ATTACHMENT ORIENTATIONS, STRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE: 
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL RANK STRATEGIES

The current study explored the mediating effect of social rank strategies on the links between adult attachment and workplace-adjustment among 131 engineers. A structural equation modeling revealed that the positive links between attachment security and job performance and the negative links with job stress were mediated by employees’ rank strategies.

Job performance and stress are considered important markers of workplace adjustment. Well-adjusted employees are often described as less stressed, more engaged with their jobs, and more productive (e.g., Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1990). Although theoretical and empirical efforts have been directed toward identifying the psychological sources of workplace adjustment (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) little is known about the ways in which personality affects employees’ adaptation to their work environments.

According to McAdams (1995), individual differences in personality may be described at different levels. He suggests that level I comprises relatively less conditional dimensions of personality and speaks to what a person “has”, and that level II comprises more contextualized strategies and speaks to what a person “does” to solve life tasks and accomplish goals (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Finch, 1997).

Two separate lines of research that emerged from evolutionary psychology perspective and correspond to these two levels of analysis, point to important links between individuals’ characteristics and psychological adjustment. The first is the adult attachment perspective (Hazan and Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and the second is the social rank perspective (Zuroff, Fournier, Patall, Leybman, & Abela, 2009). Drawing on these perspectives, the current study intends to extend existing knowledge on the links between attachment orientations, social rank styles, stress, and job performance.

Attachment Orientations and Workplace Adjustment

From the 1970s and early 1980s, several investigators began to use Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1980), which was originally applied to explain patterns of infant-parent relations (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) as a framework for understanding individual differences in emotion regulation and mental health in adulthood (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Much of the adult attachment literature has focused on individual differences in attachment orientations. Studies from the 1990s (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) revealed that
attachment orientations are most appropriately conceptualized as regions in a two-dimensional space. The first dimension, typically called attachment avoidance, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship partners’ goodwill and strives to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from partners. The second dimension, typically called attachment anxiety, reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need. People who score low on these two dimensions are said to be secure or have a secure attachment orientation. The two dimensions can be measured with reliable and valid self-report scales (e.g., Brennan et al., 1998) and are linked in theoretically predictable ways with relationship quality and affect-regulation strategies (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Shaver & Clark, 1994; Shaver & Hazan, 1993, for reviews). In McAdams’ (1995) terms, individual differences in attachment orientation may be described at level I which speaks to what a person “has”.

In their pioneering study of “love and work” viewed from an attachment-theoretical perspective, Hazan and Shaver (1990) argued that work can be disrupted by attachment insecurities. To test the validity of this idea, Hazan and Shaver assessed work attitudes and orientations in a large self-selected sample of adult newspaper readers and found that people who were securely attached had more positive attitudes toward work and suffered from fewer work-related problems; they were more satisfied with their work activities and less likely than their insecure peers to allow work to interfere with relationships.

Building on Hazan and Shaver’s (1990) study, Hardy and Barkham (1994) found that more anxious or avoidant adults reported lower levels of job satisfaction in a sample of adults who were referred for psychological treatment due to work-related distress. Moreover, anxiously attached people reported more concerns over their job performance, and avoidant people reported more conflicts with co-workers. Other studies have also found that higher levels of attachment anxiety or avoidance are associated with more job dissatisfaction, work-related distress, and burnout (e.g., Krausz, Bizman, & Braslavsky, 2001; Pines, 2004; Ronen & Mikulincer, in press; Ronen & Baldwin, 2009; Schirmer & Lopez, 2001). These associations have also been corroborated in two longitudinal studies. Burge, Hammen, Davila and Daley (1997) found that attachment insecurities in parent-child or romantic relationships predicted decreases in adolescent women’s work functioning 2 years later, and Vasquez, Durik, and Hyde (2002) found that insecure attachment in a sample of parents one year after the birth of their child predicted a greater feeling of work overload 3.5 years later. Of special importance, most of these associations persisted even when other psychological problems (e.g., depression) were statistically controlled. Taken together, these studies indicate that attachment insecurities contribute to poor adjustment to the workplace.

In the current study, we want to follow this line of research and expand it in two specific directions. First, previous studies have mainly focused on two kinds of work outcomes – job satisfaction, and distress or burnout. Beyond attempting to replicate already observed attachment-related variations in stress, we want to examine whether these variations are also manifested in a person’s job performance as reported by his or her direct supervisor. Based on Hazan and Shaver's (1990) contention that "secure attachment seems to support the healthiest and most satisfying approach to work" (p. 276), we hypothesize that more anxious or avoidant individuals would not only show higher levels of perceived stress but also lower levels of job performance. Second, we want to expand the study of the attachment-work adjustment by examining specific variables that can mediate the association between attachment orientations and workplace adjustment. Although previous studies have provided consistent support for the attachment-workplace adjustment link, they have not systematically examined the psychological mechanisms by which attachment insecurities disrupt work functioning. In the present study we would like to examine the mediating role of social rank strategies.
Social Rank Strategies and Workplace Adjustment

Social hierarchies and rank-related behaviors are ubiquitous and common to all human societies (Murdock, 1945). Drawing on the broad theoretical framework provided by evolutionary psychology it has been suggested that the social rank domain resolves problems related to intraspecific competition over resources that could be self-defeating for human communities (Cummins, 2005; Gilbert, 1992). Recently, in a seminal research on social rank strategies, Zuroff, et al., (2009) found that social rank styles, which they defined as "individual differences in preferred strategies for pursuing, defending, and when necessary, relinquishing social rank" (p. 10), could be classified into three nearly independent factors: dominant leadership (DL), coalition-building (CB), and ruthless self-advancement (RSA). DL is described as a strategy that involves dominant, initiative, and assertive behavior with peers. CB is described as a strategy that involves cooperative, respectful, and unassuming behavior with peers, and RSA is described as a strategy that involves pursuing social standing even at the cost of loyalty to peers. In McAdams’ (1995) terms, individual differences in social rank styles may be described at level II which speaks to what a person “does” to solve life tasks and accomplish goals. Zuroff and his colleagues (2009) found that the three rank styles relate differently to attachment orientations on the one hand and to adjustment outcomes on the other. Specifically, their findings revealed that CB was related to low attachment avoidance, lower loneliness, and higher social support; that RSA was related to high attachment avoidance, higher loneliness, and lower social support; and that DL was related to low levels of both attachment anxiety and avoidance, (suggesting that high scorers on DL are associated with attachment security), lower loneliness, and higher social support. These studies were based on self-report data and cross-sectional designs, and the participants in all studies were students. An observation of the associations between attachment orientations, social rank strategies, and work outcomes among working individuals has never been tested before.

We examined the associations between attachment anxiety and avoidance, stress and job performance and asked whether social rank strategies at the workplace plays an important role in linking attachment orientations to stress and job performance. Participants in this study were newly employed high-tech engineers and their managers (direct supervisors). Based on the theoretical and empirical background presented above, our predictions are as follows:

1. Attachment and Work Outcomes: attachment anxiety and avoidance would predict higher level of perceived stress and lower level of job performance
2. Attachment and Social Rank Styles. DL would be predicted by lower attachment anxiety and lower attachment avoidance; CB would be predicted by lower attachment avoidance; RSA would be predicted by higher attachment avoidance.
3. Social Rank Styles and Work Outcomes. DL and CB would predict lower perceived stress; DL would predict higher level of job performance (as reported by managers); and RSA would predict higher stress and lower level of job performance (as reported by managers).
4. Social Rank as a Mediator between Attachment and Work Outcomes. Social rank styles would mediate the links between attachment orientations and work outcomes. Specifically, we predict that DL, CB, and RSA would account for the links between attachment orientations (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) and perceived stress and job performance.
Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study were traced for follow-up when they were undergraduate students at the engineering faculty in one of the major universities in Israel. An email message was sent to each of the students at the faculty, offering them to participate in a longitudinal study on work attitudes. The students were asked to fill and submit an electronic questionnaire through the internet, including their contact information. In return, they were offered to receive a personal feedback based on one of the personality measures they filled. Eight hundred and ninety students participated in the first wave (Time 1) and formed the base sample for the longitudinal study. Anonymity was promised and carefully kept throughout the study. The respondent sample was predominately male (66 percent), and young (average age was 25.10 years, $SD = 2.45$ years; range = 18 to 36 years). Fifteen months later, we sent an email to each of the 287 participants of the first wave, who were in their last B.S.E academic year during the time we collected the first data wave. We invited them to participate in the second wave if they had completed their studies and were working as engineers at a high-tech company for at least 3 months at the time we approached them. For the current study, we focus on a subset of 131 individuals who met these criteria and were willing to participate in the second wave (Time 2). The participants in the second wave received payment in return to their participation in the study. Sixty nine percent of the participants in the second wave were men, and 31% were women. The average age was 27.06 years ($SD = 2.15$ years; range = 21.25 to 33.25 years). Statistical tests revealed no significant differences in any of the assessed variables between engineers from different university departments or between the different occupational groups. Each participant in the second wave was asked to refer his or her immediate supervisor to an internet link where he or she could fill a short questionnaire. Anonymity was promised and carefully kept throughout the study. Forty-one supervisors, mostly men (78% men, and 22% women; average age was 39.43 years, $SD = 6.90$ years; range = 29 to 53 years) volunteered to participate in the study without any payment. They were asked to report on their subordinate's job performance.

Measures

Attachment orientations. Attachment anxiety and avoidance were assessed in Time 1 and Time 2 with a 36-item Hebrew version of the Experience in Close Relationships scale (ECR, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver., 1998). The original scale was translated and then back-translated to English to determine whether the items were properly transformed to Hebrew. Participants rated the extent to which each item described their feelings in close relationships on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very much" (7). Eighteen items tapped attachment anxiety (e.g. “I worry about being abandoned”) and 18 items tapped attachment avoidance (e.g., “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down”). The reliability and validity of the scale have been repeatedly demonstrated (e.g., Brennan et al., 1998, Mikulincer & Florian, 2000). In the current sample, Cronbach alphas were high for both the anxiety items and the avoidance items in both Time 1 and 2. On this basis, two scores were computed for each participant at each wave by averaging items on each scale.

Social rank strategies were assessed in Time 2 with the Rank Style with Peers Questionnaire (RSPQ; Zuroff et al., 2009). The RSPQ comprises three nearly independent scales: dominant leadership (DL), coalition-building (CB), and ruthless self-advancement (RSA). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each item describes the way they relate to peers on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 7 (very much like me). In the original scale, 5 items tap DL (e.g., “I feel comfortable assuming a leadership position”; “I often promote my ideas, views, and goals”), 7 items tap CB (e.g., “I
value teamwork”; “I recognize and praise the valuable contributions of others”), and 5 items tap RSA (e.g., “I will compete if the outcome looks favourable for me”; “I will do whatever it takes to get ahead”). In the present study, we utilized an earlier 36-item version of the RSPQ (see Zuroff et al., 2009). In order to examine the three-factor structure of the scale, a principal components analyses followed by oblique rotation was conducted. The results yielded a robust 3-factor solution (with eigenvalues greater than 1 that explained 45.8% of the variance) that generally matched Zuroff’s classification. In the present study, we chose items that loaded on their respective factor only if the loading was greater than .40. The first factor, which explained 18.9% of the variance, included the same 5 items of the original DL scale. The second factor, which explained 15.6% of the variance, included the original 5 items of the RSA scale and 2 additional items that loaded heavily on this scale. The third factor, which explained 11.3% of the variance, included 6 original items of the CB scale. One item was removed from the scale because it did not meet our criteria. In the current sample, Cronbach alphas were high for the DL items (.83), the RSA items (.75), and the CB items (.75). On this basis, three scores were computed by averaging items on each scale.

Perceived stress at the job was assessed in Time 2 with the Hebrew version of the 10-item self-report form of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS, Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). The original scale was translated and then backtranslated to English to determine the proper transformation of the items to Hebrew. The reliability and validity of the scale have been demonstrated (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). Six of the items are negative (e.g., “How often have you felt nervous or stressed?”), and the remaining 4 are positive (e.g., “How often have you felt that things were going your way?”). Each item is rated for the past month on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). We asked the participants to think about their jobs while answering the questions. In scoring the measure, the 4 positive items were reversed scores, and then all the items were averaged. Thus, high score on the PSS was indicative of high levels of stress. Reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha was high in this sample: .89.

Manager’s performance appraisal of his or her employee was assessed in Time 2 with the Hebrew version of a job performance scale used by Podsakoff, Todor, and Skov (1982). The ten items in this scale represent different dimensions of work performance, including doing more work than is required, setting high goals, attaining the goals that were set, and spending time effectively at work. The original scale was translated and then back-translated to English to determine whether the items were properly transformed to Hebrew. Participants rated the extent to which each item pertains to them on a scale of 1 (very uncharacteristic of myself) to 7 (very characteristic of myself). In the current sample, Cronbach alpha was high for the 10 performance items (.89). On this basis, a single performance score was computed by averaging items on the scale.

Creation of Measurement Variables

To construct manifest indicators of latent attachment anxiety and avoidance, DL, CB, and RSA, perceived stress, and job performance factors, we followed the recommendations of Russell, Kahn, Spoth, and Altmaier (1998). Namely, we created parcels as indicators of each latent variable. First, we conducted, separately for each scale, exploratory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method of extraction, with a single factor extracted for each measure. We then, rank ordered items on the basis of the absolute magnitude of the factor loading and successively assigned triads of items going from the highest to the lowest loading, to each of the three or two parcels to equalize the average loading of each parcel on the respective factor. Subsequently, we created scores on the parcels by computing the average score for each set of items.
Results

Measurement Model

As advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986), structural equation modeling (SEM) is the most efficient and least problematic method of testing mediation. By controlling for measurement error, SEM avoids problems of over and underestimation of mediated effects. It also permits estimation of models that include multiple mediators (e.g. Shadish & Sweeney, 1991). Our SEM analyses were conducted using the AMOS 7.0 program, on the basis of the maximum likelihood estimation procedure. The analysis of the proposed mediation model followed the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first step, we examined the measurement model of the variables by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to estimate the loadings of the manifest indicators on their respective latent variables. We allowed all latent variables to correlate with each other in the model.

 Establishment of a measurement model is achieved by statistically significant loadings, as well as an acceptable model fit. Once an acceptable measurement model is established, the structural model can be tested in the second step. We used 3 indexes to assess the goodness of fit of the measurement and structural models: the Bentler–Bonett's normed fit index (NFI: Bentler & Bonnet, 1980; values higher than .90 represent acceptable model fit), the comparative fit index (CFI: Bentler, 1990; values higher than .90 represent acceptable model fit), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA: Steiger, 1980; values of .08 and lower represent acceptable model fit). The commonly used chi-square index that was developed by Satorra and Bentler (1988) is reported for reasons of completeness but was not consulted for low-n analyses because of its extreme sensitivity to sample sizes. However, we used the chi-square difference test (CSDT; Brown, 1990) in comparing competing models.

In Table 1, we present the loadings of the manifest indicators on their respective latent variables, and in Table 2, we present the correlations between the latent variables. A test of the measurement model resulted in good fit indices, \(\chi^2 (173, N=131) = 231.35\ p = .002; \) NFI = .886; CFI = .967; RMSEA = .049. It therefore appears that all of the latent variables have been well measured by their respective indicators (observed variables). Thus, this measurement model was used to test the hypothetical structural model.
### Table 1

**Loading of the Manifest Indicators on their Respective Latent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Anxiety T1</th>
<th>Avoidance T1</th>
<th>Anxiety T2</th>
<th>Avoidance T2</th>
<th>DL</th>
<th>CB</th>
<th>RSA</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Stress</th>
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<td>.89</td>
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Notes: Anxiety = attachment anxiety; Avoidance = attachment avoidance; DL = dominant leadership; CB = coalition building; RSA = ruthless self-advancement. All loadings (standardized regression weights) are statistically significant at *p < .001.*

### Table 2

**Pearson Correlations between the Latent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Avoidance T1</th>
<th>Anxiety T1</th>
<th>Avoidance T2</th>
<th>Anxiety T2</th>
<th>DL</th>
<th>CB</th>
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<td>.11</td>
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<td>.78***</td>
<td>.28**</td>
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<tr>
<td>DL</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.33***</td>
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<td>CB</td>
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<td>-.48***</td>
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<td>.39**</td>
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<td>.38***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
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<td>-.59***</td>
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</table>

Notes: Anxiety = attachment anxiety; Avoidance = attachment avoidance; DL = dominant leadership; CB = coalition building; RSA = ruthless self-advancement. * p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001
Structural Model for Tests of Mediation

In order to examine hypotheses 2 and 3, that is, whether attachment anxiety and avoidance predict social rank, and whether social rank predicts stress and job performance a structural model was estimated and labeled attachment-rank-outcome model. It specified a path between the two attachment orientations and the three social rank styles, and between social rank styles and the two outcome variables, that is, perceived stress and job performance (see Figure 1). In line with Hypothesis 2, the results indicated that the path coefficient from attachment anxiety and DL was found significant (.31, p<.01); the path coefficient from attachment avoidance and CB was found significant (.43, p<.01); the path coefficient from attachment avoidance and RSA was found significant (.32, p<.01). Contrary to Hypothesis 2, the results indicated that the path coefficient from attachment avoidance and DL was not significant (-.17, p>.05), furthermore, the path coefficient from attachment anxiety and RSA was found significant (.45, p<.01).

In line with Hypothesis 3, the results indicated that the path coefficient from DL and performance (as appraised by the manager) and from DL and perceived stress were found significant (.32, p<.05; -.29, p<.05 respectively); the path coefficient from CB and stress was found significant (.28, p<.01), the path coefficient from RSA and stress and from RSA and performance (as appraised by the manager) were found significant (.20, p<.05; -.29, p<.05 respectively). The model fits very well to the data. Statistics for the model fit are presented at Table 3.

In order to examine hypothesis 4, that is, whether social rank serves as a mediator of the relation between attachment orientation and perceived stress and job performance, four structural models were estimated following Holmbeck (1997) recommendations. The first structural model is the model labeled attachment – work outcomes direct effect model. In accordance with Hypothesis 1, in this model we specified 3 paths between the predictors (i.e., attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the criterion variables (i.e., perceived stress and job performance) in the absence of the mediators (i.e., social rank styles). The significance of these path coefficients serve as prerequisite for testing the mediation effects (Hoyle & Smith, 1994). In line with Hypothesis 1, the results indicated that the path coefficient from attachment anxiety and job performance (as appraised by the manager) was found significant (-.27, p<.05); the path coefficient from attachment anxiety and perceived stress was found significant (.39, p<.01), and the path coefficient from attachment avoidance and perceived stress was found significant (.20, p<.05). However, the path coefficient from attachment avoidance and job performance (as appraised by the manager) was found non-significant (-.08, p>0.05).

The third model was labeled an attachment – work outcomes partially mediated model and it specified direct and indirect paths from the predictors (i.e., attachment styles) to the criteria variables (i.e., perceived stress and job performance). Nine indirect paths were estimated. The three indirect paths from attachment anxiety to perceived stress were set from attachment anxiety to each of the rank styles and then from each of the rank styles to perceived stress (i.e., anxiety-DL-stress, anxiety-CB-stress, anxiety-RSA-stress). The three indirect paths from attachment anxiety to job performance were set from attachment anxiety to each of the rank styles and then from each of the rank styles to job performance stress (i.e., anxiety-DL-performance, anxiety-CB-performance, anxiety-RSA-performance). The three indirect paths from attachment avoidance to perceived stress were set from attachment avoidance to each of the rank styles and then from each of the rank styles to perceived stress (i.e., avoidance-DL-stress, avoidance-CB-stress, avoidance-RSA-stress). Three indirect paths were set: from attachment anxiety to stress (a), from attachment anxiety to job performance (b), and from attachment avoidance to stress (c).
We did not set a direct path from attachment avoidance to job performance because in the direct effect model this path’s coefficient was found non-significant.

After entering the mediators to the model, the previously significant path coefficients from attachment anxiety to job performance, and from attachment avoidance to perceived stress became non-significant (-.03, .15, p>.05 respectively). However, the path coefficient from attachment anxiety to stress remained significant (.28, p<.05). The fourth model was labeled an attachment – work outcomes fully mediated model. The only difference between this model and the partially mediated model is that in the fully mediated model the direct paths from attachment anxiety to job performance and from attachment avoidance to perceived stress were constrained to zero (the results are presented in Table 3).

Figure 1

The final step in our analyses was to compare the partially and fully mediated models, to assess the plausibility of a model where the effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance are fully mediated by
social rank styles. Estimating the fit of the partially and fully mediated models, we expected that a) both the partially and fully mediated models would fit the data and (b) the fit of the fully and partially mediated models would be comparable, which would justify the constraint placed on the direct path between the predictor and the criterion. The results indicate that the partially mediated model and the fully mediated model fit the data very well (see Table 3). A test of the chi-square differences yielded no significant difference between the fully and the partially mediated models, \[ \Delta \chi^2(2, N = 131) = 1.20, P > .05. \] This result indicates that the fit of the partially mediated models was comparable to the fit of the fully mediated models, suggesting that fixing to zero the direct cross-lagged effects of attachment anxiety on job performance and of attachment avoidance on perceived stress was plausible, because it did not reduce model fit.

### Table 3

**Summary Statistics of the Structural Equation Modeling Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>( \chi^2 ) ((N = 131))</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attachment-rank-outcome model</td>
<td>285.6</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>.948</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attachment – work outcomes direct effect model</td>
<td>133.7</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attachment – work outcomes partially mediated model</td>
<td>279.6</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attachment – work outcomes fully mediated model</td>
<td>280.8</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

### Discussion

Achieving higher social status is desirable to all individuals because it “yields resources benefits which provide a selective advantage in future competition” (Nicholson, 1997, p. 1070). Drawing on two perspectives that emerged from evolutionary psychology theory, the adult attachment perspective (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and the social rank perspective (Zuroff, Fournier, Patall, Leybman, & Abela, 2009), the findings of our study suggest that individuals' job stress and job performance may be affected by the strategies they utilize to pursue and defend their social rank, which may be predicted by their attachment orientations.

Specifically, our findings indicate that individuals who utilize higher Dominant Leadership strategies tend to be less anxiously attached, less stressed, and their supervisors tend to rate their job performance as higher. Individual who utilize higher Coalition Building strategies tend to be less avoidant in their attachment and to perceive their jobs as less stressful. In line with our predictions, however, their job performance might not be strongly related to their rank strategy. Individuals who utilize higher Ruthless Self-Advancement strategies tend to be more avoidant and anxiously attached (i.e., to posses
lower levels of attachment security), more stressed, and their supervisors tend to rate their job performance as poor.

Our findings further reveal that social rank strategies serve as mediators between attachment orientations and job stress, and job performance. In accordance with previous findings on the harmful effects of attachment insecurity on workplace functioning and adjustment (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Pines, 2004), our findings demonstrate that attachment insecurity is related to higher levels of stress, and that attachment anxiety is related to lower ratings of job performance (as appraised by the direct supervisors). DL and RSA seem to mediate the link between attachment anxiety and job performance. That is, anxiously attached individuals tend to utilize less DL and more RSA strategies, which are then related to lower levels of performance appraisal. CB and RSA seem to mediate the link between attachment avoidance and perceived job stress. In other words, avoidant individuals tend to utilize less CB and more RSA strategies, which are then related to higher levels of stress. Taken together, these results indicate that whereas DL and CB represent more adaptive ways of rank striving, RSA represent a maladaptive strategy which may not help the individuals who use this strategy to solve life tasks or accomplish life goals.

Our findings extend previous research in several important ways. First, a recent study has indicated that social rank strategies that were found to be associated with attachment orientations, may affect individuals perceived and received support as well as their inner feelings of loneliness (Zuroff, et al., 2009). While the participants in this study were students, our study focused on working individuals to examine the social rank strategies they use in the context of their work environments. We found that individuals' report of the strategies they utilize to pursue social rank at the workplace are closely linked to the experience of job stress and to their level of performance on the job.

Second, in support of the attachment theory, previous studies have demonstrated that attachment insecurity affect individual’s adjustment to their workplace (e.g., Krausz, Bizman, & Braslavsky, 2001; Pines, 2004; Ronen & Mikulincer, in press; Ronen & Baldwin, 2009; Schirmer & Lopez, 2001). To the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first to demonstrate an association between employees’ attachment anxiety and supervisors’ performance ratings. Third, our findings conceptually replicated Zuroff et al., (2009) seminal findings and extended them by indicating that social rank strategies could affect important indicators of workplace adjustment.

A number of limitations of our study deserve discussion. First, our study was based almost entirely on self-reports rather than, for example, peers’ reports or observational methods. While we agree that future research should include such variables to increase validity, self-report measures are appropriate when assessing subjective states such as perceived stress. Second, in the present study we did not control for gender. Although no gender differences in rank style were found in Zuroff et al.’s (in publication) studies, based on Gender Theory it is reasonable to expect that men would tend to utilize more DL strategies than women, and that women would tend to utilize more CB strategies than men.

Research on social rank styles has just begun. As studies on work generally ignore aspects of the social rank domain we hope that this research would encourage further studies on this important topic. The results of the current study have clear implications for the design of organizational intervention procedures, which should be aimed at the modification of rank strategies used by employees in order to enhance effective job performance and alleviate stress.


