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## The Relationship Between Dark Triad and Ostracism: The Mediating Role of Humility

### Abstract

Ostracism and social exclusion are the two close phenomena that describe being ignored by others without explicit declaration and being kept away from others with or without an explanation, respectively. It is possible that ostracism and social exclusion are the concepts related to personality. Connectedly, dark triad (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism) and humility may influence one's perceived ostracism or perceived social exclusion. The aim of the current study is to examine the mediating role of humility in the relationship between dark triad traits and perceived ostracism and social exclusion. The sample consists of 329 university students. Data was gathered by using the Ostracism Experience Scale, the Humility Scale and the Short Dark Triad Scale. The results demonstrate that dark triad is positively related to perceived ostracism, and this relationship was fully mediated by humility. Similarly, dark triad traits were positively related to social exclusion and this association is fully mediated by humility, as well. Humility might be said to contribute as a mediator between the dark triad and perceived ostracism and social exclusion by mitigating the detrimental impact of these characteristics on ostracism. The negative consequences of the dark triad and ostracism could be reduced by encouraging humility. The results are discussed in the light of the literature.

**Keywords:** Dark Triad, Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Humility.

## Psikolojik Dışlanma ve Karanlık Üçlü Arasındaki İlişki: Tevazunun Aracı Rolü

### Öz

Psikolojik dışlanma ve sosyal dışlanma diğerleri tarafından herhangi bir geri bildirim verilmeden ve açıklama yapılmadan kişinin dışlanması ve görmezden gelinmesi olarak tanımlanabilir. Algılanan psikolojik dışlanma ve algılanan sosyal dışlanmanın kişilik ile ilişkili değişkenler olması muhtemeldir. Karanlık üçlü (narsisizm, psikopati, Makyavelizm) kişilik özellikleri ve tevazu da, bireylerin algılanan psikolojik dışlanma veya algılanan sosyal dışlanma düzeylerini etkileyebilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı da karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri ile algılanan psikolojik dışlanma ve algılanan sosyal dışlanma arasındaki ilişkilerde tevazunun aracı rolünün incelenmesidir. Araştırmanın örneklemini üniversite eğitimi almakta olan 329 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma kapsamında veriler Psikolojik Dışlanma Deneyimi Ölçeği, Tevazu Ölçeği ve Kısa Karanlık Üçlü Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri ile algılanan psikolojik dışlanmanın pozitif yönlü ilişkili olduğunu ve söz

konusu ilişkide tevazunun tam aracı rolünün olduğunu göstermiştir. Benzer şekilde karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri algılanan sosyal dışlanma ile de pozitif yönlü ilişkili bulunmuştur ve bu ilişkide de tevazunun tam aracı rolünün olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Tevazu, karanlık üçlü kişilik özelliklerinin dışlanma üzerindeki zararlı etkisini hafifleterek, karanlık üçlü ile algılanan psikolojik dışlanma ve sosyal dışlanma arasında bir aracı değişken olarak katkı sağladığı söylenebilir. Tevazu teşvik edilerek ya da desteklenerek karanlık üçlünün ve dışlanmanın olumsuz sonuçları azaltılabilir. Ulaşılan sonuçlar literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karanlık Üçlü, Psikolojik Dışlanma, Sosyal Dışlanma, Tevazu.

## **Introduction**

Ostracism and social exclusion are the two close phenomena that describe being ignored by others without explicit declaration and being kept away from others with or without an explanation, respectively (Reinhard et al., 2020). These social threats to fundamental human needs, namely, belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence (Williams, 2007), might result in adverse emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical outcomes. For instance, having been socially excluded or ostracized increases anti-social tendencies, including aggressiveness and anti-social behavior (Perchtold-Stefan et al., 2022), decreases prosocial behavior, such as helping others (Twenge et al., 2007), and harms self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2005). Moreover, one study indicated that the human body reacts to social exclusion in a way that responds to physical pain. That is to say, individuals who experience social exclusion and ostracism may similarly become insensitive to either emotional or physical pain (Dewall et al., 2011).

However, perceived impact of and reaction to ostracism and social exclusion may depend on individual differences, such as psychopathology, including personality disorders. In a systematic review, for instance, including 52 studies that compare the emotional reactions of clinical samples and healthy controls after inducing ostracism by the experiments, participants with borderline personality disorder (BPD) showed more robust adverse emotional responses compared to healthy controls and increased dissociative symptoms after ostracism situation compared to baseline (Reinhard et al., 2020). On the other hand, Cluster A personality disorders, i.e., paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal, might even find relief in a situation where they are ostracized or socially excluded (Wirth et al., 2010). These findings may suggest that people with some personality characteristics might have insensitivity or hypersensitivity to social threats in which they might show more or less adverse reactions (Gutz et al., 2016; Staebler et al., 2011).

Scarce evidence has shown the association between specific personality traits and having ostracized and socially excluded, suggesting that people with some personality traits may experience more ostracism and social exclusion and might show stronger reactions than others do. In an experimental study with 716 participants, for example, findings indicated that individuals who scored low in agreeableness and conscientiousness were ostracized by others more than those with more agreeable and conscientious traits (Rudert et al., 2020). Likewise, agreeable and conscientious people show more distress when exposed to ostracism (Yaakobi, 2022).

People with anti-social personality traits such as psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, which is also known as the 'dark triad' altogether (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), have shared characteristics of low agreeableness and conscientiousness, reduced empathy, and increased aggression (Heym et al., 2019; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2016). Machiavellianism is a trait that implies highly manipulative and insincere in interpersonal relationships (Christie & Geis, 2013), whilst psychopathic people tend to be impulsive, low on empathy, cold-hearted and exploitative (Hare, 1985). Narcissism is characterized by superiority and entitlement (Raskin & Hall, 1979). Despite the evidence on the relationship between agreeableness and conscientiousness and having been ostracized or socially excluded, the evidence on the ostracism/social exclusion and dark triad traits, which are found closely related to those two Big Five Personality facets, is still scarce (Blinkhorn et al., 2021).

In the context of personality, humility is described as one's ability to regulate self-related emotions (egotism) in a socially acceptable way, others-oriented thinking and behaviors and an accurate view of self (Davis et al., 2011). It was suggested that humility is significantly related to improved social functioning, including developing and maintaining positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Van Tongeren et al., 2022). Moreover, humility is positively associated with two ostracism-proof personality traits, i.e., agreeableness and conscientiousness, whilst negatively associated with dark triad traits (Fernández-del-Río et al., 2020). On the other hand, evidence is scarce on the mediating effect of humility in the relationship between dark triad traits and ostracism and social exclusion. Thus, this study assesses whether humility mitigates or exacerbates the association between dark triad traits, ostracism, and social exclusion.

Hypothesis 1: Humility will mediate the relationship between dark triad and ostracism.

Hypothesis 2: Humility will mediate the relationship between dark triad and social exclusion.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 329 university students (262 female, 79.6% of the sample) were included in the current study. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 40 ( $M = 20.73$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ). Before collecting data, participants were provided with an informed consent form which states that participation in the study is voluntary.

### **Materials**

#### **Demographic Information Form**

The data on age and gender was collected using a standard demographics questionnaire.

#### **Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents**

Participants' perceived ostracism and social exclusion levels were measured via the Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents Turkish version (Gilman et al., 2013). The adaptation study into Turkish was carried out by Sertelin-Mercan (2016). The scale has 11 items and 5-point Likert type (ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *always*), and two factors structure. These factors are 'ignored' (ostracism; "Others treat me as if I am invisible."), and exclusion (social exclusion; "Others include me in their plans for the holidays."). This scale was developed for adolescents, and the adaptation study into Turkish was conducted with adolescent participants. However, the scale can also be used for university students (Kavaklı, 2018, 2019, 2021). Cronbach Alpha coefficients were also calculated as .88 both for ostracism, and social exclusion in the current study.

#### **Humility Scale**

Participants' humility level was measured via the Humility Scale developed by Büyüksevindik and Işık (2019). The scale has 9 items and 5-point Likert type (ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*) ("I am sensitive to the problems of others."), and one factor structure. In the current study, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated as .87. High scores on the scale indicate a higher level of humility.

#### **Short Dark Triad Scale**

Participants' dark triad levels were measured via Short Dark Triad Scale developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014). Özsoy et al. (2017) conducted the research for the Turkish adaptation. The scale has twenty-seven items with 5-point Likert type (ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*) and three factors structure. These factors are narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Cronbach Alpha coefficients also were calculated as .79 for Machiavellianism, .66 for narcissism, .76 for psychopathy, and .83 for all items in the current study.

## Procedure

The data was collected using an online questionnaire booklet. The study was approved by the Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University Ethical Committee (approval date: 09.11.2020, approval number: 41, see also Appendix). Before starting the study, an informed consent form was presented to the participants. Those who volunteered to participate in the study filled out the measures. The duration of the research was approximately 15 minutes.

## Results

The relationships between ostracism, social exclusion, humility, and dark triad are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*An Analysis of the Correlation between the Variables Considered in This Research*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. OST	7.88	3.15	-					
2. SOC	15.31	5.31	.36***	-				
3. HUM	40.23	4.77	-.28***	-.24***	-			
4. MAC	27.43	7.28	.15**	.02	-.12**	-		
5. NAR	25.80	5.78	-.12*	-.34***	.01	.41***	-	
6. PSI	20.06	6.27	.21***	.11*	-.24***	.52***	.35***	-
$\alpha$			.88	.88	.87	.79	.66	.76
$\omega$			.88	.89	.89	.80	.69	.79

*Note.* M = mean, SD = standard deviation, OST = ostracism, SOC = social exclusion, HUM = humility, MAC = Machiavellianism, NAR = narcissism, PSI = psychopathy,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach alpha value,  $\omega$  = McDonald's omega reliability, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

Two models have been created to examine the mediating role of humility in the relationships among dark triad, ostracism, and social exclusion. These models have been analyzed through structural equation modelling. Latent variables such as ostracism and social exclusion were created by using the ostracism experience scale items. A latent variable, dark triad, was created by using the Short Dark Triad Scale's subdimensions (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy). The latent variable of humility was created using the items of the humility scale. Analyses were carried out with latent variables. The first model's fit indexes created regarding the mediating role of humility in the relationship between the dark triad and ostracism are found within acceptable limits [ $\chi^2(114, N = 329) = 326.39, \chi^2/sd = 2.863, p < .000, GFI = .90, AGFI = .87, CFI = .92, IFI = .92, TLI = .90, SRMR = .065, RMSEA = .075$ ].

The tested model and Bootstrap analysis results showed that the relationship between the dark triad and ostracism is mediated by humility (Indirect effect = .07, %95 CI [.012, .146]). After humility was included in the model, the direct effect between the dark triad and ostracism became insignificant (Direct effect = .10, 95% CI [-.064, .264]).

**Table 2**

*The First Model's Fit Indexes*

Fit Index	Model Fit Index	Fit Index	
		Acceptable	Good/Excellent
X <sup>2</sup> /sd	2.863	0<X <sup>2</sup> /sd<5	0<X <sup>2</sup> /sd<3
RMSEA	.07	0,00≤ RMSEA≤0,08	0,00≤ RMSEA≤0,05
AGFI	.87	0,90≤AGFI≤1,0	0,95≤AGFI≤1,0
GFI	.90	0,90≤GFI≤1,0	0,95≤GFI≤1,0
IFI	.92	0,90≤NFI≤1,0	0,95≤NFI≤1,0
TLI	.90	0,90≤TLI≤1,0	0,95≤TLI≤1,0
CFI	.92	0,90≤CFI≤1,0	0,95≤CFI≤1,0
SRMR	.06	0,00≤ SRMR ≤0,08	0,00≤ SRMR ≤0,05

**Table 1**

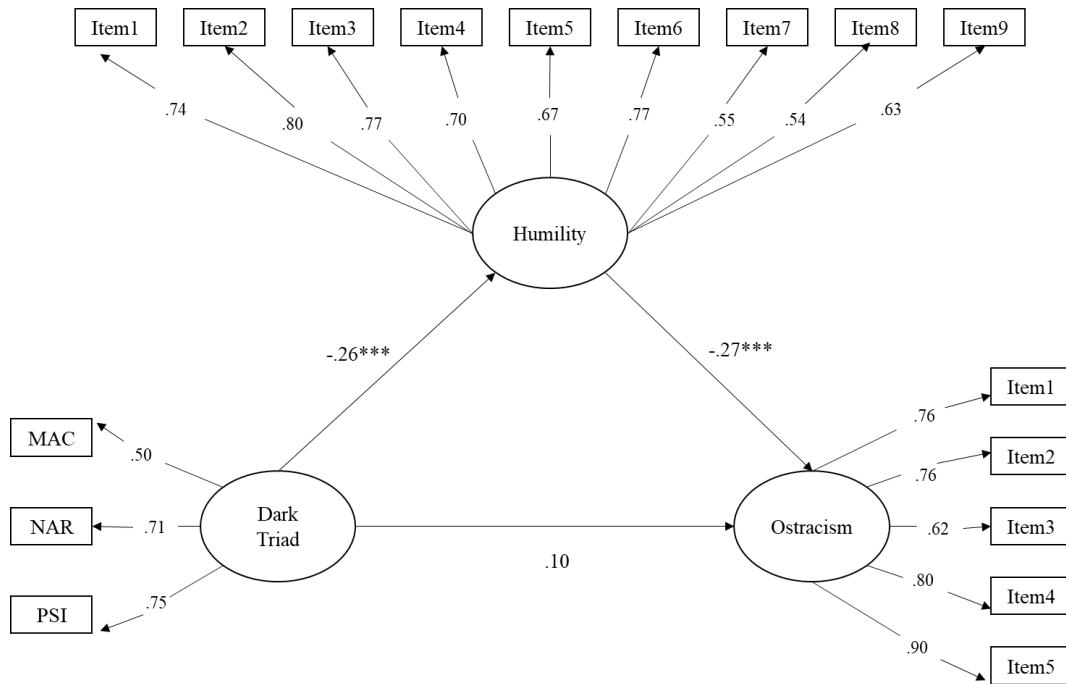
*Structural Equation Modeling in the Relationship Between Dark Triad, Ostracism, and Humility*

DV	IV	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	S.E.	t value
OST	DARK	.17	.10	.07	.01	1.43
HUM	DARK	-.26	-.26	.00	.01	-3.59***
OST	HUM	-.27	-.27	.00	.08	-4.13***

*Note.* DV = dependent variable, IV = independent variable, OST = ostracism, DARK = dark triad, HUM = humility, S.E. = standard error. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Figure 1

*Structural Equation Modeling in the Relationship Between Dark Triad, Ostracism, and Humility*



The second model's fit indexes created regarding the mediating role of humility in the relationship between the dark triad and social exclusion are found within acceptable limits [ $\chi^2(131, N = 329) = 337.36, \chi^2/sd = 2.575, p < .000, GFI = .90, AGFI = .86, CFI = .93, IFI = .93, TLI = .91, SRMR = .077, RMSEA = .069$ ].

Table 4

*The Second Model's Fit Indexes*

Fit Index			
Fit Index	Model Fit Index	Acceptable	Good/Excellent
X <sup>2</sup> /sd	2.575	0 < X <sup>2</sup> /sd < 5	0 < X <sup>2</sup> /sd < 3
RMSEA	.07	0,00 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0,08	0,00 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0,05
AGFI	.86	0,90 ≤ AGFI ≤ 1,0	0,95 ≤ AGFI ≤ 1,0
GFI	.90	0,90 ≤ GFI ≤ 1,0	0,95 ≤ GFI ≤ 1,0
IFI	.93	0,90 ≤ NFI ≤ 1,0	0,95 ≤ NFI ≤ 1,0
TLI	.91	0,90 ≤ TLI ≤ 1,0	0,95 ≤ TLI ≤ 1,0
CFI	.93	0,90 ≤ CFI ≤ 1,0	0,95 ≤ CFI ≤ 1,0
SRMR	.08	0,00 ≤ SRMR ≤ 0,08	0,00 ≤ SRMR ≤ 0,05

The tested model and Bootstrap analysis results showed that the relationship between the dark triad and social exclusion is mediated by humility (Indirect effect = .07, %95 CI [.015, .117]). After humility was included in the model, the direct effect between the dark triad and social exclusion became insignificant (Direct effect = -.05, 95% CI [-.216, .141]).

**Table 5**

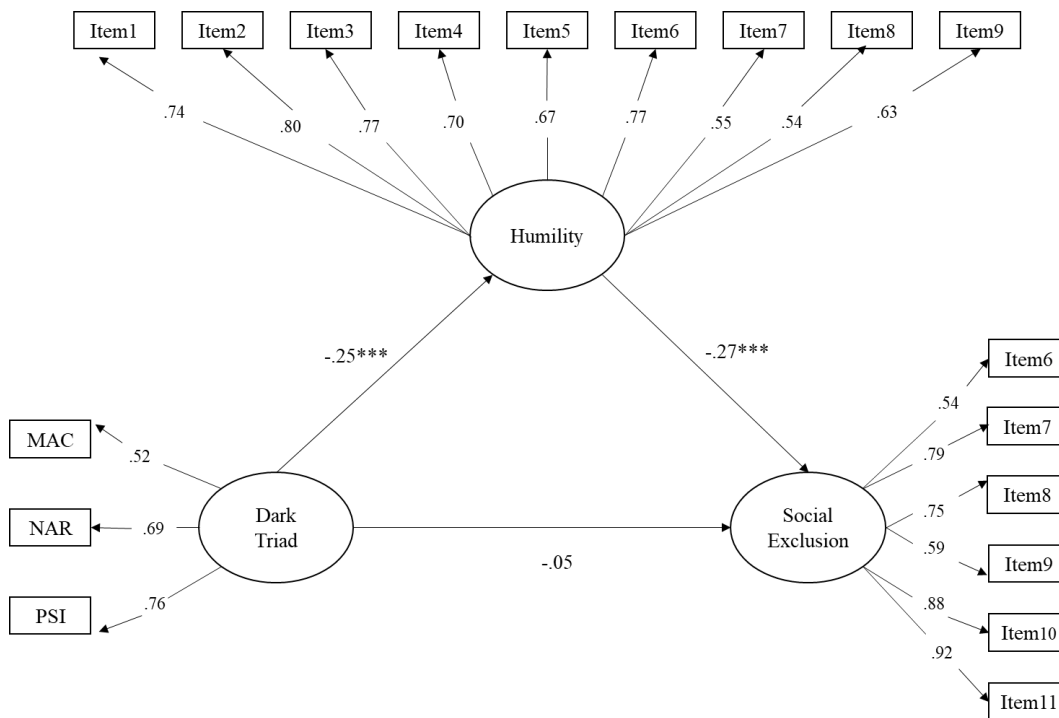
*Structural Equation Modeling in the Relationship between Dark Triad, Social Exclusion and Humility*

DV	IV	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	S.E.	t value
SOC	DARK	.02	-.05	.07	.01	.733
HUM	DARK	-.25	-.25	.00	.01	-3.52***
SOC	HUM	-.27	-.27	.00	.08	-3.95***

*Note.* DV = dependent variable, IV = independent variable, SOC = social exclusion, DARK = dark triad, HUM = humility, S.E. = standard error.

**Figure 2**

*Structural Equation Modeling in the Relationship Between Dark Triad, Social Exclusion and Humility*



**Discussion**

In the present study, the role of humility as a mediator between the dark triad and ostracism and social exclusion was investigated. The results showed that ostracism and social exclusion are negatively associated with both humility and narcissism. Ostracism is positively related to psychopathy and Machiavellianism. There is a negative correlation between social exclusion and the psychopathy dimension. There is no association between humility and narcissism, but humility was negatively associated with the dark triad. Moreover, humility fully

mediated the relationship between the dark triad and ostracism. Similarly, the relationship between the dark triad and social exclusion is fully mediated by humility.

The dark triad, ostracism, and social exclusion are frequently discussed concepts in the field of psychology (Heym et al., 2019; McDonald & Donnellan, 2012). As a coping strategy for their social exclusion, persons who experience ostracism may be more susceptible to developing dark triad characteristics. When the studies are examined, it is seen that the studies on the relationship between the dark triad and ostracism or social exclusion are relatively limited. Studies have shown that the relationship between narcissism and ostracism has been addressed. Studies generally focus on the relationship between narcissism and ostracism (Blinkhorn et al., 2021; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016; Xu & Huang, 2012). Erkutlu and Chafra (2016) reported that there is a positive relationship between narcissism and workplace ostracism. The results of another study showed that narcissistic people are more prone to violence after social exclusion (Blinkhorn et al., 2021). In contrast to previous research, ostracism and social exclusion were associated negatively with narcissism in this study. This issue can be explained by narcissism's structure. In this study, perceived ostracism and social exclusion were measured. This indicates that individuals with a high level of narcissism may not see ostracism or social exclusion as an exclusion. In other words, narcissistic individuals may believe that exclusion is unthinkable for themselves. This may explain the negative association between narcissism, ostracism, and social exclusion.

Nonetheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated the indirect effect of the dark triad on ostracism and social exclusion through humility. Thus, it does not seem possible to discuss the results related to the mediating role of humility comparatively. The findings of this research indicate the significance of evaluating humility as a mediating factor in the relationship between the dark triad, ostracism, and social exclusion. These findings have several implications for both practice and research. The findings indicate, from a practical standpoint, that evaluating humility could be an effective method to mitigate the harmful consequences of the dark triad and social exclusion. This knowledge can be used by practitioners to design interventions or training programs targeted at encouraging humility as a means of mitigating the negative effects of these factors on social relationships. The findings highlight the significance of considering humility as a potential mediator in the link between the dark triad, ostracism, and their consequences on social exclusion from a research standpoint. Future research could build on these findings by addressing the underlying mechanisms that drive the association between humility and social exclusion and by examining the efficacy of interventions designed to promote humility in reducing the negative impacts of the dark triad, ostracism, and social exclusion.

As a mediator, humility may mitigate the detrimental consequences of the dark triad and ostracism on social exclusion. Recognizing one's limits and recognizing the skills and contributions of others are components of humility. Individuals with a high level of humility tend to be more sociable, empathic, and collaborative (Ashton & Lee, 2005; Davis et al., 2010; Ross & Wright, 2021). Hence, when a person with a high dark triad level is socially excluded or ostracized, they might be more likely to experience negative emotions and hurt feelings, which can result in further ostracism and social exclusion. If the individual also displays a high level of humility, though, they may be more willing to reflect on their behavior and take steps to mend their social ties (Peters et al., 2011; Porter et al., 2022). This approach may involve understanding their limitations, appreciating the dignity of others, and seeking to enhance their interpersonal abilities. In this manner, humility may contribute as a mediator between the dark triad, ostracism, and social exclusion by mitigating the detrimental impact of these characteristics on ostracism. It may be able to lessen the negative consequences of the dark triad and ostracism by encouraging humility. The results obtained from this study also support this view. Given the aforementioned reasons, the study's findings implied that interventions aiming at enhancing humility-related



abilities may be useful for mitigating the detrimental effects of the dark triad on ostracism and social exclusion.

### Limitations and Future Suggestions

Together with its contributions, the current study's conclusions must also be evaluated considering its limitations. The current research is a correlational study lacking a cause-and-effect relationship. In addition, a self-report scale was used to assess ostracism and social exclusion. For this reason, participants' perceptions of ostracism and social exclusion were assessed. Future experimental research may yield further explanatory data. Additionally, it would be fascinating to undertake longitudinal studies that track participants over time to better understand how changes in humility and dark triad traits affect social exclusion. This would provide a more sophisticated comprehension of how these variables interact and change over time. It may be beneficial to do cross-cultural research to determine if the links between humility, dark triad traits, ostracism, and social exclusion vary between cultures. This could aid in the identification of cultural characteristics that may affect the efficacy of programs designed to promote humility as a means of minimizing social exclusion. Future studies could also concentrate on creating and evaluating interventions targeted at fostering modesty as a strategy for mitigating the detrimental impacts of the dark triad on social exclusion and ostracism. The brain mechanisms underlying the link between humility, dark triad traits, ostracism, and social exclusion may also be worth investigating. This could involve identifying the neuronal circuits involved in these activities via brain imaging techniques.

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## Appendix

### Ethical Committee Approval

 **ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT ÜNİVERSİTESİ (AYBÜ)**  
**ETİK KURULU**  
**PROJE ONAY BELGESİ** 

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi Psikoloji bölümü akademisyenlerinden Mehmet Kavaklı'nın, Dışlanmanın Öz Duyarlık, Tevazu ve Narsisizm ile İlişkisinin İncelenmesi adlı araştırması değerlendirilmiştir. (Bu kısım başvuru sahibi tarafından doldurulmalıdır)

Proje etik açısından uygun bulunmuştur.

Proje etik açısından geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Proje etik açısından uygun bulunmamıştır.

<b>AYBÜ ETİK KURULU KARARI</b> (Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır)	
Araştırma kodu (Yıl – Araştırma sıra no)	2020 - 528
Başvuru formunun Etik Kurula ulaştığı tarih	30.10.2020
Etik Kurul Karar toplantı tarihi ve karar no	09.11.2020 - 62
Yer	Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, Esenboğa Külliyesi
Katılımcılar	Formda imzası bulunan üyelerimiz toplantıya katılmıştır.

**KURUL BAŞKANI, BAŞKAN YARDIMCISI VE ÜYELER:**

**İMZA**

Prof. Dr. Cem Şafak ÇUKUR	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Prof. Dr. Muharrem KILIÇ	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Doç. Dr. Behlül TOKUR	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Doç. Dr. Birgül ÖZKAN	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Doç. Dr. Yüksel Akay UNVAN	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Şule KAYA	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ertuğrul DEMİRDEL	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Nimet YILDIRIM TİRGİL	Üye	<input type="text" value=""/>