

Examination of Athletes' Dark Personality Traits in Terms of Demographic Variablesⁱ

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38021asbid.1200668>

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the Dark Personality Traits levels of the athletes and to examine the differences in terms of demographic variables. The Dark Triad Scale developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014) and adapted into Turkish by Agrali-Ermis, Sahin and Demirus (2018) was used as a data collection tool in the descriptive survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods. The sample of the study consists of 817 athletes determined by random method. As a result of the research; it was determined that the dark triad characteristics of the participants were at a moderate level and the highest rate was in the dimension of Machiavellianism and narcissism. It was determined that female athletes had higher Machiavellianism scores than male athletes. In addition, it was observed that the level of narcissism increased significantly as the education level increased. When analysed according to the branches, it was determined that the participants who do team sports have both Machiavellian and psychopathic personality characteristics higher than the participants who do individual sports.

Keywords: Athlete, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Dark Personality Trait

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Sporcuların Bazı Demografik Özelliklerinin Sahip Oldukları Karanlık Üçlü Kişilik Özellikleri Üzerine Etkisinin İncelenmesi

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, sporcuların Karanlık Kişilik Özellikleri düzeylerinin belirlenerek demografik değişkenler açısından farklılıkların incelenmesidir. Nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel tarama modelinde olan çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak Jones ve Paulhus (2014) tarafından geliştirilen ve Türkçe uyarlaması Agrali-Ermis, Sahin ve Demirus (2018) tarafından yapılan Karanlık Üçlü Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini random yöntemiyle belirlenen 817 sporcu oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın sonucunda; katılımcıların karanlık üçlü özelliklerinin orta düzeyde olduğu ve en yüksek oranın Makyavelizm ve narsisizm boyutunda olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Kadın sporcuların erkek sporculara göre Makyavelizm puanlarının daha yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca eğitim seviyesi yükseldikçe narsisizm düzeylerinin de anlamlı derecede yükseldiği görülmüştür. Branşlara göre incelendiğinde ise, takım sporları yapan katılımcıların, bireysel spor yapan katılımcılara göre hem Makyavelist özellikleri, hem de psikopatik kişilik özelliklerinin daha yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sporcu, Makyavelizm, Narsisizm, Psikopati, Karanlık Kişilik Özelliği

Yayın Bilgisi

Gönderi Tarihi:
07.11.2022

Kabul Tarihi:
14.12.2022

Online Yayın Tarihi:
19.12.2022

Introduction

The concept of personality and its traits is an area that has been widely studied in the field of sports. It is known that, in order for professional athletes to show the best performance in competition, different personality traits are investigated and their psychological dimensions are also discussed. In this context, it has become important to examine the personality traits of the Dark Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy), which is a new approach in psychology, which is referred to as the personality traits of the individual. This trait, which can appear especially on the behaviors of the athletes and play an active role in their communication with both themselves and their environment, has now become an interesting factor in sports psychology research.

When we look at the literature, we can reach the information that athletes show higher extraversion than non-athletes. Even this situation differs within itself. For example, it was determined that while the athletes who play team sports show higher extraversion, sincerity and sociability than the athletes who do individual sports, they are at a lower level of conscientiousness. When evaluated according to gender, it was concluded that female athletes gave higher neurotic reactions than male athletes (Allen et al., 2013). In another study, it is noteworthy that most of the athletes are in the forefront of perfectionism (Hill et al., 2018).

In addition to these, the Dark Triad personality traits emerge as a completely new field. The Dark Triad are three distinct but interrelated traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Machiavellianism is defined by high manipulation, selfish attitudes, and deception, while narcissism reflects a sense of grandeur, desire for power, and superiority. Psychopathy, on the other hand, is known as the indicator of an impulsive and non-empathetic individual (Paulhus and Williams, 2002). Although it generally presents with a negative, typically maladaptive and unpleasant picture, it has been possible to reach conclusions in some studies that higher levels of the Dark Triad can provide advantages.

When we take a look at these, we can say that it can enable individuals to progress and achieve personal goals by ignoring the priorities and feelings of others. It is seen in the publications that they can be useful in scenarios where personal or professional gains are possible through self-interest. (Carter et al., 2015; Furnham et al., 2013). It has been observed that especially performance athletes, in their attempts to reach personal goals, act without taking into account the goals and feelings of others, and thus they show high performance and increase the chance of success (Carter et al., 2015).

Although new publications and studies have been made, it seems that much more needs to be covered in order to examine the Dark Triad personality traits. It is seen that there are many different areas to be considered especially in athletes and there are not enough studies on the evaluation of

different traits and Dark Triad traits. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature by associating dark personality traits of athletes with some demographic traits.

Dark Triad Personality Traits

The dark triad studies, which Paulhus et al. started in 2002, symbolize the repulsive side of personality, which is seen as a negative behavior in society. The dark triad is categorized in three dimensions as narcissistic, machiavellian and psychopathic personality in the related literature (Paulhus and Williams, 2002).

The dark triad personality is known to contain qualities that can be considered bad among personality traits, without expressing a pathological disorder. The dark triad personality traits put forward by Paulhus and Williams (2002) generally include callousness, violent behavior, bad and harmful thoughts, and inconsistent approaches (Furnham et al., 2013).

Narcissism, one of the dark triad personality traits, can be summarized as personality traits that manifest themselves as superiority over others, arrogance and self-centered behavior, while Machiavellianism can be explained as personality traits that manifest themselves by deceiving, cheating, and aiming to gain profit by hypocrisy, leaving aside moral and value judgments. Psychopathy, on the other hand, can be said to be personality traits that manifest themselves with lack of empathy, reckless and emotionless behaviors (Paulhus and Williams, 2002).

The presence of these traits among athletes can be beneficial. Thus, high Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy facilitate better adaptability to the pressure set by participating in competitions, higher levels of self-confidence, increased resilience, stronger coping strategies, participation and higher concentration power (Vaughan et al., 2018).

The dark triad consists of normal personality traits that tend to cause problematic behavior: Machiavellianism, which is characterized by the manipulation and exploitation of others, psychopathy characterized by interpersonal and emotional traits such as selfishness and unscrupulousness, and behavioral traits such as impulsivity, and narcissism characterized by the pursuit of status and fame, and competitive, aggressive attitudes towards others (Jonason and Webster, 2010; Tamura et al., 2015).

When we look at the literature, we see publications stating that the Dark Triad will appear as a problem or need that we have to face in various fields, even if it only exists at a moderate level (Marcus, and Zeigler-Hill, 2015). Preliminary evidence supports this claim in the fields of work (O'Boyle et al., 2012), sports (Nicholls et al., 2017), and health (Jonason et al., 2015).

In our study, we plan to contribute to the literature by examining the relationship between the demographic characteristics of the athletes and the Dark Triad personality traits.

Method

Research Model

The study constitutes an example of a descriptive research.

Study Group

Participants participated in the study on a voluntary basis, and a total of 817 athletes were reached. The study group consisted of 795 athletes by removing the observations showing missing data and extreme values from the data set with the examinations made on the data obtained from the athletes.

The distribution of the athletes participating in the research according to their demographic characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of the Athletes Participating in the Research According to Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	309	38.9
	Female	486	61.1
Branch	Individual	404	50.8
	Team	391	49.2
Duration of doing sports	0-3 years	133	16.7
	4-7 years	337	42.4
	8 years and more	325	40.9
National status	Yes	248	31.2
	No	547	68.8
Income Level	Low	154	19.4
	Moderate	476	59.9
	High	165	20.8
Educational Level	High school and lower	308	38.7
	Undergraduate and higher	487	61.3

Male athletes constitute 38.7% (n=309) and female athletes constitute 61.3% (n=486) of the study group. 50.8% (n=404) of the study group were in individual branches and 49.2% (n=391) were in team branches. 16.7% (n=133) of the study group have been doing sports for 3 years or less, 42.4% (n=337) of them for 4-7 years, and 40.9% (n=325) of them for 8 years or more. While 31.2% (n=248) of the study group were national athletes, 68.8% (n=547) were not national athletes. 19.4% (n=154)

of the participants have a low-level income, 59.9% (n=476) have a moderate level, and 20.8% (n=165) have a high income level. 38.7% (n=308) of the participants have high school or lower education level, 61.3% (n=487) have undergraduate or higher education level.

Data Collection Tool

Personal Information Form was applied to determine the demographic characteristics of the academic staff participating in the study, and the “Short Dark Triad (SD3) Dark Triad Personality Scale developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014) and adapted by Ağralı Ermiş, Şahin and Demirus (2018) to determine the dark triad traits.

The Short Dark Triad Scale consists of 27 items in three dimensions: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Questions 1-9 measure the traits of Machiavellianism, questions 10-18 measure the traits of narcissism, and questions 19-27 measure the traits of psychopathy. High scores obtained from each dimension of the scale indicate that individuals have a high level of displaying the traits of the personality type in the said dimension.

Data Analysis

When the skewness-kurtosis coefficients calculated for the normality assumption of the variables were examined, it was determined that the coefficients took values between -1 and +1 (total: skewness=0.043; kurtosis=-0.427; Machiavellianism: skewness=-0.197; kurtosis=0.024; narcissism: skewness=0.137; kurtosis=0.187; psychopathy: skewness=-.090; kurtosis=-.235) and it was determined that the variables did not deviate excessively from the normal. For the normality distribution of the data, histogram graphs were also used and it was determined that the data showed a normal distribution as seen in Table 2.

Statistics

Table 2

Histogram Graph Created for the Variables

		Total_dt	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
N	Valid	795	795	795	795
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation		12,521	5,977	4,490	6,107
Skewness		-,043	-,197	-,137	-,090
Std. Error of Skewness		,087	,087	,087	,087
Kurtosis		,427	,024	,187	-,235

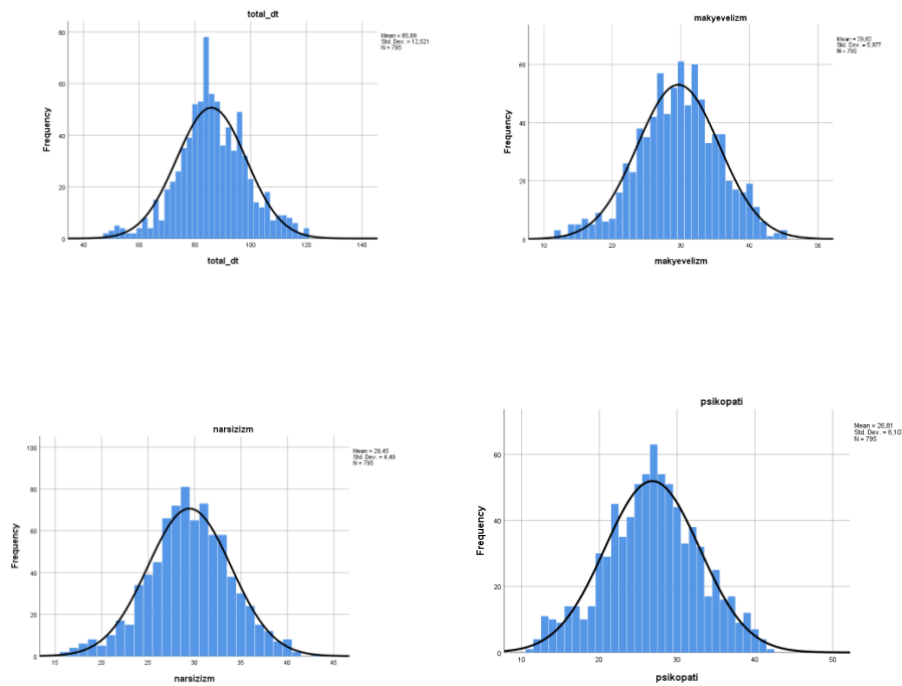
Std. Error of Kurtosis

,173

,173

,173

,173



Research Problems

The questions to be answered in this research are as follows:

- Do the participants have the dark triad traits?
- Does the level of having dark triad traits differ significantly according to the participants';
 - o Gender,
 - o Branch,
 - o National status,
 - o Duration of doing sports,
 - o Income level,
 - o Educational level?

Ethics of Research

During the current research, it was acted within the framework of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive".

Findings

What is the Level of the Participants' Dark Triad Traits?

Table 3

Level of Participants Dark Triad Traits

Dark Triad Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Machiavellianism	795	12	45	29.62	5.977
Narcissism	795	16	43	29.45	4.490
Psychopathy	795	11	42	26.81	6.107
Total_dt	795	48	119	85.89	12.521

When the information in the table is examined, it is seen that the Machiavellianism scores of the athletes participating in the research varied between 12.00 and 45.00. The mean score of the participants for Machiavellianism was calculated as 29.62 (± 5.97). The narcissism personality scores of the participants varied between 16.00 and 43.00, and their mean score for the narcissism was calculated as 29.45 (± 4.49). When the psychopathy personality scores were examined, it was determined that it varied between 11.00 and 42.00 and the mean score was calculated as 26.81 (± 6.10).

When the total score of the participants from the scale is examined, it is seen that it varies between 48.00 and 119.00, and the mean score is 85.89 (± 12.52).

Tekin (2002) states that the scale scores can be interpreted based on the "range/category number" equation. In this direction;

- scores between 9-21 indicate a low level of personality traits,
- scores between 22-33 indicate a moderate level of personality traits,
- scores between 34-45 indicate a high level of personality traits.

In this direction, it was determined that the Machiavellian, narcissistic and psychopathy personality traits of the participants were moderate.

Do the Levels of Having Dark Triad Traits Show a Significant Difference According to the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants?

Examination of Dark Triad Traits According to Gender

Table 4

The t-test Results in the Unrelated Measurements Calculated to Determine Whether the Dark Triad Traits of the Participants Show A Significant Difference According to Gender

Dark Triad	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	T	p
Machiavellianism	Male	309	28.08	5.59	793	-2.427	0.015
	Female	486	30.03	6.18			
Narcissism	Male	309	29.37	4.46	793	-0.404	0.687
	Female	486	29.50	4.50			
Psychopathy	Male	309	26.55	5.92	793	-0.583	0.560
	Female	486	26.91	6.22			

When the table was examined, it was determined that the participants' narcissism ($t(793)=0.404$; $p>0.05$) and psychopathy ($t(793)=0.583$; $p>0.05$) personality scores did not show a significant difference according to gender.

However, it was determined that the Machiavellianism ($t(793)=-2.42$; $p<0.05$) scores of the participants showed a significant difference according to their gender. When the mean scores were examined, it was determined that female athletes (30.03 ± 6.18) had higher Machiavellian personality traits than male athletes (28.08 ± 5.59).

Examination of Dark Triad Traits According to Branches

Table 5

The t-test Results in the Unrelated Measurements Calculated to Determine Whether the Dark Triad Traits of the Participants Show A Significant Difference According to The Branch

Dark Triad	Branch	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Machiavellianism	Individual	404	28.57	5.49	793	-5.112	0.00*

	Team	391	30.71	6.26			
Narcissism	Individual	404	29.33	4.46	793	-0.773	0.44
	Team	391	29.58	4.523			
Psychopathy	Individual	404	26.31	5.91	793	-2.350	0.01*
	Team	391	27.32	6.26			

When the table was examined, it was determined that the narcissism ($t(793)=0.773$; $p>0.05$) personality scores of the participants did not show a significant difference according to their branches.

However, it was determined that the Machiavellianism ($t(793)=2.42$; $p<0.05$) and psychopathy ($t(793)=2.350$; $p>0.05$) scores of the participants showed a significant difference according to their branches. When the mean scores were examined, it was determined that the participants doing team sports (30.71 ± 6.26) had more Machiavellian traits (27.32 ± 6.26) and psychopathic personality traits ($26, 31\pm 5.91$) than the participants doing individual sports (28.57 ± 5.49).

Examination of Dark Triad Traits According to National Status

Table 6

T-test Results in Unrelated Measurements Calculated for the Dark Triad Scores of the Participants According to Their National Status

Dark Triad	National status	N	\bar{X}	SS	Sd	t	p
Machiavellianism	Yes	248	28.62	6.248	793	-3.21	0.001*
	No	547	30.08	5.799			
Narcissism	Yes	248	29.28	4.358	793	-0.72	0.471
	No	547	29.53	4.551			
Psychopathy	Yes	248	26.17	6.601	793	-2.00	0.045*
	No	547	27.10	5.853			

When the information in the table was examined, it was determined that the narcissism ($t(796)=2.99$; $p>0.05$) personality scores did not show a significant difference according to the national status of the athletes.

However, it was determined that the Machiavellian personality traits ($t(793)=3.21$; $p<0.05$) and psychopathy personality traits ($t(795)=2.00$; $p<0.05$) of the athletes showed a significant difference according to their national status. According to the mean scores, non-national athletes (30.08 ± 5.79) were found to have higher Machiavellian personality traits than national athletes (28.62 ± 6.24), whereas non-national athletes (27.10 ± 5.83) were found to have higher psychopathy scores than national athletes (26.17 ± 6.60).

Examination of Dark Triad Scores According to Educational Level

Table 7

T-test Results in Unrelated Measurements Calculated for The Dark Triad Scores of the Participants According to Their Educational Level

Dark Triad	Educational Level	N	\bar{X}	SS	Sd	t	p
Machiavellianism	High School and lower	308	28.70	5.619	793	-3.498	0.381
	Undergraduate and higher	487	30.21	6.127			
Narcissism	High School and lower	308	29.25	4.290	793	-1.013	0.042*
	Undergraduate and higher	487	29.58	4.612			
Psychopathy	High School and lower	308	26.33	5.789	793	-1.768	0.119
	Undergraduate and higher	487	27.11	6.287			

When the information in the table was examined, it was determined that the personality scores of Machiavellianism ($t(796)=3.49$; $p>0.05$) and psychopathy ($t(796)=1.76$; $p>0.05$) did not show a significant difference according to the educational level of the athletes.

However, it was determined that the narcissism personality traits of the athletes showed a significant difference according to their educational level ($t(796)=1.03$; $p<0.05$). According to the mean scores, it was determined that the athletes with undergraduate and higher education level (29.58 ± 4.61) had higher narcissism personality traits than the athletes with high school and lower education level (26.33 ± 5.78).

Examination of the Dark Triad Characteristics According to the Duration of Doing Sports

Table 8

One-Way Analysis of Variance Results Calculated for the Dark Triad Scores of the Participants According to the Duration of Doing Sports

Dark Triad	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F	p	Difference
Machiavellianism	Intergroups	3.867	2	1.934	4.422	.012	0-3/8 and above
	Ingroup	346.361	792	.437			
	Total	350.229	794				
Narcissism	Intergroups	.372	2	.186	.747	.474	
	Ingroup	197.245	792	.249			
	Total	197.617	794				
Psychopathy	Intergroups	.831	2	.415	.902	.406	
	Ingroup	364.810	792	.461			
	Total	365.641	794				

When the table was examined, it was determined that the mean score of Machiavellianism ($F=4.442$; $p<0.05$) of the athletes showed a significant difference according to the duration of doing sports. Scheffe test was calculated to determine the difference.

As a result of the calculation, it has been seen that the Machiavellianism scores of the athletes who have been doing sports for 8 years or more ($\bar{x}=3.3621$) are higher than the athletes who have been doing sports for 0-3 years ($\bar{x}=3.1646$).

It was determined that the narcissism ($F=.747$; $p>0.05$) and psychopathy ($F=.902$; $p>0.05$) scores of the athletes did not differ significantly according to their branches.

Examination of dark triad traits according to income level

Table 9

One-Way Analysis of Variance Results Calculated for the Dark Triad Scores of the Participants According to the Income Level

Dark Triad	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F	p	Difference
Machiavellianism	Intergroups	.201	2	.101	.227	.797	-
	Ingroup	350.028	792	.442			
	Total	350.229	794				
Narcissism	Intergroups	.337	2	.168	.676	.509	-
	Ingroup	197.280	792	.249			
	Total	197.617	794				
Psychopathy	Intergroups	1.587	2	.794	1.727	.179	-
	Ingroup	364.054	792	.460			
	Total	365.641	794				

When the table is examined, it was determined that the mean scores of the athletes for Machiavellianism ($F=.227$; $p>0.05$), narcissism ($F=.676$; $p>0.05$) and psychopathy ($F=1.727$; $p>0.05$) did not show a significant difference according to the income levels.

Discussion and Conclusion

In studies examining dark triad personality traits in terms of demographic variables, it was observed that gender was effective in displaying dark triad personality traits (Furnham et al., 2013: 206). Accordingly, when the mean scores were compared, it was seen that men had a higher mean score than women in terms of dark triad personality traits.

In another study conducted by Aydođan and Özgür in 2016, it was determined that Machiavellianism did not show a significant difference with any of the demographic variables, while in this study comparing the dark triad traits of the athletes, it was determined that the Machiavellian characteristics of female athletes were higher than male athletes. Machiavellian people manipulate the attitudes and behaviors of those around them in their favor by analyzing social environments well (Hurley, 2005). In this respect, it can be examined whether the problems faced by women in sports, such as the fact that women were accepted in sports relatively later than men, that men are still outnumbered in sports, and that the place of women in sports is not fully accepted in society, is related to the fact that women have developed more utilitarian and manipulative traits.

In the same study conducted by Aydođan and Özgür, it was determined that psychopathy and narcissism traits did not differ according to gender, and the results in this study are similar.

In the analysis, it was determined that the Machiavellian and psychopathy traits of the athletes involved in team sports were higher than the athletes involved in individual sports. Some studies have shown that the dark triad is more compatible in interpersonal settings (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus and Williams, 2002). These findings are not in line with previous studies (Rauthmann, 2012) suggesting that individuals with high Dark Triad traits would prefer individual activities.

Therefore, it would be useful to conduct studies comparing playstyle athletic events where athletes with high dark triad traits are expected to show an advantage, and record style athletic events where personal records are important.

To understand the multiple functions of the Dark Triad in sports, it would be useful to conduct research on athletes with high DT scores.

It was determined that the narcissism personality scores did not show a significant difference according to the national status of the athletes, but the personality traits of Machiavellianism and psychopathy showed a significant difference according to the national status. Accordingly, it was determined that non-national athletes had higher levels of both Machiavellian and psychopathy personality traits than national athletes.

Since it is a new research topic in the literature, we hope to see in time whether it is supported by different studies. However, at the point of evaluating the result, the expected result was that it would also be high in narcissism. It is because national sports are expected to be more self-focused. However, the high scores of Machiavellianism and psychopathy in non-national sports in our study is a result that supports our research and meets the expectation. Because the feeling of being national, which is the dream of every athlete, can lead to attitudes that do not allow the individual to recognize boundaries, do not allow empathy under any circumstances, cause high-intensity ambition and make every path possible. This situation is actually compatible with the behavioral models of the athletes who have determined their purpose towards becoming a national.

In the DT analyzes we made according to the education levels of the athletes, it was seen that the Machiavellian and psychopathy scores were not significant, only the narcissistic scores were significant. This result can be defined as the expression of self-confidence and sense of self that education adds to the individual. In its most general definition, education is expressed as the general of studies aimed at developing the mind, body, emotional, social abilities and behavior of the person in the most appropriate or desired direction, and acquiring new abilities, behaviors, and information for a number of purposes (Akyüz, 2012). In this context, it can be interpreted that individuals with narcissistic personality traits can exhibit positive or negative attitudes and behaviors, as well as

change their attitudes and behaviors positively or negatively, by being affected by the conditions of the organization they work for. (Kanten, 2014). In addition, individuals with healthy narcissism in the business environment can be the driving force for teams and make more efforts for success (Whitbourne, 2012). This situation makes us think that it is a reflection of the self-confidence and selfishness that education brings to the individual. In that case, the increase in the narcissistic feelings of the individual with the increase in the education level can be accepted as a parallel result of our study.

As a result of our study, it was seen that the Machiavellianism scores of the athletes who have been doing sports for 8 years or more are higher than the athletes who have been doing sports for 0-3 years. This can be expressed as the expectation of each athlete from his/her own branch increases with each passing year and s/he can engage in different searches for this purpose. With each passing year, it is inevitable for the athlete to accept and implement any situation that may contribute to the achievement of his/her goal. Parallel to expectations, there are studies in the literature showing that Machiavellian traits increase with the year (Vezir, 2017; Şahinler et al., 2021).

When the DT traits of the athletes according to their income level were examined, it was determined that no significant difference was observed in all three areas. However, when we look at the literature, it is seen that different results have been reached. In a study conducted with the athletes, all of whom do not play team sports, and all of them are interested in individual sports, it was stated that there were significant differences in all three DT traits according to income level. In fact, in a sub-exploration, it has been seen that athletes with lower income levels are more Machiavellian and narcissistic, and their psychopathy levels are relatively higher (Şahinler et al., 2021). The first consequence of this situation may be that, the person welcomes the existing situation without turning to different searches when thinking that his/her income level creates the self-confidence and that s/he earns enough money.

Considering the studies that are parallel or not in parallel with our study result, it becomes clear how many ways to be taken in this field. Therefore, in line with the empirical study gaps we encountered, we see that a large number of studies from different samples are needed. It is believed that as the amount of primary data obtained on the subject increases, the effect of the dark side of personality on organizations and individuals can be revealed more clearly. In addition, it would be useful for researchers to evaluate the adaptive and maladaptive effects of the dark triad on athletes, such as the development of athletic abilities and the prevention of problematic behaviors, in order to provide appropriate psychological support to future athletes.

Conflict Statement

The author did not have a conflict statement regarding the research.

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ⁱ Bu çalışma 6. Uluslararası Akademik Spor Araştırmaları Kongresi'nde özet bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.