

## ATTACHMENT STYLES IN ORGANIZATIONS: A STUDY PERFORMED IN A HOSPITAL

ROSSELLA FALVO  
IRENE FAVARA  
GIAN ANTONIO DI BERNARDO  
UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

GIULIO BOCCATO  
UNIVERSITY OF BERGAMO

DORA CAPOZZA  
UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

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Recent research has shown that adult attachment theory may be usefully applied to the organizational domain. Our aim in this study was to analyze the influence of attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) on employees' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions. Participants were nurses, working in a hospital in Italy. Models were tested in which the outcome variables were: turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behaviors, and burnout perceptions (exhaustion and cynicism). The mediational effect of affective organizational commitment was also evaluated. Results showed that attachment security was associated with lower levels of intentions to quit and lower levels of job burnout through the mediation of affective commitment. The secure style was also directly linked to helping behaviors in favor of supervisors and colleagues. Reliable relationships were also found for the avoidant style, which was associated with exhaustion and cynicism. The novelty of findings and usefulness of studying attachment in organizations are discussed.

Key words: Attachment styles; Affective organizational commitment; Organizational citizenship behaviors; Job burnout; Turnover intentions.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rossella Falvo, Dipartimento FISPPA — Sezione di Psicologia Applicata, Università di Padova, Via Venezia 8, 35131 PADOVA (PD), Italy. E-mail: rossella.falvo@unipd.it*

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years social psychologists have become increasingly interested in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980), a comprehensive explanation of adult behavior. Growing evidence has been accumulated showing that attachment styles can explain not only caregiving and close relationships, but also interactions in wider social contexts, in particular, in organizational settings. The aim of our work is to examine the effects of interpersonal attachment orientations on work-related attitudes and behaviors.

Theorists of adult attachment, grounding on the original formulation by Bowlby (1969/1982), postulate that the nature of the relationships individuals develop with their primary caregivers during infancy strongly influences close relationships and social interactions in adulthood. The availability and responsiveness of protective others (i.e., the attachment figures), in reaction to

child's requests, are assumed to be crucial in personality development: they shape core beliefs about the self and social world; these beliefs, in turn, guide adult behaviors. Available and responsive others favor a sense of security, whereas unavailable and not responsive others provoke a sense of insecurity in interpersonal relations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005).

A central notion in the theory is that, on the basis of early and repeated attachment-related experiences, individuals construct mental representations of themselves and others, called *internal working models*. These are affective, cognitive, and motivational schemas, reflecting beliefs and expectations: the self may be perceived as more or less deserving of care and attention; others may be perceived as more or less worthy of trust. Variations in these working models are related to individual differences in attachment styles which emerge during childhood and persist in adulthood, meaningfully affecting perceptions, emotions, and behaviors in social encounters (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

Based on studies on early childhood carried out in the field of developmental psychology, Ainsworth and colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) originally operationalized the attachment styles by identifying three distinct patterns: secure, anxious, and avoidant (the last two patterns defined as insecure styles). This same distinction has been resumed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) in their seminal studies on adult romantic relationships in the social psychology field. Thus, research on adult attachment gained impetus from Hazan and Shaver's work: attachment theory has been extended to the romantic/marital domain, and suitable self-report measures have been developed (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a, for an extensive review of studies on adult attachment theory).

In social and personality psychology, attachment styles are conceptualized as relatively stable patterns of behaviors, expectations, needs, emotions, affect-regulation strategies, deriving from the interplay of a biological tendency to seek proximity in times of need (Bowlby, 1969/1982), and attachment experiences (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Individuals with a secure attachment style have positive representations (working models) about themselves and others. Since these individuals have consistently experienced positive interactions with the caregiver during infancy, they easily develop close relationships, rely on others when in need, and are able to effectively cope with environmental challenges. A negative working model of the self, perceived as not deserving others' attention, concerns the anxious style, which derives from the inconsistent responsiveness of caregivers. Anxious individuals, characterized by fear of rejection and need for approval, are usually worried about proximity in interpersonal relations, and constantly tend to monitor the environment, searching for attention and support. Finally, individuals with an avoidant style have generally experienced interactions with caregivers who are inclined to withdrawal behaviors and the rejection of proximity seeking attempts. Avoidant individuals have negative working models of other people, perceived as unreliable; they tend to rely on themselves, and feel emotional distance from others.

Research has demonstrated the relationship of attachment styles with a large array of individual differences and social-relevant variables, such as: cognitive openness (Mikulincer, 1997); resiliency and capacity to manage with stressful events (see Mikulincer & Florian, 1998, 2001; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005); concern for others' welfare (Mikulincer et al., 2003); empathy, compassion and altruistic behaviors (Mikulincer et al., 2001; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005); volunteerism (Erez, Mikulincer, van Ijzendoorn, & Kroonenberg, 2008; Gillath et al., 2005). In general, research, relevant to the work context, has shown that security is linked to positive outcomes, such as prosocial attitudes and the use of effective strategies to cope with stress.

Regarding the conceptualization of adult attachment styles and their assessment through self-report measures, researchers originally proposed a typological approach, based on three (secure, anxious, avoidant; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) or four styles (secure, preoccupied — anxious/ambivalent —, dismissing, and fearful; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Afterwards, researchers advocated a dimensional approach (Fraley & Waller, 1998), and attachment styles were measured along two relatively independent dimensions, namely avoidance and anxiety (see the Experiences in Close Relationships — ECR — Scale; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Collins and Read (1990), however, proposed a dimensional model in which attachment is articulated in three factors (close, depend, and anxiety; see also Joplin, Nelson, & Quick, 1999).

Attachment theory has been applied to different domains (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a), such as group relations (for a review, see Boccatto & Capozza, 2011) and political psychology (see Koleva & Rip, 2009). The theory has been also extended to the organizational domain. Although research in this area is still in its infancy, a number of studies convincingly shows the potential of attachment theory for understanding behavior and relationships at work. Hazan and Shaver (1990) performed one of the first studies examining the association of attachment styles with work-related variables. Their findings revealed that secure individuals were satisfied with their relationships in the workplace and with job outcomes (e.g., pay, job security, promotion opportunities). Anxious individuals were low in satisfaction with job and relationships, since they perceived little appreciation from coworkers. Avoidant individuals reported dissatisfaction with relationships, but appeared rather similar to secure respondents in satisfaction with work-related outcomes. Secure attachment, moreover, was associated with greater overall well-being (less reported suffering from loneliness and depression; less anxiety, irritability, psychosomatic and physical illness).

Krausz, Bizman, and Braslavsky (2001) analyzed the effects of attachment styles on overall work satisfaction, showing that it reached the highest level among secure employees. A study by Hardy and Barkham (1994), carried out with depressed individuals under treatment for stress at work, revealed that the anxious style was associated with anxiety about job performance and relationships at work, whereas the avoidant style was associated with worries about hours of work and relationships outside of work. Joplin et al. (1999), in a study on attachment and health, found that employees with secure attachment (that they call interdependent orientation) exhibited lower levels of social dysfunctions, while insecure employees (counterdependent and overdependent) exhibited lower levels of health; moreover, perceived social support from coworkers and family was negatively associated with avoidance, and positively associated with anxiety.

More recent studies systematically investigated the role of attachment patterns in the prediction of other organizational variables, such as: organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), namely the employees' prosocial actions performed beyond their formal role (e.g., Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983); commitment to the organization, defined as the psychological link with one's organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997); turnover intentions. In the study by Desivilya, Sabag, and Ashton (2006), it was found that individuals with secure style were more prone to display a prosocial orientation in the workplace in contrast with their insecure counterparts. In line with these results, Geller and Bamberger (2009) noticed that attachment styles affect instrumental helping behaviors, namely behaviors of task-focused assistance (see also Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). Regarding commitment and the intention to quit, results indicate that employees high in anxiety and avoidance are less committed to the organization (affective component; Meyer, Al-

len, & Smith, 1993); avoidance is also associated with turnover intentions (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). Finally, Richards and Schat (2011) found that, after controlling for differences in personality traits and affective organizational commitment, avoidance was positively related to the use of surface acting, namely the tendency to suppress the behavioral display of emotions, and negatively related to instrumental and emotional support-seeking behaviors. Anxiety was negatively associated with citizenship behaviors, and positively associated with support seeking and intentions to quit.

Taken together, the studies performed in organizational settings consistently show that individual differences in attachment styles may be crucial in favoring or inhibiting employees' well-being and organizational success.

## OVERVIEW

The aim of the present work, performed with nurses working in hospitals, was to analyze the effects of attachment styles on perceptions, attitudes and behavioral intentions. In particular, we considered as work-related criteria: organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ, 1988; Smith et al., 1983); turnover intentions; burnout (Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996); affective organizational commitment (AOC; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). We adopted Hazan and Shaver's (1987) distinction of attachment styles as secure, anxious, and avoidant, and applied a scale which parallels that elaborated by Mikulincer, Florian, and Tolmacz (1990). Since the scale was applied to a work context, only items referring to relationships with "others" were included; therefore, any reference to romantic partners was ruled out (see also Richards & Schat, 2011).

Organizational citizenship behaviors may be defined as discretionary actions, not formally acknowledged by the organizational reward system; when shared by employees, they may contribute to the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988; Schnake, 1991). In the present study, the altruism component of OCB (Pond, Nacoste, Mohr, & Rodriguez, 1997; Smith et al., 1983) was considered. It refers to actions aimed at helping specific individuals (coworkers, supervisors) within the organization. According to the attachment theory, and in line with previous research (see, e.g., Desivilya et al., 2006; Geller & Bamberger, 2009), the secure style should be associated with prosocial behaviors, while the insecure styles should interfere with altruism. Anxious individuals' egoistic focus on the self, due to a chronic preoccupation with approval and closeness, is likely to impair helping behaviors. For avoidant individuals, their threat-based working model of relational proximity, and disengagement from interdependent activities should compromise the ability to perform altruistic behaviors (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). We hypothesized, therefore, that the secure style is positively associated with altruistic behaviors, while the anxious and avoidant styles are negatively related to these behaviors.

Regarding turnover intentions, anxious and avoidant individuals are unable to create harmonious relationships with the other organization members; as a consequence, they should feel low organizational involvement and low desire to remain within the organization (see Richards & Schat, 2011). Thus, secure attachment should be associated with lower levels of intentions to quit; these intentions should, in contrast, be associated with the anxious and avoidant styles.

One of the most central attributes of secure people is their ability to adopt functional strategies for dealing with stressful events. In contrast, anxious individuals, focused on their

negative emotions and thoughts, and avoidant individuals, inclined to detach themselves from the sources of stress, are less competent at affect regulation. Several studies have demonstrated that secure attachment, differently from insecure attachment, is positively associated with well-being, and negatively associated with global distress (see, e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Joplin et al., 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002, 2009). In order to analyze the relations attachment styles have with work-related stress, we considered burnout perceptions. Job burnout is a syndrome deriving from lack of adjustment to one's job, that may characterize all occupational settings; it is a consequence of chronic stress, that is, a continued strain, due to emotional and interpersonal stressors in the workplace (Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 1996). We examined two of the three components of the construct (Maslach & Leiter, 1999): *exhaustion*, corresponding to a feeling of limited physical and emotional energy; *cynicism*, corresponding to a feeling of indifference toward one's work (the third component of burnout is reduced professional efficacy). We hypothesized a negative link between secure attachment and both dimensions of burnout. In contrast, anxiety and avoidance should be positively associated with these dimensions: anxiety should be primarily linked to exhaustion and avoidance to cynicism.

As suggested by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007a), attachment styles could have an impact on affective commitment: one of the three components of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; see also Meyer, Stanley, & Vandenberg, in press). It has, moreover, been demonstrated that affective commitment plays a crucial role in promoting OCBs and employees' well-being, also curbing turnover intentions and burnout perceptions (see, e.g., Capozza, Dazzi, Falvo, Hichy, & Mary, 2004; Falvo, Trifiletti, Andrighetto, & Capozza, 2006; for a meta-analysis, see Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Since secure individuals are equipped with efficient self-regulatory mechanisms and interpersonal skills, security is probably associated with positive experiences within the organization, which may enhance feelings of involvement and belonging. Thus, in the present study, we analyze the influence of attachment styles on AOC, and, in line with Mikulincer and Shaver (2007a), we predict a positive relationship between commitment and secure attachment. The relationship between affective commitment and insecure styles should, in contrast, be negative.

In order to explain the mechanisms through which attachment styles affect helping behaviors, turnover intentions, and burnout perceptions in the workplace, we assumed a mediating role of AOC. Research has shown that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between the perceptions of work environment and relevant outcome variables. For instance, Hichy, Falvo, Vanzetto, and Capozza (2003) found that AOC fully mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support and altruism (OCB), turnover intentions and job burnout (see also Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003). We, therefore, tested models, in which AOC mediates the relationship between attachment styles and each of the four work-related outcomes (altruism, turnover intentions, exhaustion, and cynicism).

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

One-hundred and sixty-one nurses participated in the study on a voluntary basis. They were employed in two hospitals, located in a North Italy town; 36 were males and 124 females (1

missing data). Most of respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years (37.9%), 34.2% were aged between 41 and 50, 17.4% between 21 and 30, and 9.9% were over 50 (1 missing data). Participants received a survey package including a questionnaire and an unmarked envelop. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter, which explained the aims of the research and guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of responses. After completing the survey, participants put the questionnaire inside the envelope and dropped the questionnaire in a return box. In total, 400 questionnaires were delivered with a return rate of 40.25%.

### Measures

Participants answered the following measures; unless otherwise indicated, responses to all items were given on a 7-step scale ranging from 1 (*absolutely false*) to 7 (*absolutely true*) with 4 (*neither true, nor false*) as the midpoint.

*Attachment styles.* We applied a 16-item scale, similar to that used by Mikulincer et al. (1990). The scale is based on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) distinction of the three attachment styles. In order to make this instrument suitable to the work context, we excluded items referring to romantic relationships, and replaced them with items referring to general "others." Moreover, in the instructions participants were told we were interested in their opinions about social relationships in general. Five items tapped the *avoidant* style ( $\alpha = .72$ ); an example of item is: "I feel uncomfortable being close to others." To assess the *anxious* style, five items were used ( $\alpha = .61$ , after dropping one item); an example is: "I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like." For the *secure* style, we selected items from the Italian version (Fossati et al., 2003) of the Attachment Style Questionnaire by Feeney, Noller, and Hanrahan (1994). In particular, six items of the Confidence (in self and others) subscale were chosen, such as: "I feel confident about relating to others"; reliability was .78. For each attachment pattern, items were averaged to form a reliable composite score. As expected, secure attachment exhibited significant negative correlations with both anxious ( $r = -.20, p < .05$ ), and avoidant ( $r = -.38, p < .001$ ) attachment. A nonsignificant correlation emerged between anxiety and avoidance ( $r = .10, ns$ ). These correlations are consistent with those found by Mikulincer et al. (1990).

*Affective organizational commitment (AOC).* Affective commitment was measured using Meyer et al.'s (1993) 6-item subscale. Examples of items are: "This hospital has a great deal of personal meaning for me"; "I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this hospital" (reverse code). Items were averaged to form a reliable composite score ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

*OCB-Altruism.* To assess the altruism component of organizational citizenship behaviors (Smith et al., 1983), six items, selected from Pond et al.'s (1997) scale, were applied. Sample items are: "I help others who have been absent"; "I orient newcomers even though it is not required." The six items formed a reliable composite score ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

*Turnover intentions.* Intent to quit was assessed using a 2-item measure (see Trifiletti, Capozza, Pasin, & Falvo, 2009): "I often think of leaving this hospital"; "The idea of seeking a job in an another hospital is pleasant to me." Ratings relative to the two items ( $r = .54, p < .001$ ) were averaged to form a composite score.

*Job burnout.* To measure the two dimensions of job burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996) in the Italian ver-

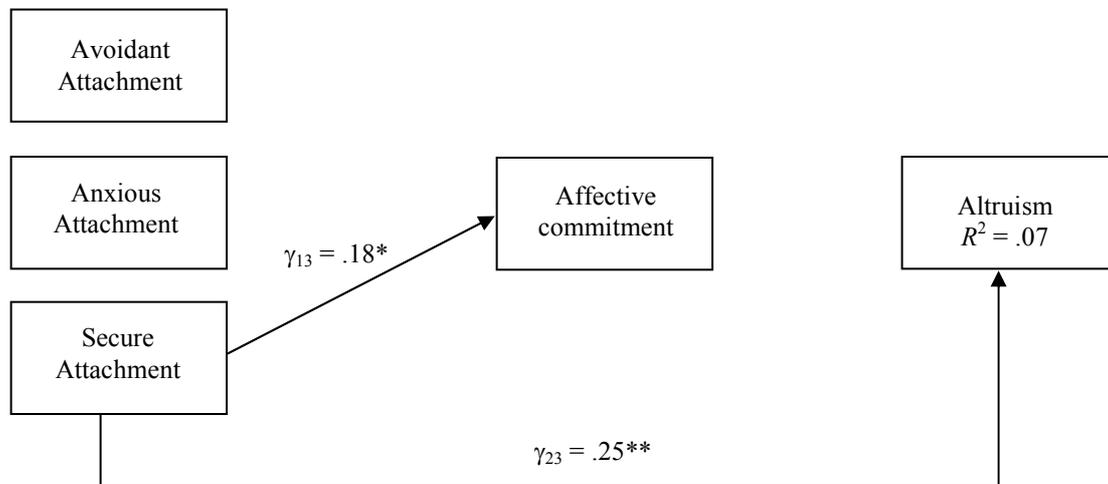
sion (Borgogni, Galati, Petitta, & Schweitzer Formation Center, 2005) was applied. Five items tapped the perception of emotional exhaustion, for example: “I feel exhausted by my work”; five assessed the cynicism dimension, for example: “I have become less enthusiastic about my work.” Participants had to indicate, on a 7-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *rarely/a few times a year or less*, 2 = *occasionally/once a month or less*, 3 = *regularly/a few times a month*, 4 = *frequently/once a week*, 5 = *very frequently/a few times a week*, 6 = *daily*), how frequently they experienced the feelings or expressed the opinions described by the items. Reliability was .94 for exhaustion and .80 for cynicism; items were, therefore, averaged to obtain reliable composite scores. The correlation between the two dimensions was  $r = .60, p < .01$ .

## RESULTS

To test the hypothesized relations between attachment dimensions and work-related criteria, four regression models were tested, in which the effects of attachment styles on altruism, turnover intentions, exhaustion and cynicism were mediated by affective commitment. Regression with observed variables was applied (LISREL 8.7; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004), given the small sample size; covariance matrices between composite scores were analyzed. The models' goodness of fit was evaluated using three indices: the chi-square test, the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR; Bentler, 1995). A model fits the data well when  $\chi^2$  is nonsignificant, CFI is equal to or above .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1997, 1999), and SRMR is equal to or below .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

In order to test mediation, we evaluated a baseline regression model in which the three attachment styles were the exogenous variables, AOC was the mediator, and altruism, turnover intentions, exhaustion and cynicism, taken separately, were the outcome variables. This model allowed us to test whether attachment styles were related to AOC and AOC was related to the outcome. In addition, for each baseline model we tested three alternative models, setting free the direct path from each attachment style to the outcome. This test allowed us to discover: whether AOC (the mediator) was related to the outcome, when controlling for the effect of the initial variable; whether the direct path from the initial variable to the outcome was significant, and, thus, whether the AOC mediation effect was partial or total. To test whether the direct path was significant, the chi-square difference test was used. The reliability of a mediation effect was evaluated when, in the alternative model, the initial variable was significantly related to AOC and AOC was significantly related to the outcome; reliability was measured by using the Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Following Taylor, MacKinnon, and Tein (2008; see also Shrout & Bolger, 2002), we tested mediation also when the total effect of the initial variable on the outcome was nonsignificant. Correlations between all the variables used are reported in the Appendix.

*Outcome variable: OCB-altruism.* The baseline model for altruism showed a poor fit; goodness-of-fit indices, in fact, were:  $\chi^2(3) = 10.81, p = .01$ ; SRMR = .064; CFI = .82. With regard to paths, neither the avoidant nor the anxious style were significantly related to affective commitment ( $\gamma_{11} = -.08, ns$ , for avoidance, and  $\gamma_{12} = -.01, ns$ , for anxiety), which was only predicted by the secure style ( $\gamma_{13} = .18, p < .05$ ). In turn, the association between commitment and altruism did not reach significance ( $\beta_{21} = .11, p > .10$ ).



Note. Only significant standardized parameters are reported.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

FIGURE 1  
 Regression model for altruism (OCB): The direct effect of secure attachment.

Regarding the direct paths (Table 1), neither the avoidant nor the anxious style predicted altruism, as demonstrated by the nonsignificant direct effects and the nonsignificant chi-square difference between the baseline and the alternative models. In contrast, secure attachment was directly associated with altruism (Figure 1). For the model including the direct path from security,  $\chi^2(2) = 0.82$ ,  $p = .66$ ; SRMR = .016; CFI = 1.00, the chi-square difference was significant, showing that the introduction of the direct path significantly improved the explanation. Thus, AOC did not show the expected mediation effect; moreover, only the secure attachment was related to altruism, this relation remaining significant also when all the three direct paths from attachment styles to altruism were simultaneously estimated.

*Outcome variable: Turnover intentions.* The baseline model for turnover intentions (Figure 2) showed a satisfactory fit:  $\chi^2(3) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .42$ ; SRMR = .034; CFI = 1.00. In this model, the relation of AOC with the outcome variable turned out to be significant ( $\beta_{21} = -.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

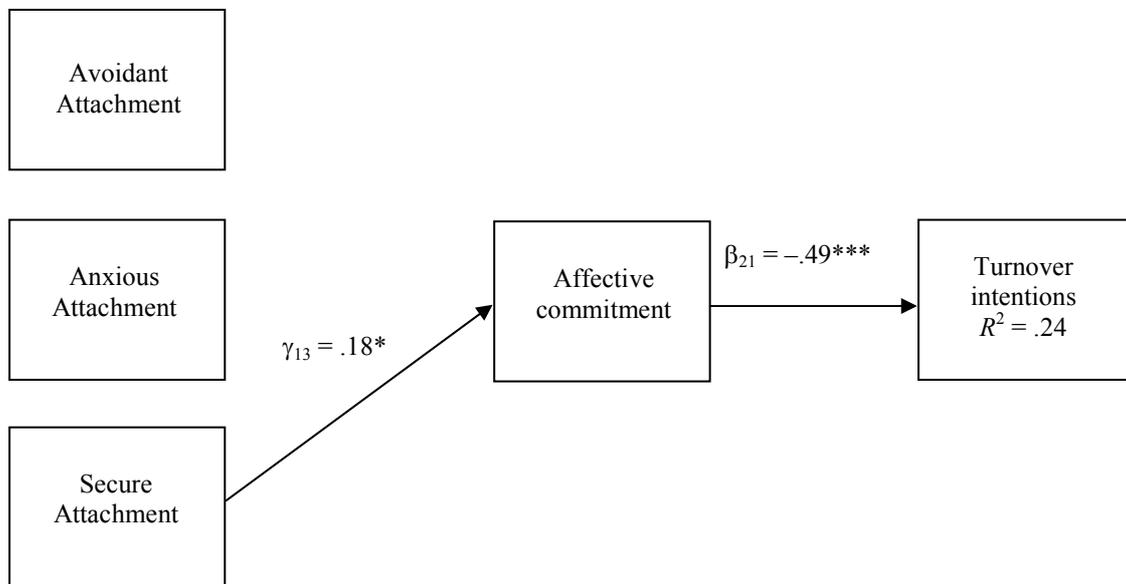
As to the direct paths (Table 1), the three attachment styles did not directly predict employees' intentions to quit: both  $\gamma$ s and chi-square differences were nonsignificant. To test the mediation effect of AOC for secure attachment, the regression model including the direct effect of this style was considered and the Sobel test was applied. Results demonstrated the significance of the mediation ( $z = -2.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, security was negatively related to the intentions to quit being positively related to feelings of attachment to the organization. For secure attachment, the hypotheses were confirmed.<sup>1</sup>

*Outcome variable: Job burnout-Exhaustion.* Goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2(3) = 8.21$ ,  $p = .042$ ; SRMR = .053; CFI = .92) showed a poor fit for the baseline model. However, affective commitment predicted exhaustion in the expected way (Figure 3).

TABLE 1  
 Direct effects of attachment styles on altruism, turnover intentions, exhaustion, and cynicism

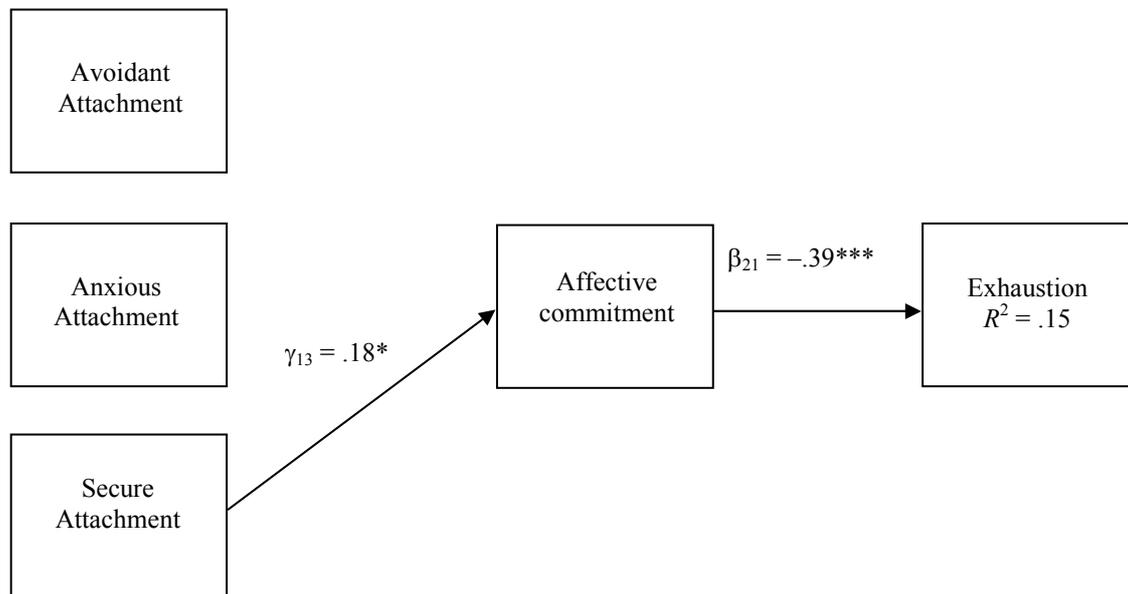
Model	$\chi^2$ (df)	$\chi^2_d$ (1)	$p <$	$\gamma$	$p <$
Baseline	10.81 (3)				
AAv → A	10.73 (2)	0.08	<i>ns</i>	-.02	<i>ns</i>
AAAn → A	10.24 (2)	0.57	<i>ns</i>	-.06	<i>ns</i>
AS → A	0.82 (2)	9.99	.005	.25	.01
Baseline	2.83 (3)				
AAv → TI	2.52 (2)	0.31	<i>ns</i>	-.04	<i>ns</i>
AAAn → TI	1.20 (2)	1.63	<i>ns</i>	-.09	<i>ns</i>
AS → TI	1.09 (2)	1.74	<i>ns</i>	.09	<i>ns</i>
Baseline	8.21 (3)				
AAv → E	1.22 (2)	6.99	.01	.19	.01
AAAn → E	7.48 (2)	0.73	<i>ns</i>	-.06	<i>ns</i>
AS → E	7.68 (2)	0.53	<i>ns</i>	-.05	<i>ns</i>
Baseline	11.43 (3)				
AAv → C	2.12 (2)	9.31	.01	.22	.01
AAAn → C	8.64 (2)	2.79	<i>ns</i>	.12	<i>ns</i>
AS → C	9.75 (2)	1.68	<i>ns</i>	-.10	<i>ns</i>

Note. AAv = Avoidant Attachment; AAn = Anxious Attachment; AS = Secure Attachment; A = Altruism; TI = Turnover Intentions; E = Exhaustion; C = Cynicism.



Note. Only significant standardized parameters are reported.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

FIGURE 2  
 Regression model for turnover intentions (baseline).



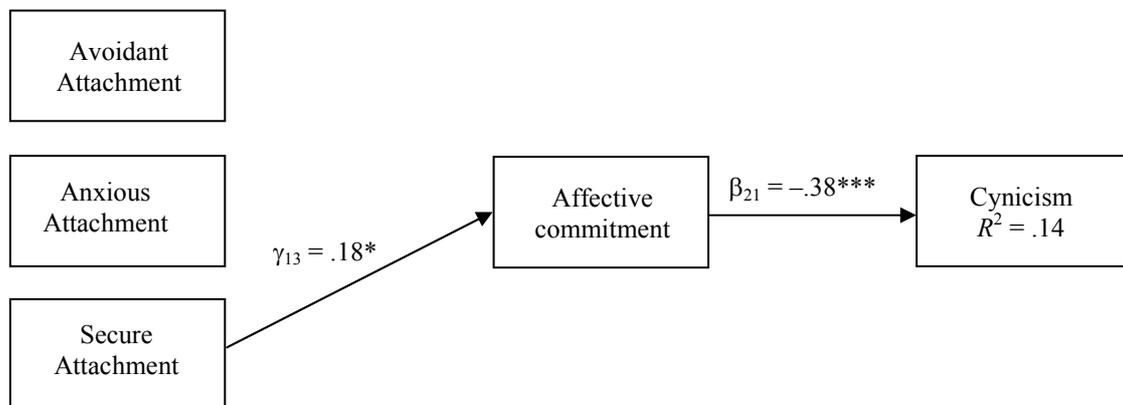
Note. Only significant standardized parameters are reported.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

FIGURE 3  
 Regression model for the exhaustion component of burnout (baseline).

For the direct effects, as can be seen in Table 1, only avoidant attachment was significantly related to exhaustion, with the respective model showing a very good fit:  $\chi^2(2) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .54$ ; SRMR = .021; CFI = 1.00. In order to test the mediation effect of AOC, the Sobel test was applied. A significant effect was found ( $z = -2.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ), meaning that security was associated with reduced exhaustion through the mediation of AOC. Thus, this component of burnout was negatively related to the secure style and positively related to the avoidant style. Finally, it is worth noting that the relationships of avoidance and AOC with exhaustion remained significant when the direct effects of the exogenous variables on exhaustion were simultaneously set free.

*Outcome variable: Job burnout-Cynicism.* Also for cynicism the only significant direct effect was that of the avoidant style (Table 1). With this parameter added to the baseline model (Figure 4), the goodness-of-fit indices were:  $\chi^2(2) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .35$ ; SRMR = .027; CFI = 1.00. Also for cynicism, the influence of security was totally mediated by the affective commitment: the Sobel test, applied to the model in which the direct path from security was set free, was  $z = -1.99$ ,  $p < .05$ .<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, results relative to the cynicism component of burnout parallel those obtained for the exhaustion component: feelings of indifference toward one's own work, produced by stressors present in the workplace, were positively related to the avoidant style; they were reduced by the secure style through the mediation of AOC.



Note. Only significant standardized parameters are reported.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

FIGURE 4  
 Regression model for the cynicism component of burnout (baseline).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present work was to analyze the effects of individual differences in attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious; see Hazan & Shaver, 1987) on work-related variables, namely, affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997), organizational citizenship behaviors (altruism component; Smith et al., 1983), turnover intentions, and job burnout (exhaustion and cynicism components; Maslach & Leiter, 1999). We also hypothesized a mediation effect, played by AOC. As suggested by some investigators, who have advocated the importance of testing mediation models to explain the influence of attachment (see Geller & Bamberger, 2009; Richards & Schat, 2011), we proposed that in work environments affective organizational commitment may, at least partially, explain the influence of attachment styles. The sense of belonging and involvement with one's organization (AOC), in fact, tends to mediate the relationship between work-related variables, such as perceived organizational support, and organizational outcomes, such as job burnout (Hichy et al., 2003; see also Carr et al., 2003; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2006; Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008).

As expected, and in line with results by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007a; see also Richards & Schat, 2011), we found that attachment security was positively related to affective commitment. Avoidant and anxious attachment styles, in contrast, did not show a significant relation with AOC. Thus, secure attachment emerges as a facilitator factor, promoting identification with the organization. Secure employees probably project their positive working models of self and others on the organization (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). In this line, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) found that attachment insecurities have a negative impact on identification and engagement with one's own group.

Concerning altruism — one of our outcome variables — findings showed that it is only influenced, and directly, by the secure style. Contrary to the hypotheses, affective commitment did not have any mediation effect. Indeed, previous research, carried out in organizational set-

tings, indicates that OCB is mainly predicted by individual difference variables (e.g., locomotion and proactivity; see Trifiletti et al., 2009; Trifiletti, Mari, Capozza, & Falvo, in press). Our result of a direct association between security and helping behaviors is consistent with Desivilya et al.'s (2006) results. Attachment security, therefore, is linked to altruistic behaviors also in the workplace. In our study, altruistic behaviors were not associated either with the avoidant or the anxious style, this finding replicating Richards and Schat's (2011) results. Geller and Bamberger (2009), instead, found an interaction effect, so that avoidance was negatively related to helping for lower levels of attachment anxiety.

As to the effect of attachment security on the intentions to quit we found, as expected, that it was fully mediated by AOC. None of the three attachment styles was directly associated with this outcome variable. Thus, for secure employees, affective bonds with the organization may curb the intentions to look for other jobs and work environments. It is worth noting that results of the two previous studies, examining the effects of attachment styles on turnover intentions, are not consistent with our results, intentions to quit being positively predicted by avoidance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a) or anxiety (Richards & Schat, 2011).

The association between attachment orientations and well-being has been largely investigated in adult attachment research. In the organizational field, Richards and Schat (2011) found that attachment styles are associated with behaviors reflecting emotion regulation and coping with stress strategies. Richards and Schat, however, did not directly measure workplace stress. Our study, by showing a so far unexplored link between attachment styles and job burnout, extends the understanding of individuals' reactions to stressors at work. We found that attachment security may lead to containing negative feelings of exhaustion and the perception of distance from one's job (cynicism), through the mediation of organizational commitment. The adverse influence of the avoidance style, positively related to burnout (exhaustion and cynicism), is consistent with previous findings (see, e.g., Joplin et al., 1999; Richards & Schat, 2011). The different relations of security and avoidance with the two components of burnout suggest that the measures used are able to detect the unique contribution of attachment styles to the explanation of the outcome variables.

For anxious attachment, it did not show any association with the outcomes. Thus, in future research, our results should be replicated by applying a more often used measure of attachment styles, for instance, the ECR scale by Brennan et al. (1998), which has high psychometric properties (see Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 2008). One limitation of our work is represented by the use of self-report measures to assess OCBs. In future studies, supervisors' evaluations of employees' behaviors should be considered. Future research should also explore other variables as potential outcomes of attachment orientations, such as performance, counterproductive behaviors, and volitional absenteeism. Finally, correlational findings should be supported by experimental data obtained by using, for instance, priming techniques (see, e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001, 2007b).

Overall, findings show that secure attachment is linked to positive outcomes: it promotes employees' prosocial behavior, and curbs turnover intentions and burnout perceptions. What routes can be followed to increase security in the workplace? Being a member of a supportive group or a supportive organization could be a method (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007b). Thus, accentuating perceived organizational support (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011) and specific components of the organizational climate, such as perceived cohesion among employees, may

enhance the security attachment systems with positive consequences for employees and the overall organization.

#### NOTES

1. The relationship between AOC and turnover intentions was significant also when the three direct paths from the exogenous variables were set free simultaneously.
2. The relationship between the avoidant style and cynicism and between AOC and cynicism remained significant when all the direct paths from the exogenous variables were simultaneously set free.

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APPENDIX  
 Zero-order correlations between the constructs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidant Attachment	–							
2. Anxious Attachment	.10	–						
3. Secure Attachment	-.38***	-.20*	–					
4. Affective commitment	-.15	-.04	.20*	–				
5. Altruism	-.04	-.06	.26***	.11	–			
6. Turnover intentions	.03	-.06	-.02	-.50***	-.03	–		
7. Exhaustion	.24**	-.04	-.13	-.39***	.05	.32***	–	
8. Cynicism	.27***	.14	-.17*	-.38***	-.06	.37***	.60***	–

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

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