

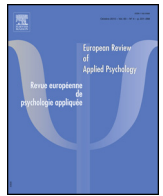


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Original article

## Can emotional bonding be a liability? Status striving as an intervening mechanism in affective commitment and negative work behaviors relationship

*Le lien affectif peut-il être un handicap ? La recherche de statut en tant que mécanisme intervenant dans le lien entre l'engagement affectif et les comportements négatifs au travail*

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** – The dark side of affective commitment has been ignored in the past literature on organizational commitment.

**Objectives.** – Using the tenants of moral self-licensing theory, we examined how affective commitment can cause negative outcomes. We hypothesized that affective commitment leads to unethical pro-organizational behaviors, careerism and counter-productive work behaviors through increased urge for status striving.

**Methods and results.** – A multi-wave and two-source data was obtained ( $n = 306$ ) from employees and their peers working in the service sector of Pakistan. Employing structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis our results indicate that high levels of affective commitment might unleash status striving which further creates unethical pro-organizational behaviors, careerism and CWBs.

**Conclusion.** – The current study opens up a new side in the affective commitment literature by examining status striving as an underlying mechanism through which affective commitment reveals its deleterious consequences for employees.

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### R É S U M É

**Introduction.** – Le côté obscur de l'engagement affectif a été ignoré dans la littérature sur l'engagement organisationnel.

**Objectifs.** – En utilisant les tenants de la théorie de l'auto-accréditation morale nous avons examiné comment l'engagement affectif peut entraîner des résultats négatifs. Nous avons émis l'hypothèse que l'engagement affectif mène à des comportements pro-organisationnels non-éthiques, à un carriérisme et à des comportements de travail contre-productifs par le biais d'un désir accru de lutter pour le statut.

**Méthodes et résultats.** – Des données multi-vagues et provenant de deux sources différentes ont été obtenues ( $n = 306$ ) auprès d'employés et de leurs pairs travaillant dans le secteur des services au Pakistan. À l'aide d'une modélisation par équations structurelles (SEM), nos résultats indiquent que des niveaux élevés d'engagement affectif peuvent être associés à la recherche de statut, ce qui crée davantage de comportements pro-organisationnels non-éthiques, de carriérisme et des comportements contre-productifs.

#### Mots clés :

Engagement affectif

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*Conclusion.* – La présente étude ouvre une nouvelle voie dans la littérature sur l'engagement affectif en examinant la recherche de statut comme un mécanisme sous-jacent par lequel l'engagement affectif révèle ses conséquences délétères pour les employés.

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## 1. Introduction

For the past few decades' organizational commitment has been viewed as a positive construct promoting beneficial outcomes for employees and their resulting organizations (Addae, Praveen Parboteeah, & Davis, 2006). Commitment can be viewed as a psychological state that includes an employee's relationship with the respective organization and his/her choice of retaining membership with the organization. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment is a composition of three dimensions, i.e., affective commitment which focuses on employee's emotional attachment as the primary reason for staying with the organization. Continuance commitment, which, is a need to stay with the organization as the costs of leaving are high and lastly normative commitment which is characterized by a sense of obligation to stay in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Previous research on organizational commitment highlight that out of the three commitment types, affective commitment is the strongest. Affective commitment has been shown to be related to a number of outcomes such as enhanced in-role performance, OCBs (Meyer et al., 1990; Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004) reduced turnover intentions, CWBs, absenteeism and job insecurity (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Gill, Meyer, Lee, Shin, & Yoon, 2011). Although the bright side of affective commitment has been established since long, however the dark aspects of an emotional bonding like affective commitment has been relatively ignored (Klein, 2016). Recent rise in corporate scandals worldwide such as Enron, World com and GE highlight the prevalence of unethical behaviors. Researchers believe not only dark behaviors as the root cause for promoting a wide array of unethical behaviors but also positive constructs such as identification, OCBs and even affective commitment might play a role in creating such negative acts (Conroy, Henle, Shore, & Stelman, 2017; Yam, Klotz, He, & Reynolds, 2017).

In line with this, the present study sheds light on the negative effects of affective commitment and corroborate three new and unique outcomes i.e. unethical pro-organizational behaviors, careerism and CWBs. Unethical pro-organizational behaviors (UPB) is a separate type of unethical behavior which encompasses actions that are voluntary not part of one's job description, that are unethical but that are performed to benefit the organization (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). For instance, UPBs may include acts of commission i.e. cooking numbers to enhance analytic projections and stock values or actions including omission e.g. hiding information about the health related hazards of a pharmaceutical product (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Careerism another self-interested unethical behavior is defined as the propensity to pursue career advancement through non-performance-based means (Feldman & Weitz, 1991). Whereas Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) are voluntary actions aimed at harming the organization or its members (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). We argue on the basis of Moral Licensing theory (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010), that affective commitment might cause individuals to engage in unethical behaviors directed towards helping the organization in the form of higher UPBs whereas lower careerism and CWBs.

Klein (2016) in their call for papers on the special issue of organizational commitment highlight a need for researchers to look beyond the sunny side of affective commitment and examine new and unique mechanisms through which affective commitment

might expose its negative consequences. We unveil one such mechanism of status striving through which affective commitment might become a liability for individuals and organizations. Status striving is a basic human motive and an assumed behavior which may be judged without any prejudice. Status striving denotes actions aimed at obtaining power and control within a status hierarchy (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002). An individual may have more hunger for attaining higher prestige than for money and material possession acquisition (Barkow, 1975). Seeing the rewards gained by individuals who are at the top, it is not a matter of surprise that striving for status, in terms of prestige, respect, and recognition by others is deemed as a basic human motive (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

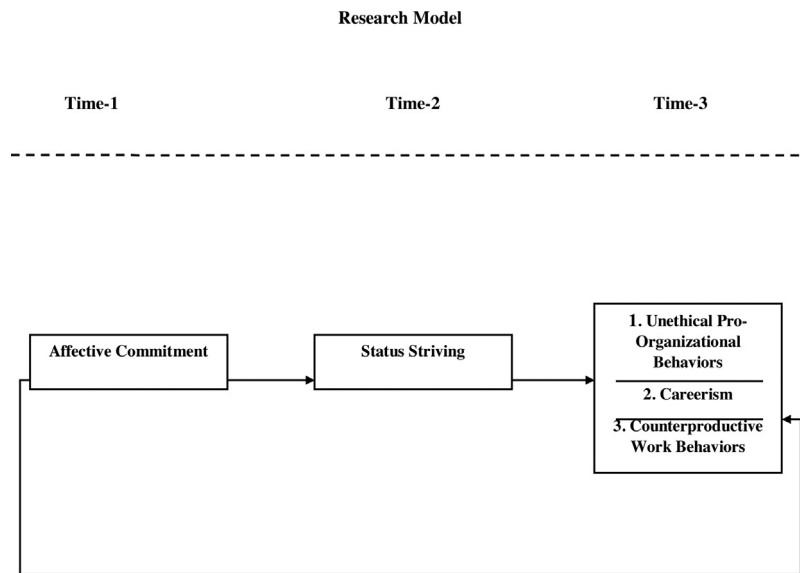
Those who have reached at a particular status in the social hierarchy are usually admired and rewarded for doing so (Pettit, Sivanathan, Gladstone, & Marr, 2013) hence pursuit of status is seen in a positive light. But at the same time, numerous researches findings cast doubt on the overwhelmingly positive significance attached to status. For instance, outcomes linked to higher status like power, financial success and physical attractiveness do not necessarily predict subjective well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Ryan et al., 1999; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Even some studies connote that a desire for high status does not indicate a core human value rather it is a sign of psychological maladjustment (Emmons, 1991; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Nickerson, Schwarz, Diener, & Kahneman, 2003). Hence, status striving does not imply always positive connotations for individuals.

Consistent with this we probe into the dark side of affective commitment and postulate status striving as an important process via which affective commitment might be burdensome for organizations. We base our study's arguments on the assumptions of Moral licensing theory (Merritt et al., 2010) which elucidates that individuals who initially behave in a moral way can later on display immoral, unethical or otherwise problematic behaviors. We believe that affectively committed employees draw confidence from their prior moral conduct and use their emotional attachment as an excuse to indulge in suspicious actions. Based on the tenants of this theory, we contend that affective commitment would help individuals to develop a moral image in the eyes of others which would permit them to gain higher rewards and power in the form of enhanced status striving. Increased emotional bonding gives them a licence to acquire power resulting in more status striving causing them to engage in immoral actions such as unethical pro-organizational behaviors (UPB), careerism and CWBs (Fig. 1).

## 2. Theory and hypothesis

### 2.1. Moral licensing theory

We built our research model on the assumptions of Moral licensing theory which elucidates that individuals who initially act morally can afterwards engage in unethical, immoral or otherwise problematic behaviors (Merritt et al., 2010). In other words, when people perceive threat that their upcoming actions might be (or seem to be) morally dubious, they draw confidence from their prior moral conduct, such that possessing a clean track record in the past enhances one's tendency to get involved in suspicious actions in the future (Merritt et al., 2010). Moral licensing can develop through



**Fig. 1.** Research model. The figure shows a time lagged mediated model whereby affective commitment leads to unethical pro-organizational behaviors, careerism and counterproductive work behaviors through status striving.

two unique pathways i.e. through ‘moral credits’ or via ‘moral credentials’ (Miller & Effron, 2010).

In the moral credits model, when individuals engage in good behaviors their moral self-worth enhances whereas in case of bad deeds their self-concept declines (Nisan, 1990). As people generally attempt to maintain a balance between good and bad deeds they are normally driven to enhance their moral self-regard when it is below the threshold point (e.g. moral cleansing) (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). On the other hand once individuals have performed sufficient amount of good deeds at a point where they have established a moral image in the eyes of others, they are permitted to deflate their moral self-regard by engaging in immoral acts (i.e. moral licensing) (Monin & Miller, 2001). In simple words, one’s moral self-regard is similar to one’s bank account where moral behaviors credit one’s account whereas immoral acts debit one’s account. The second path of moral licensing is called as moral credentials which assume that an individual’s moral self-regard remain stable. Instead one’s past behaviors and other important resources makes even morally dubious acts seem as if they are not wrongdoings at all (Miller & Effron, 2010). Hence individuals past good deeds aid in the development of one’s moral credentials which authorizes them to act in immoral ways without discrediting themselves (Merritt et al., 2010). Therefore, based on both the assumptions of this theory, we assert that affectively committed individuals because of their emotional attachment might establish a favourable moral image and gain moral credits which allow them to strive for higher status. Higher status in combination with their past good deeds grants these individuals moral credential which provides them a license to engage in negative behaviors like unethical pro-organizational behaviours (UPB), careerism and CWBs.

## 2.2. Affective commitment and negative work behaviors relationship

We employ the theoretical assumptions of moral licencing theory to justify the role affective commitment can play in unleashing higher UPBs and lower Careerism and CWBs. According to Moral licensing theory (Merritt et al., 2010) when a person has established a moral image, he/she may go for immoral behaviour. An individual’s assessment of his/her moral self-worth and the costs linked

with pro-social conduct decide whether he/she will show moral or immoral behavior (Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009). In other words, when individuals reflect upon past incidences of their own morally credible actions they will feel more at ease while indulging in behaviors that are seen as morally questionable (Miller & Effron, 2010). This theory contends that individuals tend to maintain a moral equilibrium whereby good deeds raise one’s moral self-concept and bad deeds deflate oneself below the threshold. Hence when people perform good deeds their moral self-regard gets elevated at a level above the equilibrium point which authorizes these individuals to engage in immoral actions thereby letting their self-regard to bounce back to the moral equilibrium (Merritt et al., 2010; Miller & Effron, 2010; Monin & Jordan, 2009). We believe that affectively committed individuals because of their immense emotional attachment have earned and also elevated their moral self-regard in the eyes of others which permits them to then engage in morally questionable behaviors in the form of unethical behaviors benefitting the organization.

Employees high on organizational commitment identify strongly with their respective organizations or firms (Cullinan, Bline, Farrar, & Lowe, 2008). A recent study by Ebrahimi and Yurtkoru (2017) found positive relationship between affective commitment and UPB. In this connection, we believe that an affectively committed worker may gain a moral licence due to their strong emotional bond with their organization. As a result of establishing legitimacy and gaining acceptance in the eyes of others, such affectively committed employees free themselves of following moral rules, and hence, engage in UPBs in order to benefit their organization thus resulting in higher UPBs.

Careerist individuals believe that achieving status, power and rewards depends on something beyond one’s performance. Careerists assume that career advancements are based on other non-performance means such as establishing fruitful social relationships with the supervisor/peers and casting an impression on others as a “team-player” (Feldman & Weitz, 1991). Careerism emerges whenever an individual develops feelings of incompatibility between personal and organizational objectives (Chay & Aryee, 1999; Feldman & Weitz, 1991). Previous research already depicts that affectively committed employees entail feelings of belongingness, increased goal congruence between organizations and one-self and decreased job insecurity (Chay & Aryee, 1999; Cheng & Chan, 2008; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002). Hence affectively

committed employees might inhibit the use of non-performance means to excel in their careers decreasing careerism. We contend that since affectively committed employees have established their reputation and moral integrity by staying loyal with the organization, such individuals in order to gain moral credibility might want to maintain their image and hence would refrain from engaging in negative acts thus decreasing careerism.

Past research has already established a negative relationship between employees who are affectively committed and CWBs (Dalal, 2005; Gill et al., 2011). This relationship assumes that high affective commitment on part of employees makes them feel more obliged to abide by organizational norms and values and less likely to indulge in CWBs directed towards the organization (Tian, Zhang, & Zou, 2014). Consistent with empirical research in this domain, we utilize moral licensing theory (Merritt et al., 2010) to propose the negative effects of affective commitment on CWBs. According to Miller and Effron (2010), moral licence does not mean that individuals directly seek out to perform deviant acts or go against organizational norms. In fact moral licence assumes that individuals firstly build their moral worth by abstaining from immoral or unethical behaviors. Another reason as to why we believe that individuals having higher emotional attachment with the organization in the form of affective commitment might refrain from engaging in CWBs is due to the fear that they might get morally discredited.

Past researches have already demonstrated that individuals seek out opportunities to behave morally first in order to gain a license for engaging in subsequent dubious or immoral act (Blanken, Van de Ven, & Zeelenberg, 2015). In line with this, we corroborate that emotional bonding in the form of high affective commitment puts a psychological restrain on these individuals not to violate rules or engage in self-interested behaviours. Affective commitment puts a sense of emotional pressure on individuals to prove their moral character in front of others which would cause them to although engage in UPBs for showing their devotion to organization but lower careerism and CWBs. These affectively committed employees by following organizational norms and showing their blind loyalty gain a certificate that they are morally superior, reliable and are authorized to all kinds of behaviors hence achieving moral legitimacy and moral licence for future illegal acts. Thus, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1.** Affective commitment is positively related to (a) unethical pro-organizational behaviors and negatively related to (b) careerism and (c) CWBs.

### 2.3. Status striving as an intervening mechanism in affective commitment-negative work behaviors relationship

Research on status striving assumes that acquiring higher position and prestige is a fundamental necessity and that individuals are more interested in attaining social standing than gaining monetary and financial rewards (Barkow, 1975). Affectively committed individuals feel that their contributions are more and deserve a higher status and name. We believe that it is easier for affectively committed employees to morally establish themselves in eyes of others. Such emotional bonding pays dividends to these employees as they ascertain their moral worth by pushing for higher position and enhanced status within the hierarchy. Past research already establishes that people want to reach higher status because those enjoying higher positions are judged less negatively even if they are ethically wrong (Polman, Pettit, & Wiesenfeld, 2013).

Under the moral licensing theory (Merritt et al., 2010), we argue that affectively committed individuals pursue higher status in order to gain a moral license for subsequent dubious acts. Research has demonstrated that affectively committed individuals strongly identify with the organization and exert extra effort to continue their membership in the organization (Meyer & Allen,

1991; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). In accordance with moral licensing theory (Miller & Effron, 2010), we believe that affectively committed individuals because of demonstrating loyalty and belongingness with the organization are able to easily earn moral credits which make it easy for such individuals to then pursue higher prestige, power and designation leading towards high status striving. Since affectively committed employees are more dedicated and show greater readiness to achieve organizational goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991); they are more likely to attain moral credentials where their past reputation authorizes them to strive for attaining higher status in the organizational hierarchy. Affectively committed employees since wish to remain in the organization longer and devote themselves for the success of the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990) such individuals while using their moral credits and moral credential feel their right to seek for acquiring a better rank, power and position thus promoting high levels of status striving. Thus, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2.** Affective commitment is positively related to status striving.

Status striving denotes an agentic interpersonal motives (Hogan, 1996). Whereas communal striving induces people to connect with fellow individuals, agentic motives force individuals to utilize interpersonal influence in order to gain power and dominance within a hierarchy (Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). Past research signifies a positive relationship between a yearning for higher status and UPB (Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, 2016). According to moral licensing theory, we believe that individuals holding a moral license feel free to get indulged in morally questionable behaviours, because they are no more concerned about the signals they may send to others by performing questionable behaviors (Miller & Effron, 2010).

Individuals who are high on status striving due to their enhanced status and prestige have a moral pass that they can go beyond any means to protect their organization causing increased UPBs. Their higher status gives them legal as well as moral authority to deviate from societal norms in order to give an advantage to the organization. High status striving individuals may perform unethical acts to favour the organization since these power hungry individuals might believe that helping the organization even through illicit means might advance their name and repute giving rise to higher UPBs. Past research depict that individuals who are high on status striving attempt to engage in actions which elevates their social standing, respect and social approval in the eyes of others (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001). Consistent with moral licensing theory we believe that high status striving individuals because of their higher prestige in the society have earned themselves moral credential. High status strivers might use their moral standing as a license to engage in unethical acts to benefit the organization which will help them seek further admiration from others in the organization and to maintain their positive image thereby enhancing UPOBs.

Individuals striving for high status are more interested in achieving power and dominance over others (Marszal-Wisniewska & Siembab, 2012) and chase their own self-interests (Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009). We believe that high status striving might allow individuals to seek their career interests utilizing non-performance means to maintain their status and engage in CWBs. Also, individuals trying to get to the upper levels of hierarchy might think that they no more need to follow moral rules and ethical standards do not apply to them resulting in increased careerism and CWBs. Research demonstrates that high status striving individuals want to ascend the organizational ranks so as to gain access to a number of social, financial and psychological benefits (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012). On the basis of moral licensing



theory, we contend that high status strivers will utilize their moral reputation as a permit to engage in nepotism, favouritism and other non-performance based means so as to climb the organizational hierarchy thus increasing careerism. Though moral violations are usually reprehensible, the readiness to license such violations might be colored to some extent by the status of the wrongdoer (Polman et al., 2013). Thus, status striving gives an individual moral credential whereby he/she is allowed to seek their career interests through other non-performance means to achieve success thus promoting careerism. Since high status strivers attempt to control their external environment by demonstrating assertiveness and decisiveness (Marszał-Wisniewska & Siembab, 2012), such power hungry individuals as a result of their past moral standing will openly violate organizational norms without anyone holding them accountable for such actions thereby increasing CWBs. Thus, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 3.** Status striving is positively related to (a) unethical pro-organizational behaviors (b) careerism and (c) CWBs

We believe that affective commitment results in negative ramifications through status striving. When individuals are affectively committed to their organization, they start striving hard for a higher status in pursuing higher prestige, name, and a license to their subsequent immoral behaviour. When, this happens, an individual because of moral licensing (Merritt et al., 2010) starts feeling that he/she has already proven himself/herself so much that there is no need for following moral principles anymore. This is the stage when the moral disengagement starts internally. It is part of a larger moral self-regulation framework (Blanken et al., 2015). Hence, the license achieved by affectively committed individuals after pursuing status makes them to morally disengage and start performing immoral acts of UPB, careerism and CWBs. The pursuit of higher status makes affectively committed individuals to shun the moral standards and engage more in UPB, careerism and CWBs.

Furthermore, moral licensing happens when prior moral conduct makes people more likely to engage in immoral behaviour without worrying about feeling or appearing as immoral (Monin & Miller, 2001). Likewise, moral self-licensing happens, when due to good deeds people start feeling secure in their moral self-regard (Merritt et al., 2010). Moral licensing highlights an individual's past good conduct (Blanken et al., 2015). We assert that high levels of emotional bonding in the form of affective commitment earns an individual moral credibility and warrants individuals to achieve pursuit of higher status and rewards making them behave unethically subsequently promoting higher instances of UPBs, Careerism and CWBs. Thus, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 4.** Status striving mediates the relationship between affective commitment and (a) unethical pro-organizational behaviors (b) careerism and (c) CWB.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants and procedures

The current study employed a three-wave time lagged research design where each measurement point was temporally separated by 3 weeks. To address the concerns of same source and cross-sectional data, we conducted a field survey with time lagged data collected at three different time periods from two sources (e.g. self and co-workers). Specifically, we measured our independent variable (e.g. organizational commitment) at time-1, our mediator (Status Striving) at time-2 and negative work behaviors (i.e., unethical pro-organizational behaviors and careerism) at time-3 with a time interval of 3 weeks between each time gap from employees through self-reports. Moreover, CWBs were tapped

from employee's peers at time 3. As employees spend a lot of time with their colleagues, hence, they are in a better position to give a clear view about their work behaviors. Past research in top tier journal has depicted successful use of peers to rate employee behaviors (Raja & Johns, 2010).

Temporally segregated field survey was conducted from employees-peer dyads working in a variety of organizations belonging to the service sector in Islamabad, Pakistan. Particularly we had 6 organizations of which one was a district court; one was a telecom company, a private bank, a hospital and two higher education universities in Islamabad. A cover letter explaining the purpose and scope of study was used to ensure the anonymity of responses.

The HR departments of respective organizations were contacted previously to allow access to workers and their colleagues for a period of about 3–5 months. Each questionnaire had a specific tracking ID in order to reach the specific employee successfully at time 2 and 3. For proper measurement of time gap, each questionnaire had specific time interval date specification. Additionally, the employees were requested to specify their co-workers with whom they had spent time for at least 6 months who can be reached for the peer-rated data. The employees were ensured that the employee-peer dyads will be made of the data received. Furthermore, it was ensured that the employees and co-workers do not match or see their specific data. To avoid issues of data nesting, it was ensured that no co-worker rate more than 2 employees for the peer rated data.

At time-1, about 650 questionnaires were distributed out of which 510 usable responses were received making a response rate of about 78% at this stage. After about three weeks, the specific respondents were requested to fill out the second part for tapping the mediator variable. About 400 usable questionnaires were received making a response rate of 62% at time-2. The respondents were contacted again after time 2, to fill out the third part of the survey containing the outcome variables. Sidewise, at same time, the peer-rated part was distributed among the employee's co-workers to get data for the CWB. Completely usable self-reported questionnaires matched for all time waves were about 345 at this stage. Now, the peer rated surveys had 39 unusable which were discarded due to missing data making the final figure of 306 three-time wave employee peer dyads making the final response rate of about 47%.

The study participants varied considerably in their age groups, hierarchical levels, gender and other demographics. About 77.5% of the respondents were male and 22.5% were female. The average age of respondents was 32.18 years. The education level of most of the respondents was masters and above (i.e., 57.5%) whereas 42.5% had bachelors and above qualification. About 74.2% of the employees worked in HR/admin/management department, 6.2% in finance/audit/accounting, 15% in IT/Telecom and 4.6% in Operations/Logistics department. About 64.4% had HR/admin/management as their area of specialization, 15% had finance/accounting/audit, 16.7% had IT/Telecom, 3.3% had marketing and about 7% had operations/logistics as their area of specialization. Overall, 19.6% of the respondents worked at the technical/front-line level, 30.1% at the entry-level, 37.3% worked at the middle management level whereas 13.1% worked at the top management level. On average, the working experience of employees with the current organization was 6.60 (SD = 6.13) years, and their total experience was 8.32 (SD = 6.84) years on average.

#### 3.2. Measures

English is the official language of most of the corporate sector and also medium of instruction at colleges and universities in Pakistan. Further majority of our participants were Master's degree holders depicting that they had the ability to read and understand English language. Past studies utilizing questionnaires in English

language in Pakistan have demonstrated no serious issues concerning language (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckennooghe, 2014; Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, & Darr, 2016).

In addition, given the time lagged nature of the data collected, we also had to explain respondents the process for filling out the questionnaire and clarified any uncertainties regarding our study's measures. Thus, due to the above mentioned reasons we kept the original English versions of all the measures in the present study and did not translate our surveys into Urdu. All scales were measured on a seven point likert scale ranging from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 7 = 'Strongly Agree'. Higher values indicated high levels of the variable captured through the measure.

### 3.2.1. Affective commitment

We measured affective commitment of employees through self-reports at time-1 by using 8-items from the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Sample items included "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization"; "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me" and "I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it". The Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this scale in current study is 0.86.

### 3.2.2. Status striving

11-item scale developed by Barrick et al. (2002) was utilized to measure status striving at time-2 through self-reports. Sample items for this scale are "I feel a thrill when I think about getting a higher status position at work"; "I get worked up thinking about ways to become the highest performing employee" and "I frequently think about ways to advance and obtain better pay or working conditions". The Cronbach alpha for this scale in current research is 0.92.

### 3.2.3. Unethical pro-organizational behaviors

A 6-item scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010) was utilized to measure UPBs through self-reports at time-3. Sample items included "If it would help my organization I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good"; "If needed, I would conceal information from the public that could be damaging to my organization" and "If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services and clients to customers and clients". The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.88 in current research.

### 3.2.4. Careerism

The 23-item scale developed by Feldman and Weitz (1991) was used to measure careerism at time-3 via self-reports. Sample items for this scale are "It is hard to get ahead in an organization on sheer merit alone"; "In terms of getting ahead in an organization, looking and acting like a winner can be more instrumental than simply being very competent" and "Who you know is more important than what you know". The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.94 in current study.

### 3.2.5. Counterproductive work behaviors

We used the 14 item two-dimensional scale by Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield (1999) for measuring counter-productive work behaviors at time-3 from the employee's colleagues. This scale is composed of two parts, i.e. CWBO composed of 7-items measuring the organizational deviance or CWBs aimed at the organization and CWBI comprised of 7-items corresponding to interpersonal deviance or CWB aimed at the other individuals in the same organization. Sample items for this scale are: This person. ... "Left work early without permission"; "Intentionally arrived late for work" and "Refused to talk to a co-worker".

Both dimensions of CWB were measured from the peers at the same time hence we performed the CFA to ascertain the

discriminant validity of both the dimensions. Our results indicated that the one-factor aggregate model had a higher fit ( $\chi^2 = 126.74$ ,  $df = 43$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .99, GFI = .94, NFI = .98, RMSEA = 0.08) as compared to the two factor dimensional model for the construct ( $\chi^2 = 905.20$ ,  $df = 71$ , CFI = 0.88, GFI = 0.69, NFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.20). Furthermore, the alpha reliability for the aggregate CWB scale was found to be 0.98.

### 3.3. Confirmatory factor analysis (Time-3 self-reported variables)

As the negative behaviors of UPB and Careerism were tapped from same source at the same time, hence to establish the discriminant validity, CFA was performed. Results showed better fitness for the two-factor model, keeping UPBs and careerism separate ( $\chi^2 = 911.37$ ,  $df = 238$ , CFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.83, NFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.10) as compared to a one factor model combining both UPB and careerism ( $\chi^2 = 3107.63$ ,  $df = 309$ , CFI = 0.61, GFI = 0.51, NFI = 0.59, RMSEA = .17). Hence, we kept both the constructs separate. Furthermore, a series of Confirmatory factor analysis were performed composed of alternative models. All of the alternative models showed worst fit as compared to the hypothesized 5-factor full measurement model. Results are presented in Table 1.

## 4. Results

The means, standard deviations, correlations and cronbach alpha reliabilities of the study variables are presented in Table 1. Bivariate correlation analysis showed that affective commitment (T1) has significant positive relation with status striving (T2) ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and significantly negatively correlated with unethical pro-organizational behaviors (T3) ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), Careerism at ( $r = -.78$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and Counterproductive work behaviors ( $r = -.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, status striving was significantly and positively correlated with UPB ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and CWB ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and not related to Careerism ( $r = -.09$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ) (Table 2).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was employed using AMOS 21 in order to test our direct and mediation hypotheses. SEM is a statistical technique helping the researchers to analyze and verify a series of structural paths, i.e., regression equations (Byrne, 2013). SEM technique is extensively used and is composed of two parts, i.e. full measurement model composed of the CFA and the structural model. Hence, firstly, the Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) was performed. Based on the results of CFA, the direct and mediation hypotheses of the study were analysed using the structural modelling technique (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). For validating our mediation hypotheses, the bootstrapping technique was used for testing indirect effects because of its significance in verifying mediation models (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

### 4.1. Measurement model (full CFA model)

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted in order to test and authenticate the full measurement model composed of 5 variables (i.e. Affective Commitment, Status Striving, UPB, Careerism and CWB) in current study. Our findings suggest that the hypothesized five-factor model adequately fits the data ( $\chi^2 = 3865.85$ ,  $df = 1366$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.83$ , CFI = 0.88, GFI = 0.69, NFI = 0.83, RMSEA = 0.08). Hence, full measurement model was supported. The full CFA model also showed that the factor loadings for each item of the respective variables were 0.3 and above. The factor loadings for each item of the respective constructs are presented in Fig. 2.

**Table 1**  
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Model	$\chi^2$	Df	$\chi^2/\text{Df}$	CFI	GFI	NFI	RMSEA
M0: hypothesized 5 factor model	3865.85	1366	2.83	.88	.69	.83	.08
M1: 4 factor model by combining UPB and careerism into one factor	7324.69	1496	4.90	.72	.48	.67	.11
M2: 3 factor model by combining UPB, careerism and CWB into one factor	9085.44	1499	6.06	.63	.34	.59	.13
M3: 3 factor model by combining affective commitment and status striving into one, UPB and careerism into one factor	6299.39	1404	4.89	.76	.51	.72	.11
M4: 2 factor model by combining affective commitment and status striving into one, UPB, careerism and CWB into one factor	9607.55	1501	6.40	.61	.34	.57	.13
M5: one factor model	10497.02	1502	6.99	.56	.28	.53	.14

$n = 306$ ; where UPB: unethical pro-organizational behaviors, CWB: counterproductive work behaviors.

**Table 2**  
Means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities for the main variables under study.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Affective commitment (Time-1)	4.13	1.49	(.86)				
2. Status striving (Time-2)	5.20	1.08	.22**	(.92)			
3. UPBs (Time-3)	4.21	1.36	-.22**	.53**	(.88)		
4. Careerism (Time-3)	4.32	1.16	-.78**	-.09	.26**	(.94)	
5. CWBs (Peer reported)	3.31	1.84	-.56**	.20**	.63**	.53**	(.98)

$n = 306$ ; control variables are organization type, department, designation, age, gender, education, present experience and total experience. One dummy code/variable each was generated to control the effects of DOrgtype1, DDept3, DDesign1, and DDesign4. Education (1: bachelors and below, 2: masters and above) and gender (0: male, 1: female) had two categories whereas age, present experience and total experience were continuous variables, hence, their effects were directly controlled in all analyses. Where UPB: unethical pro-organizational behaviors; CWBs: counterproductive work behaviors. Alpha reliabilities are presented in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

#### 4.2. Structural equation modelling results

After getting an adequate fit for our hypothesized 5-factor measurement model, and eradication of all alternative models, we ran our structural model using SEM technique in order to test our study hypotheses. Our structural model showed good fit for the data ( $\chi^2 = 3889.10$ ,  $df = 1369$ ,  $CFI = 0.88$ ,  $NFI = 0.83$ ,  $GFI = 0.69$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.08$ ). The results are presented in Tables 3a and 3b for hypotheses testing using SEM, moreover, Fig. 3 depicts the standardized path coefficients, their significance and percentage variance.

Hypothesis 1a, 1b and 1c state that affective commitment is positively related to UPB and negatively related to careerism, and CWB respectively. Our results ran contrary to 1a where affective commitment at T1 showed significant and negative association with UPB at T3 ( $\beta = -0.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Affective commitment showed 57% variation in UPB. Hence, H1a was not supported. Moreover, H1b and 1c were proved as shown by results in Table 3a, where affective commitment at T1 showed negative and significant relationship with careerism at T3 ( $\beta = -0.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and CWB at T3 ( $\beta = -0.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Affective commitment showed 68% variance in Careerism and 65% in CWB respectively. Hence, H1b and 1c were supported.

H2 states that affective commitment is positively related to status striving. Results indicated that affective commitment at T1 is significantly and positively related to status striving at T2 ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Affective commitment showed 4% variation in status striving. Hence, H2 was supported. H3a states that status striving is positively related to UPB. Results indicated that status striving at T2 was significantly and positively related to UPB at T3 ( $\beta = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, H3a was supported. H3b states that status striving is positively related to careerism. Status striving (T2) and careerism (T3) are not related ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ), thus, H3b was not supported. H3c states that status striving is positively related to CWB. H3c was proved as status striving (T2) had a positive and significant association with CWB (T3) ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis 4a, 4b and 4c are mediation hypotheses. H4a states that status striving mediates the relationship between affective commitment and UPB. We used bootstrapping technique, and results indicated that the indirect effects of time lagged affective commitment on UPB through status striving (indirect effect = 0.12,  $p < 0.01$ ) was significant (two tailed significance with normal distribution). Results were confirmed through the bootstrap bias corrected 95% CI which showed non-zero (0.06, 0.24). Hence, H4a was supported. Likewise, H4b states that status striving mediates the relationship between affective commitment and careerism. Bootstrapping results indicated that indirect effects of Affective Commitment on careerism via status striving are non-significant. These results were confirmed through the bootstrap bias corrected 95% CI which showed zero ( $-0.01$ , .03). Hence, H4b was not supported. H4c states that status striving mediates the relationship between affective commitment and CWB. The bootstrapping results show that indirect effects of affective commitment on CWB via Status striving (indirect effects = 0.07,  $p < 0.01$ ) were significant (two tailed significance with normal distribution). These results were confirmed through the bootstrap bias corrected 95% CI which also showed non-zero (0.02, 0.16). Hence, H4c was supported.

#### 5. Discussion

For more than two decades, affective commitment has attracted research attention reflecting it as an employee's emotional attachment with their respective organization (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). Previous research depicts affective commitment as a constructive construct with a wide array of beneficial outcomes for both individuals and organizations (Ashford et al., 1989; Gill et al., 2011; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Vandenberghe et al., 2004). Although there is plethora of research examining its positive consequences, there might be instances where emotional bonding can be a liability (Klein, 2016).

Increase incidences of unethical behaviors world-wide has opened up the possibility of examining positive constructs like organizational identification, OCBs and even affective commitment



## Measurement Model

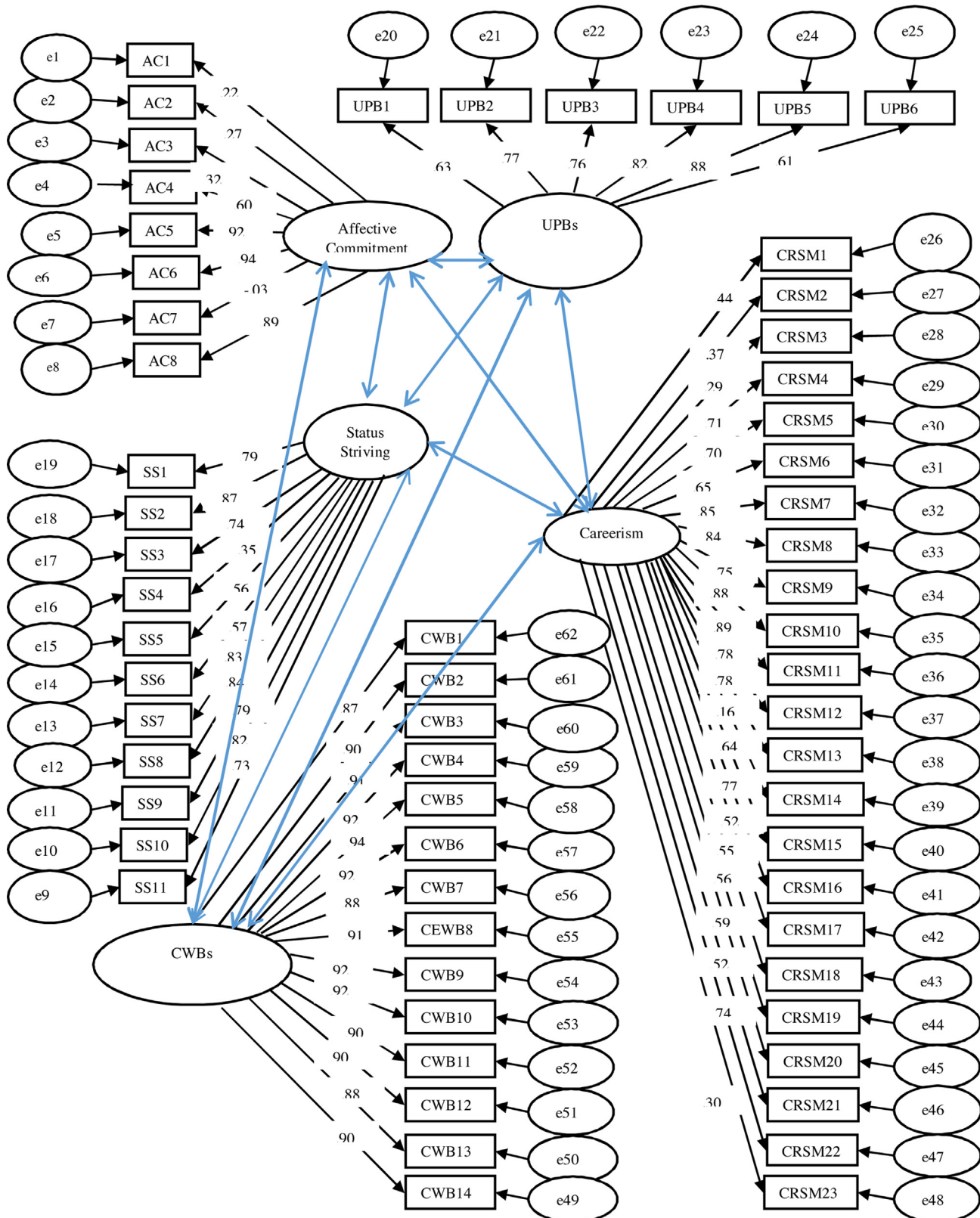


Fig. 2. Measurement model.

as plausible factors promoting negative work behaviors (Conroy et al., 2017; Koopman, Lanaj, & Scott, 2016). The present study contributes to the literature on the dark side of affective commitment by examining three outcomes i.e. UPBs, Careerism and CWBs due

to being emotionally attached with the organization. Building on the assumptions of moral licencing theory (Merritt et al., 2010), we hypothesize that affective commitment might help gain individuals establish their integrity and gain a moral licence which would then



**Table 3a**

Mediation analysis results based on standardized regression weights from SEM. Standardized direct path coefficients of the hypothesized model.

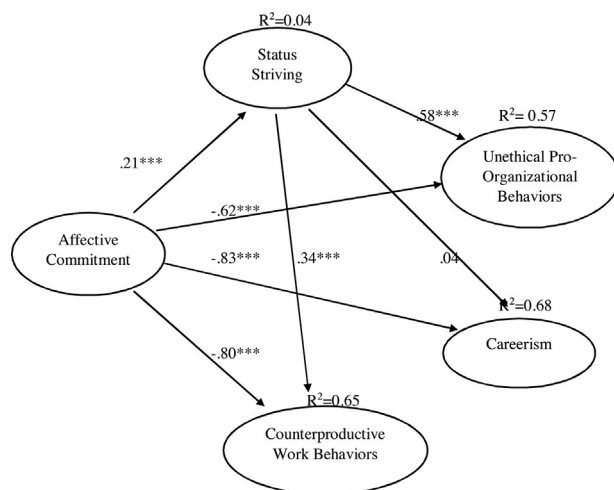
Hyp No.	Direct paths	Estimate	SE	CR
H1a	Affective commitment→UPBs	-.62***	.32	-4.41
H1b	Affective commitment→Careerism	-.83***	.28	-4.18
H1c	Affective commitment→CWBs	-.80***	.67	-4.78
H2	Affective commitment→Status striving	.21***	.17	3.21
H3a	Status striving→UPBs	.58***	.07	8.35
H3b	Status striving→Careerism	.04	.02	.46
H3c	Status striving→CWBs	.34***	.08	6.87

**Table 3b**

Mediation analysis results based on standardized regression weights from SEM. Standardized indirect path coefficients of the hypothesized model.

Indirect paths		Bootstrapping		BC 95% CI	
		Indirect effect	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit
H4a	Affective commitment→status striving→UPBs	.38***	.05	.06	.24
H4b	Affective commitment→status striving→careerism	.01	.01	−.01	.03
H4c	Affective commitment→status striving→CWBs	.33***	.03	.02	.16

$n = 306$ ; bootstrap sample size = 2000, BC 95% CI: bootstrap confidence intervals. \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .



**Fig. 3.** Hypothesized structural model and structural equation model (SEM) results.  $n = 306$ ; full structural model showing direct and mediating effects for variables under study. Mediation paths run from affective commitment to status striving to unethical pro-organizational work behaviours, careerism and counterproductive work behaviours. Standardized regression weight values are shown on the paths with asterisks indicating the significance values.  $R^2$  denote the percentage variance for each path respectively.

urge them to strive for acquiring status and power subsequently resulting in immoral and unethical acts in the form of higher UPBs, Careerism and CWBs. Generally we found support for our direct and indirect effects hypotheses with the exception of mediation of careerism only.

The current research is distinctive in the sense that it proposed and analysed an often neglected view in the affective commitment domain that is gloomy aspects of emotional bonding and how it can become problematic for individuals. By hypothesizing status striving as an underlying mechanism in the affective commitment and negative work behaviors relationship, we disentangle how and why affective commitment can be a liability rather than being effective. Our study utilized a three wave temporally separated data collected from employees and their co-workers in the service sector of Pakistan. Employing multi-wave and independent sources of measurement lessens the chances of mono-method bias in research particularly when testing mediation models. In addition, we employed structural equation modelling (SEM) technique for verifying our direct as well as indirect effects hypotheses. The

findings of the study and the corroboration of the most of the main as well as mediation effects highlight the significance and statistical power of utilizing this approach for testing mediation models.

Our study offers important contextual implications as it hypothesized and tested the effects and processes through which the dark side of affective commitment unfolds in a newer cultural context of Pakistan. Although it was not the objective of our study to examine the cultural dimensions framework (Hofstede, 1983) in our model, nonetheless using these national cultural dimensions might display their gloomy side in an Eastern country like Pakistan. According to Hofstede (1983), Pakistan scores high on power distance where there is a huge power, status and income gap between lower and upper class individuals. People in such cultures due to having unequal power and status are more likely to aspire for material resources like wealth and social status. Our study found that affectively committed individuals will be more likely to seek power, dominance and authority in the form of higher status striving corroborating the findings in our cultural setting.

Our study also found that affective commitment would be negatively related to UPOBs, Careerism and CWBs. These results are in line with moral licensing theory (Miller & Effron, 2010) whereby an individual first needs to boost his/her moral self-image and gain moral credits in the eyes of others thus lowering their self-serving and other oriented unethical behaviors. The above results for the direct effects of affective commitment on outcomes (UPOBs, Careerism and CWBs) hold true for our culture as Pakistan rates high on collectivism where individuals are strongly integrated to in-groups, need to save face and perform behaviors acceptable to others. Since affectively committed employees have strong emotional bonding with the organization they want to maintain their positive image in the organization and increase their moral credits by lowering such unethical behaviors.

Also, substantiating our study's mediation results once these affectively committed individuals establish their moral worth by attaining moral credentials in a collectivist society; such individuals get an unlimited license to attain power which leads to higher status striving and then such power hungry individuals use any means to achieve success, engage in unethical actions to benefit oneself and the organization thereby increasing UPOBs, Careerism and CWBs. Pakistan also scores high on masculinity cultural dimension where assertiveness, ambition and strength is highly admired (Hofstede, 1983). Our direct and mediation results clearly confirm the fact that affectively committed individuals because of their loyalty achieve high moral self-regard which warrants them to excel

above others increasing their status striving and further use their elevated moral standing to grow in the organization by using non-performance based means resulting in higher levels of careerism, CWBs and unethical behaviors to favour the organization.

Despite the current study's strengths, there are a few limitations. Even though the present research utilized temporally segregated data at three different time intervals, however it cannot be classified as a full longitudinal research design since all the model variables were not tapped at all the time periods. The findings depicted that status striving did not mediate the AC-careerism relationship nor did it showed direct effects. Moreover the direct effects of AC-UPBs although significant showed opposite directions.

Future researchers can extend our study's findings by utilizing a pure longitudinal research design where all the model variables are measured at all the three time periods. We only focused on status striving as an intervening mechanism through which affectively committed employees get engaged in unethical behaviors. Future researchers can examine other processes such as psychological entitlement and perceived insider status through which affective commitment shows its deleterious consequences. Studies in future should also examine when, under what conditions and for whom affective commitment reveals harmful outcomes. For instance it might be useful to study greed, psychological contract breach and dark triad personality types as moderators in the affective commitment and dark outcomes relationship. It might be also fruitful to investigate the moderating role of national cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1983) in the affective commitment and negative outcomes relationship. Based on the contextual implications of our findings it might be probable that for cultures which are high on power distance, collectivism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance are more likely to exacerbate the affective commitment and status striving and unethical behaviors relationship.

The current study offers practical benefits for managers and organizations. Our results highlighted affective commitment as a double edge sword where affective commitment leads to lower UPOBs, CWBs and Careerism whereas these main effects are reversed via status striving as a mediator. Particularly, our findings for mediation reveal that high affective commitment promote negative work behaviors (higher UPOBs, Careerism and CWBs) through the increased surge for status striving. Managers need to consider that high emotional bonding can be a liability and must take proper steps to ensure that these emotionally attached employees do not bend rules in their favour to increase their power and prestige in the organization in the form of high status striving. Through constant feedback and fair performance evaluation systems, affectively committed employees need to be reminded that no one can violate organizational norms for personal benefits even if it is a loyal and dedicated worker. Although being faithful to one's organization is considered a valuable asset for the organization, managers must be cognizant of the fact that rewarding on the basis of emotional attachment rather than on performance might authorize these individuals to enhance their status and then further use their moral standing to exhibit unethical behaviors both for achieving their self and organizational gains. Our study found that increased status striving creates other and self-oriented unethical behaviors (UPOBs and CWBs). Managers must monitor individuals who attain top management positions so as to ensure that they are following ethical behaviors. Accountability and transparency mechanisms should be equally applicable for all regardless of whether they are holding a higher status or not. Promotions should be provided on the basis of past performance rather than on the basis of considering loyalty or other emotional attachment considerations.

In conclusion, the current study suggests distinctive insights into why and how affective commitment might become burdensome for employees and organizations. Global workplaces have overstressed the loyal worker syndrome neglecting an important

yet under examined truth of exposing the dark side of being emotionally attached with the organization. Our study uncovers a pertinent reality in the commitment literature and highlights the unfavourable effects of affective commitment in a developing country context. Future research should unravel new and unique mechanisms and contingency factors that might explicate the gloomy aspects of being affectively committed.

## Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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