented above support the relevance and applicability of both scales in the family context, in continuity with previous research conducted in educational settings, since parents (or caregivers) are the first adults encountered by the child in a relational context, and such adult–child relationships constitute a central aspect of the child's development [1–3].

1.7 | Study Objectives

Building on the theoretical and empirical background described so far, the present study was designed to further explore the possibility of applying the constructs of BP and AD to the parent–child relationship within a systemic interpretative perspective, thus placing its focus at the intersection of fields of developmental, educational, and social psychology. Indeed, the expectation is that some adultcentric visions and practices typical of BP are not only part of our history but are still diffused in our contemporary culture and society. More specifically, the objectives of this work could be synthesized in three points:

a. To confirm the factorial structure of the AD Scale [61] and of the BP Scale [89] in a larger parent sample, compared with the initial validation studies.

b. To compare mothers' and fathers' positioning on the two constructs, investigating possible gender differences in endorsing adultcentric attitudes and practices related to BP, since such gender differences have been investigated in previous studies on harsh parenting and parenting styles [23, 25, 26, 96].

c. To analyze the relationship between AD and BP, hypothesizing a positive association in continuity with previous research conducted with teachers [70], while exploring its direction in a sample representing parents.

It is necessary to strongly underline that it was not in the aims of our research to judge participants' beliefs or consider them as intentionally malicious, or to detect detrimental relational modalities as an end in itself.

More recent work has further situated these constructs within the broader parenting literature and within the debate on children's rights [97]. Therefore, beyond its empirical aims, the present study is also intended to contribute to the ongoing theoretical debate on AD and BP, particularly with regard to power asymmetries and cultural dynamics in adult–child relationships, which are further developed in the Discussion.

2 | Methods

2.1 | Measurements

As outlined in the introductory sections, AD can be defined as a paradigmatic stance and BP as its pragmatic derivation, both rooted in the adult–child power imbalance. On this basis, the present study focused on AD and BP as distinct but related constructs, employing their dedicated scales to explore these dimensions in the parental context; these scales demonstrated adequate psychometric properties in the present sample, as detailed in the Results section.

The BP Scale [89] (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) contains a first section measuring the BP construct (viz., "Black Pedagogy Observation"—BPO) constituted by 24 items loading on three factors:

1. "Values of Black Pedagogy" (high values: agreement with main educational values and objectives typical of Black Pedagogy's perspective; i.e., "Children must learn to be humble"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$ in the original validation [89]);

2. "Education of children over time" (high values: nostalgic attitude towards educative practices used in the past because considered more effective and useful; i.e., "Today's children are more ill-mannered than those of my generation"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$ in the original validation [89]);

3. "Methods of Black Pedagogy" (high values: agreement with BP's disciplinary and child-rearing methods; that is, "Pedagogical beatings are sometimes necessary: slapping, caning, and so on"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$ in the original validation [89]).

The scale includes also a first item of temporal collocation and a further section regarding the Estimations of Diffusion (hereafter, ED section) of BP methods in the past and nowadays. All response scales are of 4-point Likert type (1 = Fully disagree, 2 = Slightly agree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Fully agree; 1 = Not present at all, 2 = Present, but not common, 3 = Present, 4 = Widespread). The total score is calculated by summing the items. Following the procedure described by Florio et al. [70], we computed the range (maximum score–minimum score) and divided it into three equal intervals. This method allows for the identification of threshold values corresponding to low, moderate, and high levels of BP. Table 1 shows the results for BP. For a full presentation of the instrument, please refer to Florio et al. [89].

The AD Scale [61] (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.58$) is composed of 17 items with a 4-point Likert scale as response set (1 = Fully disagree, 2 = Slightly agree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Fully agree). The items load on three subscales:

1. "Child as an empty box" (high scores: child seen as an empty receptacle in need of being provided by adults with social and cultural values, i.e., "During a child's process of socialization, the priority is that he/she embraces the social values of the society in which he/she lives"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$ in the original validation [61]);
2. "Child without agency" (high scores: child seen as disempowered and without responsibility, i.e., "Teachers have full responsibility for everything their pupils do in classroom"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.62$ in the original validation [61]);
3. "Competent child" (low scores: endorsement of statements portraying children as lacking competences, e.g., "Children come into the world without any competences"—reversed item). In the original validation [61], this factor showed a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.31$ in the parent sample, but it was included in subsequent validation work [70], and further examined in the present study, because an adultcentric bias was suspected, as the pilot study phase with university students yielded an α of 0.62.

The total score is given by the sum of the items. As outlined above, the classification followed the method proposed by Florio et al. [70].

Table 2 shows the results for AD. For a full presentation of the instrument, please refer to Florio et al. [61].

TABLE 1 | Score thresholds for Black Pedagogy's subscales.

Scale or subscale	Low score	Moderate score	High score
Black Pedagogy observation (BPO)	50.33	68.66	86.99
Values of Black Pedagogy (Factor 1)	26.00	37.00	48.00
Education of children over time (Factor 2)	10.00	15.00	20.00
Methods of Black Pedagogy (Factor 3)	13.00	19.00	25.00

2.2 | Participants

The research involved 3448 parents of primary school children, contacted for instrument administration thanks to the collaboration of the Regional Scholastic Office of Bergamo, which reviewed and approved the research protocol. The research also received ethical approval from the ethics committee of Bergamo and was conducted in accordance with institutional and conventional ethical guidelines [98–100]. All subjects received clear information about the objectives of the research, about their rights as participants—including the guarantee of anonymity and the possibility to drop out from the study at any moment. After having been informed, they were asked to express their consent to proceed in participation. The document has been made available for parents' completion in paper form. Parents were not instructed to refer exclusively to their primary school–aged children when answering the questionnaires; therefore, their responses could also concern older or younger children.

The sample ($N = 3448$) consisted of 54.4% of fathers and 45.6% of mothers, the age range was from 17 to 72 years ($M = 41.99$, $SD = 5.85$). Regarding educational qualifications, the sample was distributed as follows: 29% held a first-grade secondary school qualification, 50.4% held an upper grade secondary school qualification, 4.2% held a "University Diploma," 2.9% a Bachelor's degree, 11.1% a Master's degree, and finally, 2.5% held a postmaster's specialization qualification. These qualifications

TABLE 2 | Score thresholds for Adultcentrism.

Scale or subscale	Low score	Moderate score	High score
Adultcentrism (Total score)	26.00	37.00	48.00
Child as an empty box (Factor 1)	11.33	15.66	19.99
Child without agency (Factor 2)	10.00	15.00	20.00
Competent child (Factor 3)	9.67	14.34	19.01

were grouped into three categories for analysis: middle school, high school, and higher education.

Moreover, the sample was also divided considering two territorial areas: it has been chosen the distance of 20 km as the cutoff distance since it represents half distance considering the position of the Comprehensive Institute most distant from the city (40 km), thus resulting in 63.5% of cases located at less than 20 km from the city center and 36.5% at more than 20 km.

2.3 | Data Analysis

In order to assess the psychometric properties of the BP Scale and of the AD Scale factor structure in our sample of parents, we conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood approach. It should be specified that Items 1 and 17 of the AD Scale were not included in the factor analysis because their loadings were not acceptable, but they have been maintained for theoretical reasons. Specifically, these represent the only items putting AD in clear connection with the concept of a "not truly child-friendly society", an aspect of basic importance according to the literature on the topic [101–104]. The two items are constructed as oppositely worded, allowing a mutual cross-check: lower agreement with Item 1 should correspond to higher agreement with statement 17, and vice versa.

The adequacy of the factor structure [101] was evaluated with the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and with the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Chi-square was not considered, because it is sensitive to sample size and models with a large sample size are better evaluated using RMSEA and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) [102, 103]. The application of RMSEA is heavily contingent on a set of cutoff criteria. Hu and Bentler [101] suggested that an RMSEA smaller than 0.06 and a CFI and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) larger than 0.95 indicate relatively good model-data fit in general. However, Hu and Bentler cautioned that the suggested cutoff values might not generalize to conditions that were not manipulated in their study. Earlier research [105] interpreted RMSEA and SRMR ≤ 0.08 as indicating reasonable fit. Schreiber et al. [106] recommend an RMSEA < 0.05 to 0.08. Browne and Cudeck [107], MacCallum et al. [108], and Jöreskog and Sörbom [109] suggested that an RMSEA value of < 0.05 indicates a close fit, and that < 0.08 suggests a reasonable model-data fit. Shi and Maydeu-Olivares [110] showed that CFI and RMSEA cutoffs can vary by estimation method (e.g., ULS vs. ML), as may other indices, thus recommending greater emphasis on the SRMR to assess model fit. The SRMR was more stable across methods. Models should produce an SRMR ≤ 0.08 [101, 106]. In line with this literature, we rely on the ≤ 0.08 threshold for the interpretation of RMSEA and SRMR. For completeness, CFI and TLI are reported, but they should be interpreted with caution when the null model RMSEA is ≤ 0.158, since lower values imply that such criteria are not reliable [111].

In addition, to investigate the relationship between the two constructs and their factors, we performed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

To evaluate measurement invariance, three different models were used: (1) configural invariance, that serves as the basic model, in which the structure is assumed to be the same across the compared groups; (2) metric (or weak) invariance, where loadings are fixed to be equal in the various groups; and (3) scalar (or strong) invariance, in which both loadings and intercepts are fixed to be equal across groups [105].

To compare the three models, we focused on changes in RMSEA and SRMR [112–114], as the χ^2 difference test is too sensitive for invariance assessment with large sample sizes ($N > 300$ [115]). Following Cheung and Rensvold [116] and Chen [115], we considered measurement invariance present when ΔRMSEA < 0.015 and ΔSRMR < 0.030. CFI and TLI were reported only if the RMSEA of the null model was < 0.158.

Subsequently, we conducted descriptive analyses on the sample's characteristics. We assessed the absence of important violations of normality considering that values of skewness and kurtosis between −1 and +1 are considered acceptable [117]. Analyses were conducted with Jamovi [118] and R software [119]. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship. The most widely used thresholds by which the effect size is interpreted as small, medium, or large are those proposed by Cohen [120]. In particular, $d = 0.20$ or $r = 0.10$ is interpreted as small effects, $d = 0.50$ or $r = 0.30$ as medium effects, and $d = 0.80$ or $r = 0.50$ as large effects. At the same time, according to Cohen [120], "the terms small, medium, and large are relative, not only to each other, but to the area of behavioral science or even more particularly to the specific content and research method being employed in any given investigation [...]." Richard et al. [121] analyzed 322 meta-analyses of social-psychological phenomena and showed that the average effect size in social psychology corresponds to $r = 0.21$. At the same time, in different areas of social psychology the typical effect size can be either greater (e.g., for group processes studies, $r = 0.32$) or lower (for social influence studies, $r = 0.13$). These results indicate that the thresholds proposed by Cohen cannot be directly applied to the field of social psychology as Cohen's effect size benchmarks overestimate the boundaries, at least for medium effect. Based on their work, Lovakov and Agadullina [122], referring to an empirically derived effect distribution, recommend interpreting correlation coefficients of 0.12, 0.24, and 0.41 and Cohen's *d*s of 0.15, 0.36, and 0.65 as small, medium, and large effects for social psychology studies. Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted when mean comparison between only two groups was of interest, for instance in comparing scores of mothers and fathers. After checking assumptions of normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, ANOVAs have been performed to investigate differences in scores between more than two groups.

3 | Results

The results will be presented in a structured way, following the order of the analysis conducted. First, the results of the analysis related to the items of BP and AD scales will be shown. Subsequently, the CFA and the results of the analyses performed on the emerged factors will be presented.

With the aim of analyzing participants' estimations of diffusion, in the past and nowadays, of BP's methods (items of ED section), it has been investigated which generation respondents considered as "the past" through the first item of the BP Scale (i.e., "In your opinion, which generation was the last to apply "old fashioned" educational practices?"). Considering the responses of all participants, most identified the generation of their parents (40.1%) as the last one applying "old fashioned" educational practices, but the proportion of subjects who consider that these methods were used until their grandparents' generation is very similar (39.9%). Moreover, the 16% of the sample witnessed that their own generation still applies disciplinary methods commonly referred to in our territory as "old fashioned." This suggests that these three perspectives derive from what a person has experienced or heard about in terms of methods applied in these generational groups. Only the 4.1% stated that such methods disappeared a long time ago, after their great-grandparent's generation. Table 3 presents the different percentages in mothers' and fathers' responses.

The chi-square test for independence performed on this contingency table (Table 3) was significant: $\chi^2(3) = 11.3$, $p = 0.01$. This result would suggest that there is a significant association between parents' gender and the generations indicated as those which were the last to apply "old fashioned" disciplinary methods. Nonetheless, Cramer's V was of 0.06, indicating a negligible effect size in this case [123]; therefore, the significant association should not be considered as practically relevant.

Afterwards, a paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the perception of diffusion, in the past and nowadays, of BP's methods identified as "old fashioned" educational practices. It is worth recalling that these are not the method against which participants scored their agreement, but only an estimation of how widespread these methods are in their opinion. Results are provided in the following Table 4.

As presented, all BP methods are esteemed as diminished in their diffusion nowadays compared to the past, and this is true both for mothers and fathers. Mean differences and relative effect size provide information of the extent of the decrease. It is immediately evident that some methods decreased much more than others, such as pedagogical beating and denial of meals as a punishment. Whereas blackmailing and justifying that unpleasant measures are adopted for children's own good are the practices that decreased less, with Cohen's d not reaching the medium effect threshold as the other methods. However, they reach the threshold of medium effect according to Lovakov and Agadullina [122]. This could indicate that methods threatening the emotional and psychological well-being of the child decreased less than other "physical" methods, but this appears to be not always true (cf. Figure 1).

Shapiro–Wilk normality test resulted significant ($p < 0.05$), thus suggesting a violation of normality assumption. Nevertheless, the skewness and kurtosis values fall within an acceptable range between −1 and +1 [117]. Tables 3 and 4 summarize descriptive information about the two measures used to investigate, respectively, the constructs of BP (Table 5) and AD (Table 6).

One-way between groups ANOVAs were performed to explore the impact of educational qualification (middle school, high school, or higher education) on AD and BP. The results are summarized in Table 7. As seen in Tables 5 and 6, these variables and their subscales show a distribution that does not violate the normality assumption ($|-1| < sk < |1|$ $|-1| < ku < |1|$). Where the assumption of homogeneity of variances (Levene's test) was violated, Welch's tests have been performed [124], and in these cases partial eta squared (η^2_p) has been calculated with the formula shown by Lakens [125]:

$$\eta^2_p = \frac{F \times df_{effect}}{F \times df_{effect} + df_{error}}$$

3.1 | BP and AD Scales' Factor Structure Through the CFA

In considering BP, we tested by CFA the model elaborated in previous studies [70, 89]. In line with the validation study and the application of the instrument in a sample of teachers, we loaded the following: 12 items (13, 15, 9, 12, 7, 2, 5, 16, 20, 6, 11, and 17) on "Values of Black Pedagogy" factor; 5 items (21, 1, 4, 3r, and 8r) on "Education of children over time" factor; and 7 items (10, 22, 14, 23, 18r, 24, and 19) on "Methods of Black Pedagogy" factor. Fit index indicated a reasonable fit: RMSEA = 0.073 (CI 0.072–0.075), SRMR = 0.076, CFI = 0.783, TLI = 0.759[1].

Cronbach's α was computed separately for "Values of Black Pedagogy" factor ($\alpha = 0.84$), "Education of children over time" factor ($\alpha = 0.70$), and for "Methods of Black Pedagogy" factor ($\alpha = 0.71$). Total Cronbach's α resulted 0.84, greater than the suggested acceptable value of 0.70 [125]. Figure 2 shows the item loadings.

Items 8 and 18 showed low factor loadings of 0.29 and 0.25, respectively. Therefore, additional methods were employed to determine whether to retain these items in the scale. The correlation of each item with the total scale score, excluding the item itself (corrected item-total correlation), was calculated. Results showed low values (<0.30) [126]: Item 8 $r = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$; Item 18 $r = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$). The effect of these items on the internal consistency of the scale was assessed by examining the change in Cronbach's α if each item was removed. The Cronbach's α without Item 8 remained almost invariable at 0.71, and similarly, without Item 18, alpha was 0.71,

TABLE 3 | Responses of mothers and fathers to the item of temporal collocation "In your opinion, which generation was the last to apply 'old fashioned' educational practices?"

Group	Parents	Grandparents	Great-grandparents	Own generation	Total
Fathers	39.2%	41.3%	4.8%	14.7%	100.0%
Mothers	41.1%	38.1%	3.2%	17.6%	100.0%

TABLE 4 | Paired samples *t*-tests (Student's *t*) for the entire sample and mothers' and fathers' groups, comparing estimations of the diffusion of Black Pedagogy's methods in the past and nowadays.

BP method	Group	*t*-test	*df*	*M* (Past)	*M* (nowadays)	*M* difference	*SE* difference	Cohen's *d*
All methods	S	72.01*	3011	31.53	21.88	9.66	0.13	1.31
	M	45.79*	1364	30.84	21.64	9.20	0.20	1.24
	F	55.88*	1646	32.11	22.07	10.03	0.18	1.38
a. Pedagogical beating	S	75.21*	3301	3.04	1.70	1.34	0.02	1.31
	M	51.81*	1499	3.01	1.66	1.35	0.03	1.34
	F	54.56*	1801	3.06	1.73	1.33	0.02	1.29
b. Denial of meals	S	61.45*	3295	2.31	1.24	1.07	0.02	1.07
	M	38.53*	1499	2.25	1.26	0.99	0.03	1.00
	F	48.22*	1795	2.36	1.23	1.14	0.02	1.14
c. Cautionary tales	S	52.67*	3302	2.76	1.82	0.94	0.02	0.92
	M	34.29*	1501	2.68	1.80	0.88	0.03	0.88
	F	40.07	1800	2.83	1.85	0.98	0.02	0.94
d. False information	S	46.79*	3294	2.92	2.12	0.80	0.02	0.82
	M	28.33*	1504	2.84	2.11	0.73	0.03	0.73
	F	37.78*	1789	2.98	2.13	0.85	0.02	0.89
e. Treating coldly	S	37.88*	3282	2.79	2.17	0.61	0.02	0.66
	M	24.99*	1494	2.74	2.15	0.59	0.02	0.65
	F	28.48*	1787	2.83	2.19	0.64	0.02	0.67
f. Toughening up	S	50.35*	3291	2.19	1.34	0.85	0.02	0.88
	M	32.19*	1495	2.17	1.37	0.80	0.02	0.83
	F	38.85*	1795	2.20	1.32	0.89	0.02	0.92
g. Discouraging sexuality	S	50.97*	3270	2.83	1.91	0.92	0.02	0.89
	M	32.15*	1485	2.77	1.92	0.85	0.03	0.83
	F	39.75*	1784	2.89	1.91	0.98	0.02	0.94
h. Lying	S	41.27*	3282	2.69	2.01	0.68	0.02	0.72
	M	26.50*	1495	2.65	2.00	0.65	0.02	0.69
	F	31.72*	1786	2.72	2.02	0.70	0.02	0.75
i. Humiliating	S	43.14*	3272	2.40	1.67	0.73	0.02	0.75
	M	27.69*	1489	2.31	1.62	0.69	0.03	0.72
	F	33.16*	1782	2.47	1.71	0.75	0.02	0.79
l. Physical violence	S	51.66*	3280	2.20	1.32	0.87	0.02	0.90
	M	33.59*	1490	2.15	1.32	0.84	0.02	0.87
	F	39.30*	1789	2.23	1.33	0.90	0.02	0.93
m. Blackmailing	S	20.43*	3246	2.51	2.17	0.34	0.02	0.36
	M	14.83*	1475	2.47	2.10	0.36	0.02	0.39
	F	14.15*	1770	2.55	2.23	0.32	0.02	0.34

(Continues)

TABLE 4 | (CONTINUED)

BP method	Group	*t*-test	*df*	*M* (Past)	*M* (nowadays)	*M* difference	*SE* difference	Cohen's *d*
n. Unpleasant measures for child's own good	S	23.94*	3243	2.81	2.41	0.40	0.02	0.42
	M	16.13*	1475	2.79	2.40	0.39	0.02	0.42
	F	17.68*	1767	2.82	2.41	0.41	0.02	0.42

Note: Black Pedagogy methods (full items) are as follows: (a) Pedagogical beating (slaps, to hit with a stick, etc.); (b) denial of meals or having these replaced with bread and water; (c) cautionary tales focused on distressing characters in order to be obeyed (the boogeyman, ghosts, legends, etc.); (d) providing false information to divert from topics mentioned by the child but considered inappropriate for his/her age; (e) treating the child coldly as a consequence of his/her disobedience; (f) toughening children up in respect to physical exertions, namely, to improve their stamina towards fatigue, heat, cold, hunger, and tiredness; (g) monitoring and discouraging children's curiosity towards their own sexuality; (h) lying by exacerbating the consequences of a conduct considered wrong with the intention of scaring the child and thus preventing his/her attempts to put such conduct into practice; (i) humiliating: involving other people (family members, relatives, classmates, etc.) in showing disapproval of the child in response to his/her mistake or disobedience; (l) physical violence (beatings, whipping, etc.); (m) blackmailing the child to make him/her do something; (n) always highlighting that when unpleasant measures are executed this is done solely for children's own good.

Abbreviations: F, fathers; M, mothers; S, entire sample.

*Asterisk denotes $p < 0.001$.

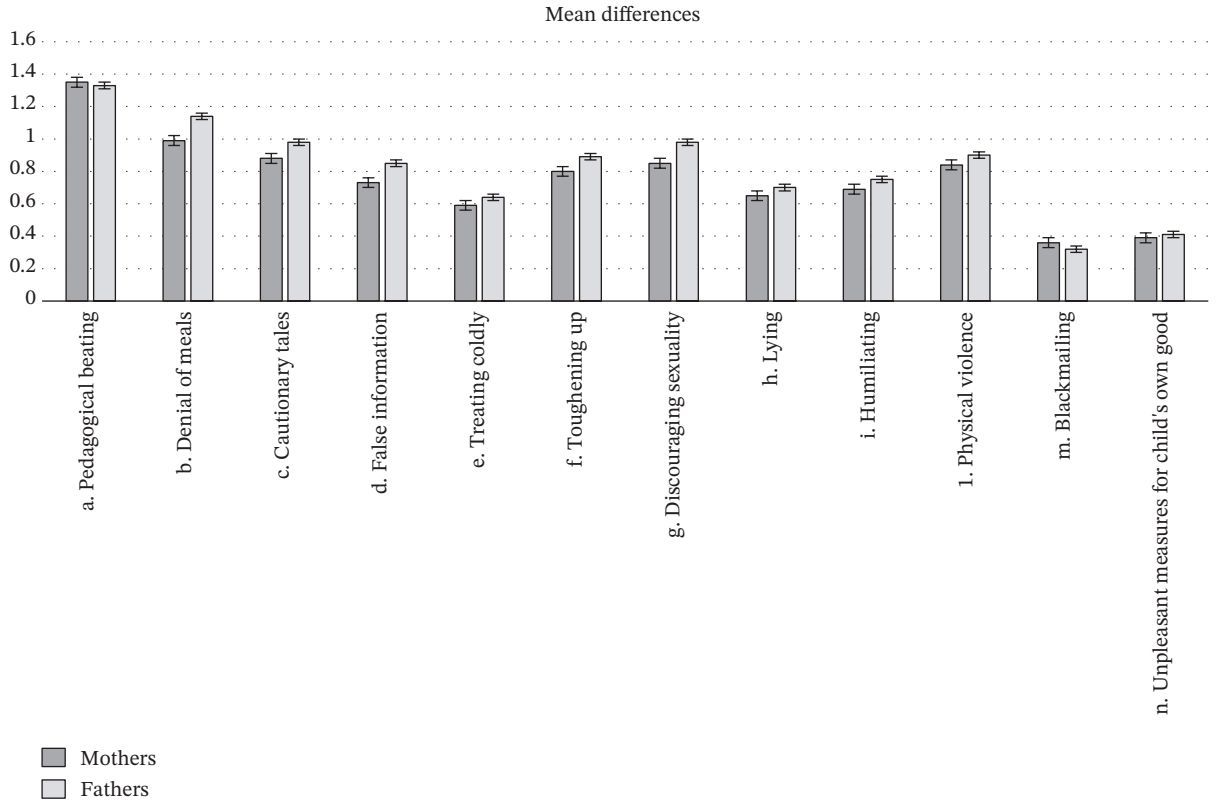


FIGURE 1 | Mothers' and fathers' scores in the estimations of diffusion of Black Pedagogy methods: Mean differences of diffusion in the past and nowadays.

TABLE 5 | Minimum and maximum possible scores on the Black Pedagogy Scale sections and subscales, compared with mean total scores, distribution of responses, and mean responses.

Scale or subscale	Min score	Max score	*M*	*SD*	*SEM*	*sk*	*ku*	*M*(r)
Black Pedagogy observation (BPO)	32	87	62.2*	8.56	0.16	0.020	0.127	2.59
Values of Black Pedagogy (Factor 1)	15	48	36.0*	5.19	0.09	−0.043	−0.059	3.00
Education of children over time (Factor 2)	5	20	13.5*	2.67	0.05	0.010	−0.137	2.70
Methods of Black Pedagogy (Factor 3)	7	25	12.8°	3.31	0.06	0.485	−0.012	1.83

Note: Total scores were calculated by summing all items of the scale. Asterisk "*" denotes that the mean falls within the moderate range according to the thresholds Table 1. Degree sign "°" denotes that the mean falls within the low range according to the thresholds Table 1.

Abbreviation: *M*(r), mean response calculated by dividing the mean score by the number of items.

TABLE 6 | Minimum and maximum scores of the Adultcentrism Scale and subscales, compared with mean scores, distribution of responses, and mean responses.

Scale or subscale	Min score	Max score	*M*	*SD*	*SEM*	*sk*	*ku*	*M*(r)
Adultcentrism (Total)	25	58	42.0*	5.15	0.09	0.200	0.040	2.80
Child as an empty box (Factor 1)	7	20	15.0*	2.11	0.04	−0.017	0.041	3.00
Child without agency (Factor 2)	5	20	12.4*	2.89	0.05	0.423	−0.100	2.48
Competent child (Factor 3)	5	19	10.4°	1.98	0.04	0.485	−0.012	2.08

Note: Total scores were calculated by summing all items of the scale. Asterisk "∗" denotes that the mean falls within the moderate range according to the thresholds Table 2. Degree sign "°" denotes that the mean falls within the low range according to the thresholds Table 2.
Abbreviation: *M*(r), mean response calculated by dividing the mean score by the number of items.

TABLE 7 | One-way between-groups ANOVA: Qualification levels and scores of Adultcentrism and Black Pedagogy Scales and subscales.

Scale or subscale	*F*	df_1	df_2	Levene's p	η^2_p
AD	26.418*	2	2877	0.221	0.018
AD-F1	0.588	2	3108	0.266	0.000
AD-F2	41.702*	2	3074	0.216	0.026
AD-F3	9.781*	2	3054	0.857	0.006
BPO	74.4°*	2	1389	<0.001	0.096
BP-F1	52.9°*	2	1456	<0.001	0.063
BP-F2	40.351*	2	3120	0.647	0.025
BP-F3	42.235*	2	3062	0.595	0.027

Note: Bonferroni's adjustment: α level set at $p < 0.006$. Asterisk "∗" denotes $p < 0.001$; $df_1 = n - 1$; $df_2 = n - k$; Degree sign "°" denotes Welch's test (unequal variances) performed instead of Fisher's.
Abbreviations: AD, total score on Adultcentrism Scale; AD-F1, first factor of AD "Child as an empty box"; AD-F2, second factor of AD, "Child without agency"; AD-F3, third factor of AD, "Competent child"; BPO, score of the "Black Pedagogy Observation" section, belonging to the Black Pedagogy scale; BP-F1, first factor of BP, "Values of Black Pedagogy"; BP-F2, second factor of BP "Education of children over time"; BP-F3, third factor of BP, "Methods of Black Pedagogy".

indicating that removing these items does not significantly affect the scale's reliability [127]. To further evaluate the impact of these items, we conducted a sensitivity analysis by correlating scale scores with and without these items. The correlation between the two scores was very high ($r = 0.99$, $p < 0.001$), indicating minimal influence on the overall construct measurement [128]. Finally, distributional properties were examined. Item 8 showed skewness = −0.46 and kurtosis = 0.44, and Item 18 skewness = 0.71 and kurtosis = −0.09. Both were within acceptable limits [129]. In addition, these items are reversed and therefore play an important role in controlling acquiescence bias [130]. On the basis of these results, and in line with methodological guidelines discussed by Hair et al. [131], we decided to retain Items 8 and 18 in the scale, treating low item loadings as indicators of potential concern rather than as automatic criteria for item removal, and supporting this decision through the additional evaluations reported above.

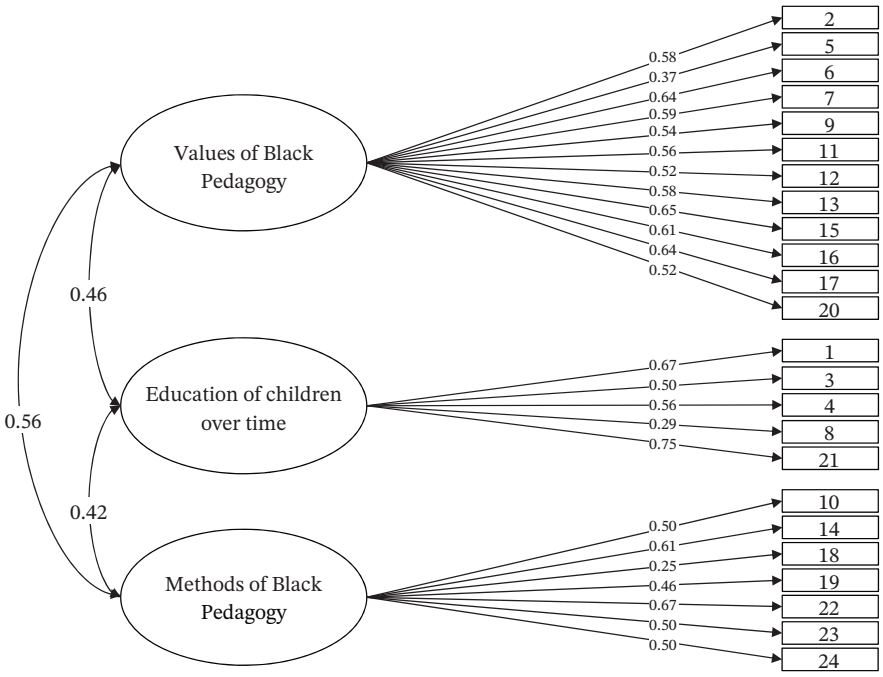
Also for AD, the first objective was to test the model proposed in previous literature. While the AD Scale originally included a three-factor structure [61], a recent study with teachers [70] supported a single-factor solution. In contrast, in all studies, the BP Scale maintained a three-factor structure.

However, in this case, the sample was different because it was composed of parents. Therefore, it was initially considered appropriate to reassess the three-factor structure "Child as an empty box" factor (Items 3, 8, 2, 4, and 5), "Child without agency" factor (Items 15, 10, 14, 7, and 16), and "Competent Child" (Items 9, 11, 12r, 6r, and 13). What emerged was an acceptable RMSEA = 0.075 (CI 0.072–0.078), SRMR = 0.068, but the third factor "Competent Child" showed borderline item loadings ($p = 0.04$). Figure 3 shows the item loadings.

Consequently, we have considered the possibility to perform a SEM (Table 8) with only two factors, excluding the "Competent Child" factor. It was evident also in the label that this was the only factor that attributed to the child an ability instead of describing an incompleteness or a lack, as suggested by the terms "empty" and "without." The fit index improved to RMSEA = 0.062 (CI 0.060–0.063), SRMR = 0.074, CFI = 0.802, and TLI = 0.761[1].

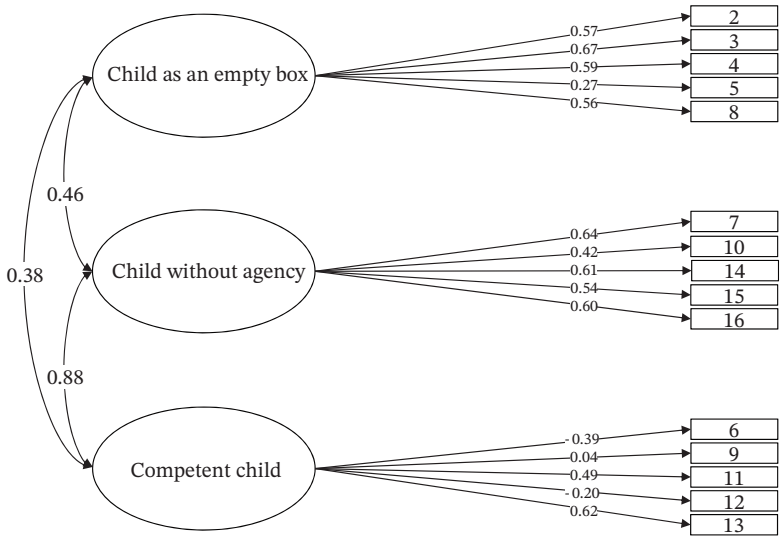
Excluding the third factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.028$), Cronbach's α for the scale including only the first and second factors was 0.73, which is in line with the commonly acceptable value [125]. The reliability of the two factors considered separately was also adequate ("Child as an empty box": $\alpha = 0.63$, "Child without agency": $\alpha = 0.69$). Moreover, the mean of interitem correlation values is acceptable for the first (0.39) and second (0.42) factors [123]. Figure 4 shows the item loadings.

A similar issue to the one described above emerged with Item 5 of the AD Scale, which showed a low factor loading of 0.27. As done previously, a series of additional analyses was conducted to determine whether the item should be retained. The corrected item-total correlation was $r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$, which meets the commonly recommended minimum threshold of 0.30 [126]. The correlation between the total scale score including Item 5 and the total scale score computed without Item 5 was high $r = 0.99$, $p < 0.001$ [128]. The internal consistency of the scale remained essentially unchanged when the item was removed (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$) [127]. Finally, distributional analyses showed acceptable values for both skewness (0.51) and kurtosis (0.01), falling within the recommended thresholds [129]. Taken together, these results supported the decision to retain Item 5 in the scale.



Note.
RMSEA = 0.073 [CI 0.072 - 0.075];
SRMR = 0.076;
CFI = 0.783;
TLI = 0.759

FIGURE 2 | Item loadings in Black Pedagogy Scale's factor structure through the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).



Note.
RMSEA = 0.062 [CI 0.060 - 0.063];
SRMR = 0.074;
CFI = 0.802;
TLI = 0.761

FIGURE 3 | Item loadings in Adultcentrism Scale's factor structure through the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

This model also investigated with SEM analysis the relationship between AD and BP and the related factors (cf. Figure 4 and Table 8). Results showed that AD generally was associated with BP, except for the relationship between "Education of children over time" and "Child as an empty box", which is not significant ($p = 0.152$).

As indicated in Table 9, the SEM model also shows measurement invariance of Parents (mothers–fathers) and of the territorial area. This latter variable was obtained by dividing the children's comprehensive institute locations into two groups: a distance greater or less than 20 km from Bergamo City.

TABLE 8 | Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) including three factors of Black Pedagogy (endogenous variable) and two factors of Adultcentrism (exogenous variable).

EN	EX	Estimate	*SE*	*z*-value	$p\ (>|z|)$	Std.lv/Std.all
BP-F1	AD-F1	0.234	0.024	9.927	<0.001	0.252
	AD-F2	0.436	0.027	16.177	<0.001	0.502
BP-F2	AD-F1	0.061	0.043	1.432	0.152	0.041
	AD-F2	0.153	0.040	3.806	<0.001	0.11
BP-F3	AD-F1	−0.264	0.030	−8.840	<0.001	−0.271
	AD-F2	0.666	0.041	16.425	<0.001	0.734

Abbreviations: AD-F1: first factor of AD "Child as an empty box"; AD-F2, second factor of AD, "Child without agency"; BP-F1, first factor of BP, "Values of Black Pedagogy"; BP-F2, second factor of BP "Education of children over time"; BP-F3, third factor of BP, "Methods of Black Pedagogy"; EN, endogenous variable; EX, exogenous variable.

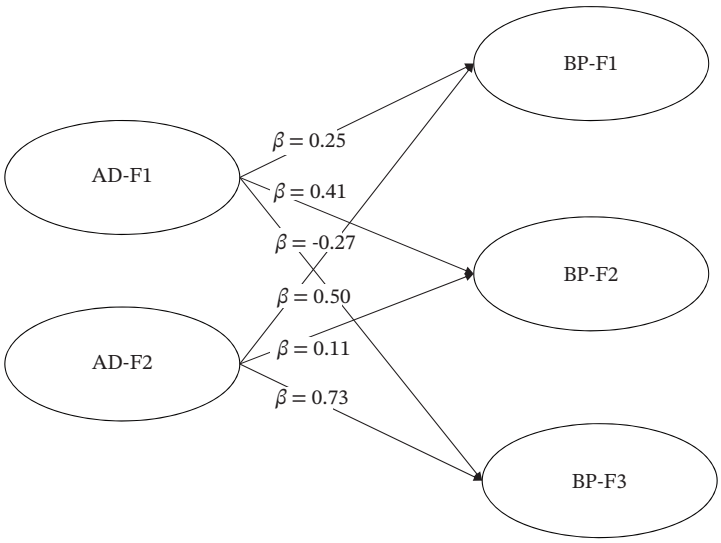


FIGURE 4 | Structural Equation Model (SEM): Adultcentrism predicting Black Pedagogy. Note: AD-F1, factor of AD "child as an empty box"; AD-F2, factor of AD, "child without agency"; BP-F1, factor of BP, "values of Black Pedagogy"; BP-F2, factor of BP "education of children over time"; BP-F3, factor of BP, "methods of Black Pedagogy."

TABLE 9 | Area and parent measurement invariance.

		RMSEA	SRMR
Area	Configural	0.063	0.076
	Metric	0.063	0.077
	Scalar	0.062	0.077
Parent	Configural	0.061	0.075
	Metric	0.060	0.075
	Scalar	0.060	0.075

Note: Area: territorial area (distance < 20 km or > 20 km from Bergamo City center. Parent: mother or father.
Abbreviations: RMSEA, root mean squared error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean squared error.

The RMSEA and SRMR for the SEM model were below 0.08, which indicates an acceptable fit [105–109, 132]. Therefore, the model is invariant for territorial areas and parents. Tukey post hoc tests for multiple comparisons showed that the scores of AD, "Child without agency" (AD-F2), and "Methods of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F3) were always significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) for the lower level of qualification in each comparison. Games–Howell post hoc test showed similar results for the BPO and "Values of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F1). For "Competent child" (AD-F3) and "Education of children over time" (BP-F2), respondents with middle school and high school qualification levels did not differ from each other in the score on these subscales. However, they both had significantly higher scores ($p < 0.01$) compared with the higher education's group.

Moreover, the presence or absence of significant difference in the scores of mothers and fathers was analyzed. Due to the large sample size, the interpretation of the results was based mainly on effect size indices (Cohen's *d*). In accordance with Cohen's thresholds [120], all differences observed between mothers and fathers are below the threshold for a small effect. However, when considering the Lovakov and Agadullina thresholds [122] only

TABLE 10 | Mean, standard deviation, and *t*-test value comparing parents' scores on Black Pedagogy and Adultcentrism Scales and subscales.

	Mothers		Fathers				
Scale or subscale	***M*(m)**	***SD*(m)**	***M*(f)**	***SD*(f)**	***t*-test**	***df***	**Cohen's *d***
Black pedagogy observation (BPO)	62.5	8.55	62.0	8.57	−1.390	2992	−0.0509
Values of Black Pedagogy (Factor 1)	36.1	5.12	35.9	5.24	−1.165	3147	−0.0417
Education of children over time (Factor 2)	13.5	2.71	13.6	2.64	1.525	3273	0.0535
Methods of Black Pedagogy (Factor 3)	13.0	3.35	12.6	3.26	−3.323* *	3210	−0.1178
Adultcentrism (Total)	42.4	5.07	41.6	5.18	−4.411* *	3010	−0.1612
Child as an empty box (Factor 1)	15.0	2.12	15.0	2.11	−0.723	3265	−0.0254
Child without agency (Factor 2)	12.7	2.85	12.2	2.92	−4.082* *	3225	−0.1443

Abbreviations: M(f), mean of fathers' responses; M(m), mean of mothers' responses; SD(f), standard deviation—fathers; SD(m), standard deviation—mothers.
* *Double asterisks denotes $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 11 | Matrix of linear correlation indices (Pearson's *r*) including Adultcentrism and Black Pedagogy Scales and subscales, and age (all sample).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	—						
2. AD	−0.04*	—					
3. AD-F1	0.01	0.61* * *	—				
4. AD-F2	−0.04*	0.82* * *	0.37* * *	—			
5. BPO	−0.15* * *	0.45* * *	0.26* * *	0.45* * *	—		
6. BP-F1	−0.13* * *	0.49* * *	0.37* * *	0.49* * *	0.88* * *	—	
7. BP-F2	−0.05* *	0.03	0.03	0.05* *	0.61* * *	0.33* * *	—
8. BP-F3	−0.14* * *	0.39* * *	0.09* * *	0.37* * *	0.73* * *	0.43* * *	0.25* * *

Note: Asterisk "*" denotes $p < 0.03$. Double asterisks "* *" denote $p < 0.001$. Triple asterisks "* * *" $p < 0.001$.
Abbreviations: AD, total score on Adultcentrism Scale; AD-F1, factor of AD "child as an empty box"; AD-F2, factor of AD, "Child without agency"; BPO, score of the "of Black Pedagogy observation" section, belonging to the Black Pedagogy Scale; BP-F1, factor of BP, "Values of Black Pedagogy"; BP-F2, factor of BP "Education of children over time"; BP-F3, factor of BP, "Methods of Black Pedagogy".

AD Total reaches the level of a small effect. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the differences remains not significant. Table 10 shows the results:

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between AD, BP, and age. Correlational analysis showed effect sizes ranging from small to very large according to Cohen's criteria [120] and Lovakov and Agadullina's thresholds [122] for social psychology. High correlations emerge between: BPO and BP-F1 ($r = 0.88$), AD and AD-F2 ($r = 0.82$), and BPO and BP-F3 ($r = 0.73$), all of which can be classified as large according to both criteria. Other correlations show medium effect sizes according to Cohen [120]: AD-F1 with AD-F2 ($r = 0.37$), BPO with AD and AD-F2 ($r = 0.45$); BP-F1 with AD and AD-F2 ($r = 0.49$); BP-F2 and BP-F1 ($r = 0.43$). According to Lovakov and Agadullina's criteria [122], correlations ≥ 0.41 reach the threshold for large effects. Age shows small correlations according to both criteria. Results are summarized in Table 11.

In the total sample, several strong correlations are observed; in the same way, it is interesting to compare the correlations of mothers' and fathers' groups (Table 12).

4 | Discussion

4.1 | Factorial Structure and Applicability of AD and BP in Parents

This work is part of a series of studies in which AD and BP constructs have been operationalized and explored [61, 70, 89]. Based on the responses of this sample of parents (objective a), the factorial structure of the BP Scale was confirmed through CFA (RMSEA = 0.073; CI 0.072–0.075, SRMR = 0.076), whereas the AD Scale showed a better fit in its bifactorial structure (RMSEA = 0.062; CI 0.060–0.063, SRMR = 0.068). Taken together, these findings indicate that the AD and BP Scales can be meaningfully applied to the study of adult–child power

TABLE 12 | Matrix of linear correlation indices (Pearson's *r*) for mothers' and fathers' groups, including Adultcentrism and Black Pedagogy Scales and subscales, and age.

	Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	M	—						
	F	—						
2. AD	M	−0.02	—					
	F	−0.12* * *	—					
3. AD-F1	M	0.02	0.62* * *	—				
	F	−0.01	0.59* * *	—				
4. AD-F2	M	−0.00	0.81* * *	0.39* * *	—			
	F	−0.12* * *	0.82* * *	0.36* * *	—			
5. BPO	M	−0.13* * *	0.43* * *	0.25* * *	0.43* * *	—		
	F	−0.20* * *	0.47* * *	0.27* * *	0.46* * *	—		
6. BP-F1	M	−0.10* * *	0.47* * *	0.38* * *	0.48* * *	0.87* * *	—	
	F	−0.18* * *	0.50* * *	0.36* * *	0.50* * *	0.88* * *	—	
7. BP-F2	M	−0.03	0.03	0.00	0.05	0.62* * *	0.32* * *	—
	F	−0.07* *	0.05	0.05*	0.05*	0.62* * *	0.33* * *	—
8. BP-F3	M	−0.14* * *	0.36* * *	0.06*	0.35* * *	0.73* * *	0.42* * *	0.26* * *
	F	−0.20* * *	0.41* * *	0.11* * *	0.38* * *	0.73* * *	0.43* * *	0.25* * *

Note: Asterisk "∗" denotes $p < 0.03$. Double asterisks "∗ ∗" denote $p < 0.001$. Triple asterisks "∗ ∗ ∗" denote $p < 0.001$.
Abbreviations: AD, total score on Adultcentrism Scale; AD-F1, factor of AD "child as an empty box"; AD-F2, factor of AD, "Child without agency"; BPO, score of the "of Black Pedagogy observation" section, belonging to the Black Pedagogy Scale; BP-F1, factor of BP, "Values of Black Pedagogy"; BP-F2, factor of BP "Education of children over time"; BP-F3, factor of BP, "Methods of Black Pedagogy"; F, fathers; M, mothers.

dynamics in the parental context. Such results are consistent with the Hungarian validation of the AD Scale with parents [92] and extend previous work by confirming that the BP Scale remains valid in a large parental sample. Notably, in a study with primary school teachers [70], the best-fitting solution for the Adultcentrism Scale for Teachers (ADT) was one-dimensional, yet it still explained meaningful variance in BP. In our parent sample, the CFA confirmed the stability of the BP structure across contexts, whereas the AD structure appeared more variable, though still predictive of BP.

A possible explanation for the changing structure of AD lies in the fact that both AD and BP address aspects of the adult–child relationship that often remain unacknowledged. In particular, AD can be conceived as a forma mentis "physiologically" operating in the background for adults, while its negative outgrowths become visible in detrimental disciplinary practice, here represented by the BP construct. Therefore, it may be more difficult to circumscribe AD in itself, given its nature as a multifaceted paradigm of thought, whereas BP, as a possible pragmatic derivation of AD, definitely showed solidity in its structure across samples.

4.2 | Associations Between AD and BP in the Parental Context

What is certain is that the explanatory power of AD was confirmed also in the present study: results of the SEM performed (Table 8) showed that AD factors predict BP in its values and methods, which are more explicit, visible, and recognizable (Objective c). Specifically, the SEM analysis indicated that AD predicted the three factors of BP in different ways. "Child without agency" (AD-F2) showed the strongest and most consistent associations: it significantly predicted "Values of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F1), "Education of children over time" (BP-F2), and especially "Methods of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F3). This may suggest that the most powerful pathway from AD to BP practices lies in denying children's agency. In contrast, "Child as an empty box" (AD-F1) presented weaker and partly divergent associations: it predicted "Values of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F1); it was not significantly associated with "Education of children over time" (BP-F2), and showed a negative association with "Methods of Black Pedagogy" (BP-F3). This pattern may indicate that perceiving the child as "empty" to be filled does not necessarily translate into approval of detrimental disciplinary practices and may even imply a separation between an abstract adherence to values and the actual use of BP's methods. In line with the criteria reported in the Data Analysis section [120, 122] and with recent recommendations for SEM [133], the standardized coefficients (cf. Table 8) can be considered effect-size information: the paths from AD-F2 reflect large to very large effects, whereas those from AD-F1 are modest or even negative, highlighting the different explanatory weight of the two factors.

The present study therefore confirms the overall validity and usability of both measurements, as supported by the factorial

structure and predictive associations reported above. They represent original tools to explore the line of research that embraces AD, as well as its derivations such as adultism, which is receiving increasing attention in recent literature [39, 134–140], and specific detrimental disciplinary practices [70, 141–144]. Attention to children's well-being is not new, but it is renewed by the interdisciplinary effort of scholars—who are themselves adults—aiming to design tools that avoid displacing children's genuine point of view and culture. At the family microsystem level, a key positive feature of the parent–child relationship is the parents' capacity to see the child as a separate person, because this recognition allows the child to develop independently from a psychological standpoint [145]. Such recognition at the microsystem level parallels what is required at the cultural level: just as children must be acknowledged as separate persons in the family, societies need to question AD as a forma mentis that shapes norms and practices. In fact, considering the macrosystem level, AD has been described as a pervasive way of thinking in our society and culture [59, 61, 62, 64, 71, 94, 146]. In this perspective, we did not expect substantial group differences; in fact, the model tested (cf. Table 7) proved to be invariant for territorial areas and parents' gender (Objective b). It is important to specify that the territorial areas considered present some differences in terms of microculture of which we are in some measure aware considering the experience of our territory, but it would certainly be more informative to compare results on AD and BP Scales at a transregional or even transnational level.

4.3 | Group Differences in AD and BP

Statistically significant group differences emerged only by educational level: lower educational qualification was associated with higher scores on AD and BP Scales. According to the effect-size benchmarks adopted [120, 122], most partial eta squared η^2_p values ranged from small to medium effect (Table 7). Especially, BP total score reached the highest magnitude (BPO; $\eta^2_p = 0.096$). These results suggest that the level of educational qualification shows a consistent impact, especially on the BP total score (BPO) and this pattern is consistent with previous findings [61, 89, 92]. The fact that educational level has a stronger influence on BP, especially on the overall BPO score, while its impact on AD is more limited, may reflect the different nature of the two constructs already mentioned above. Indeed, a possible interpretation of this result is that higher educational qualifications may foster critical thinking skills [147] that help individuals to question cultural models when they are visible in practices and values, but it is less effective in addressing AD itself, which operates as a more elusive and background paradigm of thought.

In line with the overall invariance of the model by gender, *t*-test analyses revealed a few significant differences (Objective b), but these were small in magnitude [120, 122]. Mothers scored slightly higher than fathers only on the "Methods of Black Pedagogy" factor, the AD total score, and the "Child without agency" factor (cf. Table 10). These findings are echoed in other research: for example, Lee et al. [148] found that mothers spank their children more than fathers. Nonetheless, the effect sizes in our study were very small, supporting the interpretation that AD and BP are culturally pervasive constructs, shared across genders, rather than being strongly differentiated by parental role.

However, it is still noteworthy that fathers never scored higher for none of the constructs examined, although several studies suggest that they tend to show greater authoritarian parenting attitudes [37, 96, 149–154]. One explanation could be that authoritarian attitudes are not fully captured by the instruments used in this study. Nevertheless, previous research has already demonstrated that BP is a construct suited to the objective [70, 89]. Another possibility is a selection bias: fathers with more authoritarian attitudes may have been less willing to participate, given the sensitivity of the topics described in the informed consent. Although the present work was not designed to control for this aspect, future research should address whether it is simply difficult to involve fathers in this type of study with random sampling, whether a cultural change is underway encouraging more differentiated paternal styles, or conversely whether fathers are actively resisting cultural premises and reshaping their role within the family. These latter two scenarios have already been noted in the literature [152, 155–161]. Research has highlighted counter-normative paternal roles and role-reversed parental arrangements in family management [162, 163], as well as increasing attention to domestic violence against men [164], which has been discussed in relation to broader social changes linked to gender equality and individualism [165].

4.4 | Perceived Decline of BP Methods Within the Cultural Context

The results presented so far directly address our initial objectives (a, b, and c), confirming the scales' structure, highlighting the associations between AD and BP, and clarifying how parents' gender and educational level shape these constructs in the family context. Linking our reflections on power imbalance when a disciplinary role is involved with other phenomena of cultural transition offers valuable opportunities to enrich the discourse and to clarify the direction needed: in our opinion, this direction is not about simply giving children the same power as adults. Such an approach carries the risk of adultizing: if the recognition of children's rights and culture is accompanied by the expectation that they bear adult responsibilities for their own development, they lose their fundamental right to experience childhood as a protected stage of life [166, 167]. This would create a paradox and could even be seen as a form of subtle violence [168]. Therefore, the direction is not to hold children accountable for what adults imagine they should be, but rather to embrace complexity through a nonjudgmental and transdisciplinary approach to both adults and children. The objective is to define a protected dimension for childhood and adolescence, a dimension that is dynamic and capable of adapting to the evolving needs of children across generations, as well as to the adult-child system in families, schools, and all other contexts where adults and children interact.

The relevance of a nonjudgmental approach is reflected in our participants' estimations of the diffusion of BP methods

(Figure 1), that show a clear pattern of decline: we observe a substantial perceived decline for corporal punishment (pedagogical beating), physical violence, denial of meals, humiliating, lying, providing false information, cautionary tales, toughening up, and discouraging sexuality (Cohen's *d* ranging from 0.75 to 1.31), while it was noticeably smaller for practices such as blackmailing, treating the child coldly, and justifying unpleasant measures for the child's own good (Cohen's *d* ranging from 0.36 to 0.66). These significant differences require a further explanation besides the main assumption that the less physical the method is, the less visible and recognizable as detrimental it is [70, 89], since these responses raise specific questions. Why did "providing false information"—a verbal method—decrease at a rate similar to "toughening up the child," which involves the body? And why did "lying" and "humiliating" decline more sharply than "blackmailing" or than "justifying unpleasant measures for child's own good," although they all belong to the same nonphysical category of detrimental practices? One possible explanation is that children today have more opportunities to compare what parents say and do with external sources. Cautionary tales and false information can be quickly debunked through contact with peers and teachers as early as kindergarten. This process is likely to occur earlier than in past generations, due to both parents often being employed [169–173] and the earlier exposure to internet technologies, which represent a privileged communication channel and a vast source of information for children and youth [174–182]. The same reasoning could help in explaining the results concerning the method of "lying": lies about the outer world have more chance to be refuted by meeting other people (e.g.: teachers, peers), whereas lies concerning specific family issues may be more difficult to be proved wrong.

The act of humiliating, especially in public, is known to cause psychological suffering and feelings of shame [183–186]. Its impact may depend on the child's wider social context: if teachers, relatives or peers support the parent's disapproval, humiliation is reinforced, whereas if they support the child, its effects may be mitigated. To the best of our knowledge, no studies directly addressing this aspect with children are available. However, research with adults suggests useful directions. Mann et al. [187] found that general audience support after humiliation did not reduce the perceived humiliation and reason about the possibility that support from a trusted peer of equal status could mitigate the experienced humiliation. These findings point to the need for further research specifically addressing how social support may moderate humiliations experienced by children at the hands of caregivers or other adults entrusted with their care (e.g., parents or teachers).

Indeed, Pianta [10] highlighted that supportive teacher–pupil relationships can act as protective factors, counterbalancing difficulties and risks experienced by children in other contexts. A similar reasoning emerges when referring to our findings (cf. Figure 1), showing that the most visible and culturally delegitimized practices, such as corporal punishment, humiliation, or providing false information, appear to be perceived as progressively disappearing. By contrast, less visible or more easily justified practices, such as blackmailing or justifying unpleasant measures for children's own good, remain relatively stable. This pattern may suggest that harmful methods tend to decline if they are explicitly discouraged or disapproved within the wider social environment.

Such interpretation requires further confirmation, particularly through longitudinal designs, but is consistent with the view that AD and BP must be understood within their cultural and social framework [61, 70, 89, 93]. Consequently, promoting change at the cultural and societal level may be more effective, as it undermines the sociocultural consensus sustaining detrimental practices.

4.5 | The Cultural Entanglement of Subtle Detrimental Child-Rearing Practices

Including the macrosystem [97] in our discussion is a necessary step, but this should not lead to a demonization of AD or of its methodological derivations, such as BP or adultism [61, 70], because it could risk degenerating into a fruitless search for a goal that keeps changing its form—namely, the attempt to fix once and for all static boundaries of what counts today as detrimental practices, overlooking their dynamic nature and their susceptibility to future cultural, legal, and scientific shifts. Rather, the challenge is to recognize how these constructs manifest within present cultural premises and in the everyday exercise of child-rearing practices. As discussed above, our findings confirm that some methods—such as blackmailing, justifying unpleasant measures "for the child's own good," and treating the child coldly—proved to be particularly resistant in our data, and can be understood as practices enacted mainly in the intimate space of the adult–child relationship, thus being less visible to significant others. Therefore, subtler practices may persist precisely because they are harder to identify, discourage, or counter from the outside, since some other adult is needed to take a position against these practices. Moreover, children themselves may be unable to challenge them, partly due to the idealizing narratives that emphasize a positive image of the caregiver [153], a bias that maintains proximity to the attachment figure and is associated with intergenerational patterns of insecurity [188, 189].

This raises a new concern: once the most visible and culturally delegitimized methods (e.g., corporal punishment) disappear, subtler detrimental practices risk becoming the main outlets through which an exacerbated adultcentric paradigm finds expression. Jurisprudence may progressively recognize these hidden practices [79], but the boundaries remain blurred, and the pursuit of well-being risks becoming endless. Therefore, the awareness of AD and of its derivations such as BP at the macrosystem level should be combined with a nonjudgmental approach, encouraging adults not to feel guilty but rather curious about alternative conceptions of the relationship they can have with children and adolescents.

4.6 | The Bleak Side of Misapplied Power: The Victimised Perpetrator Within the System

In line with the systemic perspective outlined in the introduction—where harsh parenting is rooted in family subsystems and sustained by hierarchical positions—our discussion focuses on how power asymmetries operate across contexts. A parallel can be made with the phenomenon of bullying, with an intent that is heuristic rather than identificatory: it does not equate the two phenomena, but it may help to highlight the reflection about power dynamics that can shift their expression as norms and surveillance increase.

Bullying is a dysfunctional universal social process because it is transversal across school contexts, and bully and victim represent its symptoms, not its causes [190]. Its manifestations evolve with societal and technological changes [191], as well as teachers' awareness, which may also remain limited because bullies avoid acting in front of those who are willing and able to intervene [192]. Episodes of "bullying" towards adults are also possible, where dominance is enacted by youths towards adults [193–195]. This makes evident the risk of an uncontrolled power shift in favor of children and adolescents. In the same way in which the bullying phenomenon is a symptom of contextual power issues and struggles [190] and the bully may also be a victim, since evidence supports the notion that perpetrators of bullying often carry histories of physical or emotional abuse at home, including authoritarian parents and physical discipline, as well as other forms of harsh parenting [28, 196–198]. Continuing our heuristic parallel, also the adults endorsing disciplinary practices of BP can be seen as victims [199, 200]: therefore, within the adult–child relational system, a nonjudgmental stance remains crucial [88] since, it is recalled, AD can represent, to some extent, the adult's natural standpoint [70], yet it should not harden into a blind centralization of power that tautologically justifies actions "because adults are adults." Our findings reinforce this view: the subtler BP methods located in the intimate relational space—such as blackmailing or justifying unpleasant measures for the child's own good, treating the child coldly—persisted, while more visible practices declined substantially. As previously discussed, this pattern may suggest that when overt expressions are discouraged, power imbalance can migrate into less observable forms in areas where external observers or societal controls are less likely to intervene.

For this reason, it is important that adults themselves—not only professionals—bring these practices to the table of public discussion. However, this is not easily achievable if we frame the issue in terms of diagnostic-like cutoffs (low, moderate, and high) or if we rely on labels imbued with strong negative connotations, such as Schwarze Pädagogik [201]—that is, BP—or, as it has also been translated, "poisonous pedagogy" [199, 200]. Seen from this angle, the BP method of "justifying one's actions for the child's own good" may not be only a malicious excuse but also the expression of an adult struggling with societal demands and lacking alternative strategies, not a new idea in the literature [69, 73]. In this light, to move beyond a good-bad dichotomy [88], we propose the label "bleak pedagogy" [202]. Bleak here does not convey a judgment of value, but the sense of aridity and lack of alternatives in which adults may find themselves: a barren landscape where disciplinary methods are reproduced [74, 75, 199] not out of malice, but because they appear to be the only available resources—unpleasant yet perceived as effective [70, 89]. At the same time, this bleakness can be read as a space to be transformed, a call to cultivate new resources for the role of adults and more generative ways of relating to children. The choice of bleak is therefore very specific and grounded in our line of work on AD and BP constructs [60, 61, 70, 88–91, 93]: although our proposal has been positively received in the contexts where it has been presented so far [202], it has at times been misreported as a reference to a supposed "gloomy pedagogy" [203]. We would like to stress that our choice of the term bleak is intentional and theoretically motivated: it does not repudiate earlier labels, but rather reflects a necessary evolution of the construct, informed by both our empirical findings and the reflections that stem from them.

The practical implication is not to eradicate AD or deprive adults of their responsibilities and duties [167]; rather, it is to expand adults' repertoires within a shared cultural effort, creating conditions that integrate children's and adults' evolving culture and relationships, enabling the diffusion of less coercive routes to the same aims of development and mutual well-being.

4.7 | Limitations and Possible Lines for Future Research

Some limitations have already been mentioned: this kind of study, despite the large size of the sample, would be more informative in the next steps if more contexts were compared in transnational or transregional studies. Instead, here the proposed explanations of the results refer to the specific context of an Italian northern region. However, we assume that similar or different results can be found in other contexts, and it could be useful to explore if our line of reasoning concerning subtle detrimental educational practices would be applicable to other cultures. Moreover, although the conceptual framework referred to parenting styles and attachment theories, no standardized instruments directly assessing these constructs were included. This decision followed the specific aim of the study, which was to complete the validation of the AD and BP scales within the parental context. At this point, both constructs—in the version here presented—can be considered sufficiently stable to be combined in future research with established measures of parenting, attachment, or family functioning, contributing to their integration within broader family research frameworks.

Another limitation concerns the composition of the sample, which included only parents for reasons related to the refinement of the instruments. Nonetheless, the data proved informative in several directions precisely because respondents were adults. Future research in Italy on these constructs should combine the responses of adults with those of children or young people, using the appropriate versions of the AD and BP scales. This line of research is particularly interesting in regard to the dismissal of AD's third factor ("Competent child"), which in our view does not represent a psychometric failure but rather a consistent result considering that it was already weak in its structure in the validation phase, but only with the sample of parents and not with the sample of university students (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.62$) [61]. Instead, in the refined version presented here, this factor definitively disappears, which may also indicate that adults have difficulty responding consistently in regard to children's competences. Indeed, understandably, if adults cannot notice them, having worked only on data derived from parents' responses may explain this result. In a possible future version of the AD Scale for adolescents or young adults the "Competent child" factor should be tested among others, because a young sample could better describe how they perceive adults' capacity to perceive their competences.

A further aspect concerns the relative consistency of the two measures across studies. As discussed above, the factorial

structure of the BP Scale has remained stable in all known applications, whereas the AD Scale has shown some variations depending on the sample and context. However, these differences appear theoretically grounded, since AD represents a more implicit and multifaceted paradigm of thought. For this reason, the joint use of the AD and BP Scales is recommended in the future, as the latter captures the practical and more visible manifestations of the former. Moreover, the AD Scale could be usefully administered alongside other constructs that are more directly observable to further clarify its theoretical position within the broader framework of adult–child relationships. We also suggest that its interpretation should rely less on absolute scores (low, moderate, and high) and more on the emerging patterns of association with related constructs.

5 | Conclusions

Exploring the adultcentric paradigm and Bleak Pedagogy (former Black Pedagogy) highlights the need to embrace the complexity of the concepts, taking into account the social, historical, cultural, and relational context, as well as the specific roles of the different levels of the surrounding system [97]. This unveiled the scenario of a "Bleak Pedagogy", which recalls the substantial loneliness, desolation, and lacking nature of those coercive and controlling disciplinary methods that are practiced out of frustration, to fulfill society's demanding expectations and/or due to the perceived lack of better alternatives in taking on the parent role. The same could be translated to a macrosystem level with AD: if the imbalance of power is exacerbated in any extreme direction (i.e., authoritarianism, permissiveness) there is the risk of losing sight of the person-child, replacing them with total freedom or excessive rules, expectations, and predefined life trajectories – pressures often perceived from adults themselves.

In light of these considerations, it becomes possible to better define what not being adultcentric entails. It does not mean denying the adult's central role, but rather transforming it into a conscious, dialogical, and reflective position. For this reason, we insist on underling that the adult's centrality is natural to a certain extent, but that this centrality must be aware of itself, especially of its resources and limitations. This helps recognize that the authoritarian adult may also reflect a suffering system: what truly requires protection is the encounter and the relationship between child and adult, in its relational value and quality. Every adult must have the space and time to cultivate new resources to sustain their role, to let the individuality and idiosyncrasies of a specific child or adolescent question former obsolete premises and assumptions on education and child-rearing. Societal and cultural change should aim to ensure that every environment where this precious encounter occurs (e.g. school, home) offers favorable conditions and expectations. Within such settings, the person-adult and the person-child can both develop throughout the life cycle by mutually inspiring, challenging, and amazing each other, in a safe climate where the quality of their relationship remains the primary driving force in overcoming child-rearing challenges' resolution.

Beyond their theoretical scope, our findings are relevant for professionals and researchers working with parents and families, because the Adultcentrism and Bleak Pedagogy scales can support reflective work on how adults understand their role and daily child-rearing practices, thus encouraging awareness and preventive approaches in family and educational contexts. These constructs enrich existing frameworks in parenting and family research by addressing the cultural assumptions that shape adult–child relationships. This leads to a broader form of child and youth protection, giving adults the opportunity to grow into better reference figures than those they encountered in the early stages of their life, because it embraces the future of all children and adolescents, not only those who experience maltreatment and come to the attention of authorities.

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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.

Endnotes

[1]The CFI and TLI are reported but should be interpreted with caution when the baseline model RMSEA is < 0.158, since lower values imply that such criteria are not reliable [110].

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