

# The Mediating Role of Perceived Overqualification in the Effect of the Dark Triad on Organizational Cynicism\*

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## ABSTRACT

It is observed in the organizational behaviour literature that negative organizational behavior variables are among the current issues that have emerged to occupy it. The dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), organizational cynicism, and perceived overqualification are some of these negative organizational behavior variables. The main purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of perceived overqualification in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism. Quantitative research design is employed for this study, where data is gathered from 453 academics working in a public university in Turkey. Descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis and Hayes Process Model 4 are used to analyze the data. The results reveal that the variables are interrelated and perceived overqualification plays a mediating role in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism. At the same time, it has been determined that the dark triad has a direct effect on perceived overqualification, perceived overqualification has a direct effect on organizational cynicism and the dark triad has a direct effect on organizational cynicism.

**Keywords:** Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Organizational Cynicism, Perceived Overqualification.

## Karanlık Üçlünün Örgütsel Sinizme Etkisinde Algılanan Aşırı Nitelikliliğin Aracı Rolü

### ÖZ

Örgütsel davranış literatürünü meşgul etmeye başlayan güncel konular arasında artık sıklıkla negatif örgütsel davranış değişkenlerinin olduğu görülmektedir. Karanlık üçlü (Makyavelizm, narsizm ve psikopati), örgütsel sinizm ve algılanan aşırı yeterlilik bu olumsuz örgütsel davranış değişkenlerinden bazılarıdır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, negatif örgütsel davranış değişkenlerinden karanlık üçlünün örgütsel sinizme etkisinde algılanan aşırı nitelikliliğin aracılık rolünün test edilmesidir. Nicel araştırma deseninin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada veriler Türkiye'de bir kamu üniversitesinde çalışan 453 akademisyenden toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tanımlayıcı istatistikler, doğrulayıcı faktör analizi, açıklayıcı faktör analizi, korelasyon analizi ve Hayes Process Model 4 kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, değişkenlerin birbiriyle ilişkili olduğunu ve algılanan aşırı nitelikliliğin karanlık üçlünün örgütsel sinizm üzerindeki etkisinde aracılık rolü oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Aynı zamanda, karanlık üçlünün algılanan aşırı niteliklilik üzerinde, algılanan aşırı nitelikliliğin örgütsel sinizm üzerinde ve karanlık üçlünün örgütsel sinizm üzerinde doğrudan bir etkiye sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karanlık Üçlü, Makyavelizm, Narsizm, Psikopati, Örgütsel Sinizm, Algılanan Aşırı Niteliklilik.

### 1. Introduction

Personality is a systematic behavioral tendency of individuals (Mengüloğlu, 2020). From an individual's point of view, it is the knowledge of the individual about his/her physiological, mental and spiritual characteristics. Whereas from other's perspective, it describes certain characteristics and roles an individual has in the society (Bedük, 2012). The main point of research on the dark side of personality is based on the research of Emil Kraepelin and Diefendorf A. Ross. Kraepelin and Diefendorf (1912) in their studies stipulate the features of the dark sides as moral deprivation, lack of sympathy, tendency to persecution, detailed thinking, lack of foresight, inconsistent behavior, aggressiveness, lying for profit and blaming others for failures, among others. Delroy L. Paulhus & Kevin M. Williams are the first

\* This paper is extracted from the first author's doctoral thesis under the supervision of the second author.

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Makalenin Gönderim Tarihi: 29.04.2023; Makalenin Kabul Tarihi: 01.06.2023

**Citation/Atf:** Canbolat, M. A., Bedük, A. (2023). The mediating role of perceived overqualification in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 51, 391-407. <https://doi.org/10.52642/susbed.1289788>

researchers to introduce the concept of the dark triad into the literature. The dark triad comprises of three main dimensions which are; Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The word “dark” here is actually used to emphasize how socially disturbing the structure is (Thomaes et al., 2017).

Machiavellianism is put forward by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), who is a diplomat and political philosopher. The concept refers to an understanding of politics and the state (Yerebakan, 1988). According to this system of thought, people are innately prone to evil (Özcihan, 2014). The dominant view in the literature is that Machiavellianism is the situation of knowingly and willfully using others for purposes (Wastell & Booth, 2003). Narcissism denotes excessive attachment to one's own physical and spiritual self or character, excessive self-love, self-admiration, egocentrism, lack of empathy, and overestimating oneself (Özel, 2014). Individuals with narcissistic personality traits persistently focus on the desire for perfection qualities such as success, power, beauty or intelligence. The sense of entitlement predominates along with arrogance (Amirigargari, 2013). The tendency for interpersonal manipulation is the central common point of Machiavellianism and narcissism (McHoskey, 1995). The concept of psychopathy is first expressed by the French psychiatrist Philippe Pinel in 1809 with the term of "manie sans délire" (insanity without delirium). Pinel used this concept to describe individuals who do not show any psychotic symptoms but lack moral values (Sass & Felthous, 2018). Psychopathy is a developmental or mental disorder with an antisocial lifestyle, apathetic, deficient in emotional responses, lack of conscientiousness and a high tendency to dishonesty (Matthews, 2018).

Another variable of the study is organizational cynicism. One of the earliest definitions for it is that is a state of dissatisfaction and distrust of others in the organization (Cook & Medley, 1954). The first researchers to deal with cynicism in the organizational context are Kanter and Mirvis (1989), who defined organizational cynicism as a new disease of the era. Organizational cynicism is a situation that is becoming more common in organizations (Mirvis & Kanter, 1991). Organizational cynicism is the employee's disbelief in organizational management (Stanley et al., 2005). It is a reaction and defense mechanism that the employee employs in order to protect him/herself against bad conditions or events in the work environment (Naus et al., 2007; Canbolat & Bedük, 2022).

Finally, it is known that the concept of overqualification in the organizational context is used for the first time in the study called “The Overeducated American” conducted by Freeman in 1976 (Gizlier, 2018). In this study, Freeman explained overqualification as "the situation in which employees have more than enough education for the job they do". Certainly, it is not appropriate to limit the concept of overqualification only to the level of education. There are times that employees may have to work in jobs that are far below their qualifications (Kır & Akçakanat, 2021). The general definition of overqualification is that the qualifications of the employee are more than the requirements of the job is doing in the organization (Kanbur & Şen, 2020), and his/her educational background, skills and experiences are not sufficiently utilized (Kayalık, 2017). In the face of this situation, it is the employee's state of self-superiority and to belittle the work done (Yıldız et al., 2017).

## 2. Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research design. The research is also cross-sectional and correlational. In line with the literature review, theoretical models and research hypotheses were formulated. Validity and reliability tests were conducted on the study scales or variables. The data obtained from the administered questionnaires were first subjected to descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory factor analysis, and then the main hypotheses were tested with Model 4 in the Hayes PROCESS Macro.

### 2.1. Research Model

The independent variable of the study was specified as the dark triad, the dependent variable as organizational cynicism and the mediator variable as perceived overqualification. When the literature was examined, it was deduced that all the study variables can be explained by the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. In addition, the JD-R model is based on the assumption that all job characteristics can actually be classified as job demands or job resources (Emre, 2018). According to the job demands and job

resources model, every job has two characteristics; a set of job demands that require physical, mental and emotional abilities and effort, and job resources that have physical, organizational and social characteristics that cause employees to produce positive work-related outputs (Demerouti et al., 2001; Akçakanat et al., 2019). The model also asserts that work can be produced when the resources that employees have meet or exceed their job expectations, otherwise it may lead employees to negative consequences that can result in burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001; Güler, 2019). Ultimately, the dark triad, organizational cynicism and perceived overqualification are also among the concepts that represent negativity. However, in a situation where the job demands of the organization on the employees are high, the employees may not have negative attitudes towards the organization if they believe that they can control these demands and they have the authority to fulfill these demands (Camgöz et al., 2017).

Every organization has its own unique job demands and resources that have significant effects on achieving organizational goals (Bakker et al., 2004). Job demands describe the physical, social and psychological effects of the physical and mental efforts made for the purpose of meeting the requirements of a job (Alcan, 2020; Öztürk, 2020a). Job resources, on the other hand, are defined as job dimensions that facilitate the accomplishment of the goals of the job, reduce the costs related to job demands and motivate employees (Alcan, 2020) as well as refers to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job. Job resources reduce job demands and associated physiological and psychological costs and provide functionality in achieving job goals and, finally, promote personal development and learning (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Incentive approaches such as autonomy, quick feedback, promotion, reward or bonus can be mentioned as examples of job resources (Yavan, 2016). The general perception between these two concepts (job demands and job resources) is that they are negatively related (Chen & Chen, 2017). The ability of employees to fulfill their job demands depends on the availability of sufficient job resources (Öztürk, 2020b). In other words, employees can produce positive business results if organizations have sufficient job resources against job demands (Güler & Ocak, 2019). In an organization where job demands and resources are unbalanced, it can result in a lot of negativities on employees (Yelgin, 2018). As a matter of fact, this imbalance leads to an increase in negative attitudes towards work, especially when it is in the work-family dimension (Allen et al., 2000). A high level of job demands can create negative psychological effects on employees (Bolat et al., 2018; Alcan, 2020). In addition, it can cause emotional attrition in employees and even lead to physical diseases of psychological origin (Kaya, 2016).

Finally, the model argues that job demands consume employees' energy and, accordingly, job resources can increase the motivation of employees in order to cope with these demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Yamaner, 2019). Job demands are not seen as a compelling factor for employees who have a perception of overqualification. On the other hand, overqualified people who fulfill the job demands of the organization quickly and successfully compared to their colleagues will be able to claim a greater share of the job resources. In the light of this information, the current study examined the mediating role of perceived overqualification in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism.

Based on the results of literature review, the type of relationship that exists between the study variables is shown in Figure 1 below.

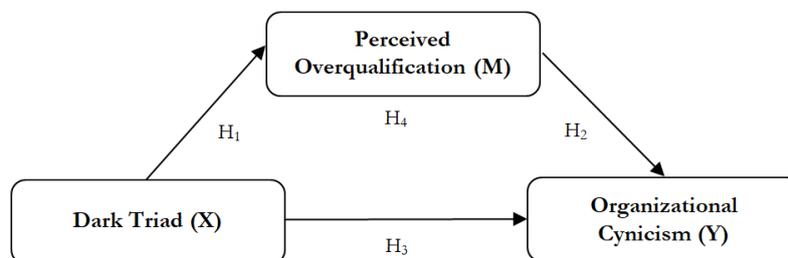


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Research

In line with the model presented in Figure 1 above, the following hypotheses were put forward.

## 2.2. Research Hypotheses

It has been observed in the literature that the vast majority of the studies conducted on the dark triad are done using students studying at higher education or university graduates (see: Jonason & Tost, 2010; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Lee et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2012; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012; Crysel et al., 2013; Jonason et al., 2013; Jones & Figueredo, 2013; Özsoy & Ardıç, 2017; Özkul, 2020). On the other hand, some studies (Tokgöz & Yılmaz, 2008; Fındık & Eryeşil, 2012) reveal that the level of cynicism increases as the level of education increases. Just as in the dark triad studies, the sample group in organizational cynicism studies is usually selected from higher education students or university graduates (Diktaş & Özgeldi, 2020; Nasu & Afonso, 2020; Qian & Jian, 2020; Mumcu & Özzyer, 2021). These assertions are similarly valid for the perceived overqualification variable. Specifically in studies assessing the level of education (Büchel, 2002; Frenette, 2004; Vaisey, 2006; Ramos & Sanromá, 2012; Maynard & Brondolo, 2014; Harari et al., 2017), it is revealed that the increase in education level increases the perception of overqualification. For these reasons, it has been deduced that the research can be carried out with academicians who have a high level of education. Although there is no research in the literature that specifically evaluates the dark triad and perceived overqualification together, there are studies that test the perceived overqualification with some dimensions of the dark triad as stated below.

It is possible to come across a large number of studies (Fine, 2007; Karaman & Çetinkaya, 2019) that evaluates the relationship between perceived overqualification and personality traits. Karaman and Çetinkaya (2019) found that individuals with personality traits within the scope of emotional balance, including the dark triad, perceive themselves as overqualified. On the flip side, narcissistic tendencies in individuals can affect perceived overqualification (Lobene et al., 2015). Maynard and Brondolo (2014) posit that narcissism is positively related with perceived overqualification, and on the other hand, Harari et al. (2017) found that narcissism is a determinant of perceived overqualification. These results show that individuals with a high level of narcissism will be more likely to experience perceived overqualification (Ulukök, 2020). Besides, educational status in the context of perceived overqualification can lead to Machiavellian tendencies (Özcihan, 2014). The following research hypothesis is formulated in the light of the above review:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The dark triad has a direct effect on perceived overqualification.*

Luksyte et al. (2011) found in their research that those who have a perception of overqualification in organizations can act cynically when they find the work done meaningless, and this may cause unproductive work behavior. Although psychological contracts provide motivation in this regard, cynicism is dominant in non-productive work behaviors. On the other hand, Bakker et al. (2003) found in their research that cynicism is associated with overqualification in the context of professional competence. Karadeniz (2017) claimed that there is a positive relationship between academicians' perception of superiority and organizational cynicism attitudes. There is also a significant and positive relationship between educational level and organizational cynicism. In addition, it is stated that university graduates who are overqualified do not accept the current situation in their organizations due to their more inquisitive nature, and this situation triggers organizational cynicism (Görmen, 2012). The hypothesis put forward in line with all these research results is as follows:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived overqualification has a direct effect on organizational cynicism.*

Ermiş (2019) found in her research that academics have moderate and low levels of dark triad personality traits. On the other hand, it has been found that academics exhibit low levels of cognitive and emotional dimensions of organizational cynicism, and moderate and high attitudes in behavioral dimension (Kutaniş & Çetinel, 2010; Korkmaz, 2011; Çopur, 2018). In the research of Karadeniz (2017) and Kalğan (2009) organizational cynicism attitudes were found to be at a high level in the cognitive dimension. In general, it can be said that the organizational cynicism attitudes of academics are at a high level (Arslan, 2012). Özer (2018) found that about 48% of the 1 (one) unit change in organizational cynicism is explained by personality traits. Researchers have found that there is a relationship between the dark triad and organizational cynicism behavior (Murat, 2017) and that all three sub-dimensions of the

dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) have a statistically significant effect on organizational cynicism (Murat & Börü, 2017). It is also among the findings of the researchers (Murat & Börü, 2019) that the psychopathy characteristics perceived by the employees towards their managers affect their cynicism behaviors. In addition, it has been established that individuals with an increased Machiavellian personality trait tendency, which is one of the dimensions of the dark triad, experience organizational cynicism (Aksoy, 2016). Likewise, there is a significant positive relationship between Machiavellianism and organizational cynicism (Özsoy, 2017). Similarly, cynicism is a concept that helps explain Machiavellianism (Jonason et al., 2015). Although cynicism does not contain skepticism (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989). Machiavellianism is a way of thinking that leads an individual to cynicism (Erkara, 2019). In addition, O'Hair and Cody (1987) have shown that cynics, just like machiavellians, can go down the path of deceiving others in order to achieve their goals, while at the same time not trusting others. Based on the results of the literature review, the hypothesis below is put forward:

*H<sub>3</sub>: The dark triad has a direct effect on organizational cynicism.*

Cynicism can be described as having negative emotions such as desecration, disappointment, frustration, despair, helplessness and insecurity (Başar, 2019). The same or similar emotions or feelings can be used to develop perceived overqualification and the dark triad. In addition, cynicism has been found to be effective in directing overly qualified people to counterproductive work behaviors (Luksyte et al., 2011). Cynicism is also a phenomenon that is considered as a personality trait that reflects negative perceptions (Erol, 2018). Likewise, it is stated that personality traits have a positive effect on organizational cynicism (Özer, 2018).

Demir (2021) shown in the results of their study that self-esteem, one of the dimensions of perceived overqualification, has a significant effect on cognitive and behavioral dimensions of organizational cynicism, and that personality traits do not have a moderating role in the effect of perceived overqualification on organizational cynicism. In addition, overqualified employees may display cynical attitudes towards the organization when they cannot fully use these qualities or when there is no suitable organizational environment to further develop these qualities. Overqualified employees also tend to retain their qualifications such as excess education, knowledge and experience by moving away from the organization. From this point of view, it can be said that as the employees' perception of overqualifications increases, their organizational cynicism levels also increase. If the level of the employee's education, knowledge, skills and abilities are above the work to be executed, it can lead to perception of excessive talent in the individual (Maynard & Brondolo, 2014). Overqualification can also be seen in the form of demand-ability (Akbıyık, 2016) or individual-job mismatch, just like in the job demands-resources model (Kayalık, 2017).

The perception of employees' overqualification is a psychological variable that leads them to job dissatisfaction and negative emotions (Özkanan, 2018) and can cause various attitudes and behaviors (Erdoğan et al., 2011). In fact, perceived overqualification is a phenomenon that is evaluated as a negative variable in the literature (Erdoğan & Bauer, 2009). The dark triad and organizational cynicism also have a negative effect on variables such as job satisfaction (Güllü & Yıldız, 2019). One of the main personality traits that make up organizational cynicism is Machiavellianism. Although there is a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and organizational cynicism, employees' Machiavellian attitudes cause cynical attitudes of individuals (Aksoy, 2016). As can be deduced so far, the dark triad, perceived overqualification and organizational cynicism interact or relate directly or indirectly with each other. The hypothesis put forward in accordance with this interaction or relationship is as follows:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived overqualification has a mediating role in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism.*

### 2.3. Participants

The study is conducted with the aim of examining the mediating role of perceived overqualification in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism. The population of this research consists of 761 academics working at a public university in Turkey in the 2021-2022 fall semester. The reason why this category of participants is chosen is due to their high level of education with a minimum of a master's

degree holder. Simple random sampling technique is used to select 479 academics between the periods of September-November 2021. Twenty-six (26) out of a total of 479 questionnaires distributed are eliminated for various reasons. Hence, the study is carried out with a data obtained from 453 participants. Most of the participants are between the ages of 35-44 (46.6%), has a doctorate degree (59.8%), holds Assistant Professorship position (23.7%) and majority of them are also married (75.5%). In addition, it is established that greater part of the participants has 4-10 work experience representing 48.6% and 75.9% of them do not have any administrative duties beside their academic duties.

#### 2.4. Instruments

For the purpose of gathering the necessary data for this study, a survey technique is used, where a questionnaire is designed in that regard. The questionnaire consists of a total of 45 questions or items in which 7 questions are meant for demographic data, 12 items for dark personality traits, 13 items for organizational cynicism and 13 items for measuring perceived overqualification.

The first part of the data collection tool consists of the participants' demographic features such as age, gender, marital status, level of education, title, organizational seniority and their administrative duties. The second part contains items assessing the dark personality traits. In the literature, the most widely accepted and used scale for the dark triad is first developed by Jonason and Webster (2010) with the name "Dirty Dozen". The scale consists of 3 dimensions and 12 items, namely Machiavellianism (4 items), psychopathy (4 items), and narcissism (4 items). In this study, the "Dirty Dozen" scale, the validity and reliability of which is tested in Turkish context by Yaşlıoğlu and Atılgan (2018), and measured using a 5-point Likert type (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) is used. In this study, Cronbach's alpha values for the scale are as follows; dark personality traits scale: 0.83, Machiavellianism: 0.82, psychopathy: 0.69 and narcissism: 0.80.

The third part of the data collection tool is dedicated to the perception of organizational cynicism. In order to measure the perception of organizational cynicism, the scale designed by Brandes et al. (1999) on organizational cynicism and its validity and reliability are tested in Turkish context by Karacaoğlu and İnce (2012) is used. The scale consists of 3 dimensions and a total of 13 items namely; cognitive (5 items), emotional (4 items), and behavioral cynicism (4 items). The scale is assessed with a 5-point Likert type (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha value for organizational cynicism is 0.93, cognitive cynicism is 0.94, emotional cynicism is 0.96 and behavioral cynicism is 0.82.

In the fourth and last part of the data collection tool, the perceived overqualification scale developed in Turkish by Uçar and Sezgin (2021) is used to measure the perceived overqualification. The scale consists of 3 dimensions, namely the perception of qualification (5 items), non-appropriateness (4 items) and the perception of simplicity (4 items) making a total of 13 items. This scale is measured using a 5-point Likert type (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree). Cronbach's alpha value in this study for perceived overqualification scale is 0.84, perception of qualification is 0.91, non-appropriateness is 0.83 and perception of simplicity is 0.84.

#### 2.5. Procedure

In order to comply with scientific research and publication ethics, the permission or approval of Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Ref: 08-2021/145) is obtained before the data collection. The participants are assured of data security, personal data protection, confidentiality and compliance with ethical standards before the gathering of the data. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and it took approximately 10 minutes to fill.

#### 2.6. Data analysis

The data obtained are statistically analyzed within the scope of this study using IBM SPSS and IBM SPSS AMOS software. Firstly, the demographic results of the participants are obtained using frequency analysis, followed by reliability analyzes and normality tests. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) are conducted on each scale. Subsequently, correlation analysis is done

to determine the relationship that exists among the study variables and their sub-dimensions. The above proposed hypothesis is tested using Model 4 of Hayes Process program developed by Andrew F. Hayes.

### 2.6.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is an analysis technique used to test whether the original structure of a previously developed scale is confirmed by the data gathered for a new study (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2015). This technique is often preferred in validity analyzes (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017). Confirmation of a scale with CFA indicates that it is a valid scale (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2015). As a result of the analysis, it is understood from various parameters that the scale is confirmed or an ideal model is formed. The most commonly used of these parameters are as follows:

- First of all, the standard coefficients of the scale items that emerged as a result of CFA should be examined. These coefficients can be evaluated as factor loads reported in EFA (Başar, 2016). Although it is suggested that the ideal value of standard coefficients should be above 0.50 (Kaiser, 1974; Gürbüz, 2021), Başar (2016) argues that if this value is above 0.40, a good degree of fit is achieved again.
- It is recommended that the correlation coefficients between dimensions should not exceed 0.85 for multidimensional models (Gürbüz, 2021). If this value exceeds 0.90, it indicates that there is a multicollinearity problem between dimensions (Aksu et al., 2017).
- Finally, the goodness of fit values obtained as a result of CFA are expected to be within acceptable limits (Gürbüz, 2021).

### 2.6.2. Kaiser Meyer Olkin Analysis (KMO)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is one of the most preferred methods to test whether the sample size is sufficient for factor analysis. While the KMO value in the range of 0.80-0.89 is considered be “very good”, a KMO value in the range of 0.90-1.00 is considered be “excellent” (Kaiser, 1974; Aksu et al., 2017).

As a result of the KMO test, the KMO value of the dark personality traits scale was found to be 0.863 and this value was considered to be at a very good level. The KMO value of the organizational cynicism scale was determined as 0.909 and this value was evaluated to be at an excellent level. Finally, the KMO value of the perceived overqualification scale was determined as 0.824 and this value was also considered to be at a very good level. In this case, it was concluded that the sample size of the study was sufficient.

On the other hand, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is a statistical technique used to test whether the obtained data come from a multivariate normal distribution. Out of this test, if the Chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) test result obtained is significant, it is an indication that the data come from a multivariate normal distribution (Çapri, 2006). Table 1 shows the results of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

**Table 1.** Results of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Scale	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
Dark Personality Traits	2054.973	66	= 0.000
Organizational Cynicism	5448.920	78	= 0.000
Perceived Overqualification	3649.300	78	= 0.000

Note:  $\chi^2$  = Chi-squared, df = degrees of freedom

As seen on Table 1, Bartlett's Sphericity test revealed a statistically significant  $\chi^2$  result for each scale and suggested that factor analysis could be applied to the variables. In this case, Maximum Likelihood (ML) will be used as the calculation method due to the determination of the multivariate normal distribution (Gürbüz, 2021).

Due to the nature of the research, the first level multi-factor CFA model was preferred. In this measurement model, observed variables with similar common variances are gathered under the same dimension. In this way, while the items under the same dimension are tested to be related to each other (convergent validity), attempt is made to determine that these items are relatively independent from the observed variables in other dimensions (discriminant validity) (Gürbüz, 2021).

The standard coefficients of the items in the dark triad scale ranged between 0.41 and 0.89, that of those items in the organizational cynicism scale ranged between 0.51 and 0.96, and the standard coefficients of the items in the perceived overqualification scale ranged between 0.42 and 0.95. The fact that the coefficients are above 0.40 indicates that the items fit well with their respective sub-dimensions (Başar, 2016). Since the interdimensional correlation coefficients ranged from 0.12 to 0.67, it was inferred that there was no multicollinearity problem between the dimensions.

Fit indices are widely used in the assessment of CFA results. However, a common conclusion has not yet been reached regarding which of the many model indices should be based on this assessment. It is recommended that the goodness of fit indices in Table 2 be taken as a basis, especially in the calculations obtained by the Maximum Likelihood calculation method (Gürbüz, 2021). Also, the fit indices of the first-level multifactorial CFA results and the "good fit" and "acceptable fit" values of the index values are included in this table.

**Table 2.** Model Fit Indices of the Scales Using CFA

Index	Dark Personality Traits Scale	Organizational Cynicism Scale	Perceived Overqualification Scale	Good Fit Values	Acceptable Fit Values
$\chi^2/df$	2.207	2.195	2.483	<3	$3 < (\chi^2/df) < 5$
RMSEA	0.052	0.051	0.057	<0.05	<0.08
SRMR	0.041	0.037	0.059	<0.05	<0.08
CFI	0.971	0.987	0.976	>0.95	>0.90
NFI	0.949	0.977	0.960	>0.95	>0.90
NNFI	0.960	0.983	0.968	>0.95	>0.90
GFI	0.962	0.987	0.954	>0.95	>0.90
AGFI	0.938	0.936	0.929	>0.95	>0.90

Notes:  $\chi^2/df$  = CMIN / df, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, NFI = Normed Fit Index, NNFI = Non-Normed Fit Index, GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit-Index.

Sources: (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Yaşlıoğlu, 2017; Gürbüz, 2021)

As seen from Table 2, the RMSEA index value of the dark personality traits scale shows an acceptable fit value and the other index values on the same scale also indicate a good fit value. Under this circumstance, it can be said that the construct validity of the dark personality traits scale is achieved. It is also established that the RMSEA and AGFI index values of the organizational cynicism scale depict acceptable fit values and all other indexes on the scale have good fit values. Hence, it is deduced that the construct validity of organizational cynicism scale is also realized. Finally, it is ascertained that RMSEA, SRMR and AGFI indexes have acceptable fit values for the perceived overqualification scale, and all other indexes show good fit values on the scale. Therefore, it can be said that the construct validity of the perceived overqualification scale is accomplished. A complete evaluation of the results indicates that all the scales are validated with the obtained data.

### 2.6.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was applied to test the compatibility of the scale dimensions with the scale dimensions in the literature. Accordingly, the EFA applied to the Dark Personality Traits scale revealed that the scale had three components. The components have eigenvalues over 1 and represent 63.12% of the total variance. Organizational Cynicism scale EFA revealed that the scale has three components. The components have eigenvalues over 1 and represent 79.45% of the total variance. Perceived Overqualification scale EFA, on the other hand, revealed that the scale has three components. The components have eigenvalues over 1 and represent 70.81% of the total variance. All these findings indicate that the research data has reached the dimensions in the literature. Table 3 presents the results of Pearson correlation analysis.

**Table 3.** Pearson Correlation Analysis

Scale Totals & Sub-Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1-Perceived Overqualification	1											
2-Perception of Qualification	.676**	1										
3-Non-Appropriateness	.686**	.120*	1									
4-Perception of Simplicity	.759**	.259**	.371**	1								
5-Organizational Cynicism	.354**	.105*	.201**	.458**	1							
6-Cognitive Cynicism	.340**	.133**	.173**	.424**	.878**	1						
7-Emotional Cynicism	.309**	.099*	.140**	.426**	.835**	.599**	1					
8-Behavioral Cynicism	.230**	.017	.192**	.290**	.798**	.531**	.533**	1				
9-Dark Personality Traits	.194**	.021	.191**	.210**	.322**	.211**	.267**	.355**	1			
10-Machiavellianism	.181**	-.031	.200**	.230**	.255**	.154**	.219**	.292**	.831**	1		
11-Psychopathy	.185**	.037	.185**	.179**	.235**	.181**	.181**	.238**	.677**	.504**	1	
12-Narcissism	.102*	.041	.081	.097*	.252**	.158**	.212**	.285**	.791**	.450**	.222**	1
Mean	2.84	3.52	2.26	2.55	2.60	2.98	2.07	2.66	1.98	1.70	1.46	2.79
Standard Deviation	0.62	0.81	0.92	0.93	0.84	1.03	1.00	0.96	0.56	0.70	0.58	0.87

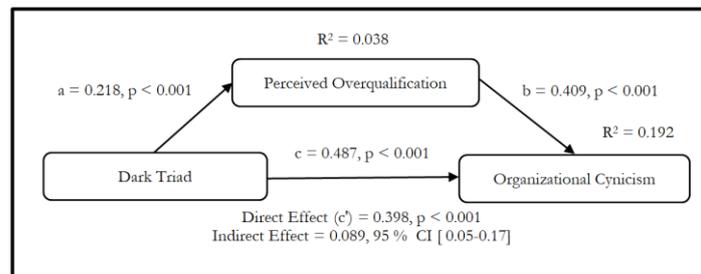
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level (2-tailed)

Based on the results of the correlation analysis, it is inferred that there is an insignificant relationship between the perception of qualification and behavioral cynicism, as well as between this sub-dimension (perception of qualification) and the dark triad together with its sub-dimensions (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism). Narcissism also has an insignificant relationship with non-appropriateness. Furthermore, it is found that there is a positive, generally weak or moderate relationship between the total and sub-dimensions of the rest of the scales.

**2.6.4. Testing of Hypotheses**

The proposed hypothesis in line with the theoretical model of the study is tested using Hayes Process macro. The results of the analysis are shown on Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The Mediating Role of Perceived Overqualification in the Effect of Dark Triad on Organizational Cynicism (N=453)

In Figure 2 above, path a denotes results of regression analysis on the effect of the predictor variable; dark triad (X) on the mediating variable which is perceived overqualification (M). Accordingly, it is seen that the dark triad significantly and positively affects perceived overqualification ( $a = 0.218$ , 95% CI [0.1160-0.3196],  $t = 4.203$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The dark triad explains about 4% ( $R^2 = 0.038$ ) of the variation in perceived overqualification. Based on this, the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted.

The figure also shows the combined effect of perceived overqualification (path b) and dark triad (path c') on the outcome variable, which is organizational cynicism (Y). Based on the results, it is deduced that perceived overqualification has a significant and positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.409$ , 95% CI [0.2947-0.5236],  $t = 7.024$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Accordingly, the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) was accepted. The dark triad also has a significant and positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.398$ , 95% CI [.2692-

0.5260],  $t = 6.085$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The dark triad together with perceived overqualification explain about 20% ( $R^2 = 0.192$ ) of the variation in organizational cynicism.

Furthermore, figure 2 shows the total effect (path c) of the dark triad (X) on organizational cynicism (Y) in a model without the mediating variable (M). On the basis of the results, it is seen that in the absence of perceived overqualification, the dark triad has a significantly positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.487$ , 95% CI [0.3542-0.6193],  $t = 7.2166$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, based on the results, the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) was accepted.

The indirect effect of the dark triad (X) on organizational cynicism (Y) through the mediating variable (M) is displayed on Figure 2. On the basis of the confidence intervals obtained using the bootstrap technique, it is seen from the table that the dark triad has a statistically significant indirect effect on organizational cynicism through perceived overqualification, as is evident in its  $\beta$  value of 0.089 and 95% CI [0.0407-0.1444]. Hence, it is inferred that perceived overqualification mediates the relationship between the dark triad and organizational cynicism. In the light of these results,  $H_4$  is accepted. Figure 2 also displays the full and partial standardized effect sizes of the dark triad (X) on organizational cynicism (Y). Accordingly, the confidence intervals in both effect sizes are significant since they do not include zero (0) value. The full standardized effect size is 0.059, and the partial standardized effect size is 0.106. Based on this, it can be said that the effect size of the mediator (perceived overqualification) in the tested model is moderate.

## 2.7. Limitations

As with many studies, this study also has some limitations. The most obvious of these limitations is the limited access to the respondents during the data collection stage due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, since the data of the study are obtained in a cross-sectional approach, it should be taken into consideration that the findings may differ if the research is carried out in a pandemic free period. In terms of population and sampling, the study is limited to academics working in only one province during the 2021-2022 fall semester. Therefore, it is unknown to what degree one can generalize the results of this study to other sectors.

## 3. Conclusions

This study was conducted on 453 academics with the aim of assessing the mediating role of perceived overqualification in the relationship between dark personality traits and organizational cynicism. Most of the participants are between the ages of 35-44 (46.6%), has a doctorate degree (59.8%), holds Assistant Professorship position (23.7%) and majority of them are also married (75.5%). In addition, it is established that greater part of the participants has 4-10 work experience representing 48.6% and 75.9% of them do not have any administrative duties beside their academic duties.

According to the Hayes Process Macro Model 4 analysis results, it was determined that the dark triad had a significant and positive effect on perceived overqualification ( $b = .218$ , 95% CI [.1160, .3196],  $t = 4.203$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The dark triad explains about 4% ( $R^2 = 0.038$ ) of the variation in perceived overqualification. Based on this, the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted. This finding supports the literature. Karaman and Çetinkaya (2019) found that individuals with personality traits within the scope of emotional balance, including the dark triad, perceive themselves as overqualified. On the flip side, narcissistic tendencies in individuals can affect perceived overqualification (Lobene et al., 2015). Maynard and Brondolo (2014) posit that narcissism is positively related with perceived overqualification, and on the other hand, Harari et al. (2017) found that narcissism is a determinant of perceived overqualification. Thus, it can be concluded that similar findings can be obtained in different sample groups, so this effect is not a special case for academics.

Based on the results of the combined effect of the mediating variable (perceived overqualification) and the dark triad on the outcome variable (organizational cynicism), it was established that perceived overqualification had a significant and positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.409$ , 95% CI [0.2947-0.5236],  $t = 7.024$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Accordingly, the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) was accepted. The dark triad also has a significant and positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.398$ , 95% CI [.2692-

0.5260],  $t = 6.085$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The dark triad together with perceived overqualification explain about 20% ( $R^2 = 0.192$ ) of the variation in organizational cynicism. This finding supports the literature. Luksyte et al. (2011) found in their research that those who have a perception of overqualification in organizations can act cynically when they find the work done meaningless, and this may cause unproductive work behavior. Although psychological contracts provide motivation in this regard, cynicism is dominant in non-productive work behaviors. On the other hand, Bakker et al. (2003) found in their research that cynicism is associated with overqualification in the context of professional competence. Karadeniz (2017) claimed that there is a positive relationship between academicians' perception of superiority and organizational cynicism attitudes. In this case, it can be said that as perceived overqualification increases, organizational cynicism also increases. Academicians may turn to organizational cynicism when they think that they cannot get paid for the work they produce in line with their qualifications.

When the total effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism is examined in a model without the mediating variable, it is seen that the dark triad has a positive and significant effect on organizational cynicism ( $b = 0.487$ , 95% CI [0.3542-0.6193],  $t = 7.2166$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, based on the results, the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) was accepted. Ermiş (2019) found in her research that academics have moderate and low levels of dark triad personality traits. In the research findings, the dark triad mean scores of the academicians are low ( $\bar{x} = 1.98$ ). Özer (2018) found that about 48% of the 1 (one) unit change in organizational cynicism is explained by personality traits. Researchers have found that there is a relationship between the dark triad and organizational cynicism behavior (Murat, 2017) and that all three sub-dimensions of the dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) have a statistically significant effect on organizational cynicism (Murat & Börü, 2017). In addition, it has been established that individuals with an increased Machiavellian personality trait tendency, which is one of the dimensions of the dark triad, experience organizational cynicism (Aksoy, 2016). Moreover O'Hair and Cody (1987) have shown that cynics, just like machiavellians, can go down the path of deceiving others in order to achieve their goals, while at the same time not trusting others. The findings obtained in the research and the findings in the literature show a high level of similarity. Thus, it can be said that individuals with dark personality traits are prone to organizational cynicism.

In addition, when the indirect effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism through the mediating variable is examined, the indirect effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism is significant. Hence, perceived overqualification mediates the relationship between the dark triad and organizational cynicism ( $b = .089$ , %95 GA [.0407, .1444]). Moreover, the confidence intervals in both effect sizes are significant since they do not include zero (0) value. Based on the results, the fourth hypothesis ( $H_4$ ) was accepted. Also, according to the full and partial standardized effect sizes of the dark triad on organizational cynicism obtained from the analysis, it was concluded that the mediation effect of perceived overqualification in the model was moderate. Cynicism; It can be explained as having negative feelings such as disrespect, disappointment, frustration, abusing events, hopelessness, helplessness and insecurity, or in other words, desensitization (Başar, 2019). Perceived overqualification and the dark triad can also develop with similar feelings. Cynicism is also a phenomenon that is considered as a personality trait reflecting negative perceptions (Erol, 2018). Likewise, it is stated that personality traits have a positive effect on organizational cynicism (Özer, 2018). Overqualified employees may exhibit cynical attitudes towards the organization when they cannot fully use these qualities or when there is no suitable organizational environment to further develop these qualities. As a matter of fact, the perception of overqualification is a phenomenon that is evaluated negatively in the literature (Erdoğan & Bauer, 2009; Dar & Rahman, 2020). The dark triad and organizational cynicism also have a negative effect on variables such as job satisfaction (Güllü & Yıldız, 2019). It is seen that the dark triad, perceived overqualification and organizational cynicism have direct or indirect interaction with each other. The results of the current research also reveal this interaction.

As a result, the research revealed that perceived overqualification has a mediating role in the effect of the dark triad on organizational cynicism. It can therefore, be said that this study introduces a new finding or assertion to the literature. Similarly, both the dark triad and perceived overqualification affect organizational cynicism. Considering that organizational cynicism is a disease (Saruhan & Yıldız, 2009), it

can be said that the two main antecedents of this disease are the dark triad and perceived overqualification.

Taking all the above results into consideration, the following suggestions or recommendations can be made.

- Although personality traits are among the traits that cannot be changed in individuals, it is possible to prevent individuals from perceiving themselves as overqualified with the right job placement and task assignment activities at the right levels regarding their perceived overqualification perception. Consequently, organizational cynicism will be prevented.
- In determining the overqualification perceptions of academicians, instead of the sub-dimensions; qualification, non-appropriateness and simplicity, it is recommended that new scales that can measure according to the number of citations, H-index, number of international publications, recognition and productivity levels should be developed and empirical research should be conducted to evaluate these scales.
- Bearing in mind that the dark triad is a personality trait, this trait It should be taken into consideration that it can easily trigger more many negative variables such as counterproductive work behaviours, social isolation, work alienation or political behaviours, etc.
- It is also recommended to apply the research model in different universities and sectors and to comparatively examine the results.

#### **Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oran Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Yazarların alıřmadaki katkı oranları Mehmet Ali CANBOLAT %70/ Aykut BEDÜK %30 řeklinde dir.  
The authors' contribution rates in the study are Mehmet Ali CANBOLAT %70/ Aykut BEDÜK %30 form.

#### **ıkar atıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

alıřmada herhangi bir kurum veya kiři ile ıkar atıřması bulunmamaktadır.  
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

#### **İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy**

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This article was scanned in Plagiarism programs and Plagiarism was not detected.

#### **Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etięi Beyanı / Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Statement**

Bu alıřmada Yükseköęretim Kurumları Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etięi Yönergesi kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulmuřtur.  
In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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