

SENIORITY AS AN ASSET? THE MODERATING EFFECT OF AGE ON THE RELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF EXPATRIATES

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the moderating effects of age on the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) of expatriates. Grounded in lifespan development theory and more particularly socioemotional selectivity theory, our research shed additional light on one of this under-researched areas in expatriation research. Our hypotheses are tested through hierarchical models using data from 254 expatriate managers. Our findings show that age is a facilitator of regulation and utilization of emotions on general living adjustment and of regulation of emotions on interactional adjustment. Complementary analyses show that previous expatriates' experience is not a substitute of age: the moderating effect of experience on the relationship between EI and CCA appears to be less prominent than that of age.

Keywords: cross-cultural adjustment, emotions, expatriates, age, socioemotional selectivity theory

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are central to human functioning. They guide thoughts and action throughout the span of human life (Frijda, 1988; Carstensen et al., 2000). However, although emotions are central for all human activities - including work related ones - the emotional dimension has been largely a neglected variable in organizational studies (e.g. Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000; Jordan, Ashkanasy & Härtel, 2003). One of the most emotionally demanding occupational roles in today's business world is expatriation, which is defined as a voluntary, temporary migration of a person abroad for a specific purpose with an ultimate return to his / her home country (cf. Cohen, 1977). In fact, expatriation is a very crucial international business activity, which is undertaken by an increasing number of multinational companies (MNC) globally. As such, it is an emotionally demanding activity because its success, to a large extent, depends on whether an expatriate can adjust to the new cultural environment of the host country, which, to a large extent, depends on how well he / she is able to deal with his / her emotions while on assignment.

The cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) is defined as the extent to which a person feels psychologically comfortable in relationship to a variety of aspects of a new environment (e.g. Caligiuri, 1997; Tung, 1998; Mezias & Scandura, 2005). The extant research has so far provided very ample evidence confirming that expatriate's adjustment is a challenging and difficult process (e.g. Aycan, 1997; Tung, 1998; Caligiuri, 2000). Three main dimensions of CCA have been proposed, validated and are widely used in the literature: *interactional adjustment*, which focuses on engaging in harmonious interpersonal relationships with locals in the host environment; *work adjustment*, which deals with how well a person fits into the local unit's environment, i.e. organizational culture, policies, procedures, expectations and behavioral norms;

and *general living adjustment*, which is related to how well a person adjusts to daily life issues in the new environment, i.e. food, transport, recreation, etc. (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003).

A few studies so far have analyzed the role that emotions, most often conceptualized as emotional intelligence (EI), play in expatriates' CCA (e.g. Gabel, Dolan & Cerdin, 2005; Lii & Wong, 2008; Koveshnikov, Wechtler & Dejoux, 2012). These studies tend to conclude that EI is important for CCA. As such, EI is described as an enduring personal trait which underlines the person's ability to adaptively identify, understand, manage, and harness emotions of both in the self and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden & Dornheim, 1998) and to use these emotions to facilitate cognitive processing (Mayer, Carusso, & Salovey, 1999). However, whilst the extant evidence generally confirms that by and large EI is conducive to expatriates' CCA, we still lack a more nuanced understanding of this relationship. More specifically, we know little concerning what factors moderate this relationship.

To shed some light on this question, we draw on lifespan development psychology, and more specifically on socioemotional selectivity theory, that examines how people's motivation and behavior changes over their life span (Carstensen, 1993; Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999), to suggest that age is an important moderating factor in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. Our choice of a possible moderator can be justified by two reasons. First, as such, the role of age in expatriates' CCA remains largely ignored and under-explored in the literature: whereas expatriates' age is commonly used as a control variable, it is not often examined as a potential predictor of international assignment outcomes (cf. Olsen & Martins, 2009). Even those studies that find a positive correlation of age and CCA (e.g. Selmer, 2001; Morley & Flynn, 2003) do not explicate how exactly age

influences CCA. Second, more generally, there has been an increasing interest, rooted in the observed aging of the working population, especially in Western countries, in how aging of the workforce may influence its behavior and, ultimately, various organizational outcomes (e.g. Kooij et al., 2011, 2013). Therefore, in this study we develop theoretical arguments to explain the relationship between expatriates' age, EI and CCA. We test our hypotheses through hierarchical regression models using a sample of 254 expatriate managers.

Our results suggest that age has a multidimensional, positive and significant moderating effect on the relationship between EI and CCA. More specifically, it appears that age is a facilitator of regulation and utilization of emotions on general living adjustment and of regulation of emotions on interactional adjustment. Moreover, our complementary analyses show that, contrary to a rather widespread assumption in the expatriation literature, previous expatriates' experience is not a substitute of age: the moderating effect of experience on the relationship between EI and CCA seems to be less prominent than that of age. Thus, our study contributes to the literature by explicating a more nuanced understanding of the role of age and emotions for CCA of expatriates.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, drawing on socioemotional selectivity theory we develop a number of hypotheses concerning the moderating role that age may have on the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. Then, we test our hypotheses through hierarchical regression models and report our findings. The final section concludes with a discussion of the paper's findings and its implications for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Emotions, age and cross-cultural adjustment

Amongst expatriates' personal characteristics that can potentially influence their CCA (for overviews see e.g. Hechanova *et al.*, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010), emotions, most often operationalized as emotional intelligence (EI), has been increasingly recognized in the literature as a positive factor (e.g. Gabel, Dolan & Cerdin, 2005; Lii & Wong, 2008; Koveshnikov, Wechtler & Dejoux, 2012). At the same time, the influence of age on CCA, although commonly recognized as being in some ways influential (e.g. Selmer, 2001; Morley & Flynn, 2003), remains relatively under-explored and under-theorized. In fact, age is not included as a potential predictor of CCA in the main theoretical frameworks, all of which are based on thorough analyses of existing literature, such as e.g. Black *et al.*'s (1991) adjustment model, Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*'s (2005) meta-analytical model, or Lazarova, Shaffer and Westman's (2010) expatriate work-family performance model. Moreover, when age is included, analyses yield rather conflicting results, which are summarized in Hechanova *et al.*'s (2003) meta-analytic review. The authors conclude that age has a negative influence on general living and interactional adjustment but it influences positively work adjustment. Hence, it seems that there is clearly the need to develop specific theoretical arguments supporting the role of age in expatriates' CCA (cf. Olsen & Martins, 2009).

In this study, we use socioemotional selectivity theory to theoretically develop links between age, emotions and CCA. Socioemotional selectivity theory is a life span theory of how time horizons shape human motivation (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen *et al.*, 2000; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). It suggests that people's age, emotions and

behavior (in our case CCA) are closely intertwined and personal goals are always set in a temporal context. When people perceive time as expansive, which is typical for younger people, they tend to concentrate on preparing for the future by acquiring potentially to-become-useful information and expanding their horizons. In contrast, when people perceive their time as shrinking, i.e. when they get older, they start to place increasing value on emotionally meaningful goals and invest more cognitive and social resources in obtaining them. This shift promotes emotion regulation (i.e. control over the emotions that an individual experiences and expresses). Hence, socioemotional selectivity theory appears to be very relevant to examine what factors (e.g. age) can moderate this relationship. We now turn to developing our hypotheses based on this theory.

Emotions, age and general living adjustment

Socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that as people get older they direct attention to emotionally meaningful aspects of life, such as, for example, the desire to lead a meaningful life (Carstensen, 1993, 1995; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). It means that when the future is perceived as limited, present-oriented goals (i.e. 'here and now') that maximize emotional meaning of life become more relevant. To accomplish this older people tend to be better at regulating their emotions by avoiding negative and intensifying positive emotional states and more flexible in adjusting their emotional reactions and experiences in response to different life situations (Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004).

Whereas younger adults have a tendency to process negative information more thoroughly than positive information and to weigh negative information more heavily in impression formation, memory and decision making (Baumeister et al., 2001), older people tend

to favor information that furthers their emotional satisfaction, so that their attention and memory are biased in favor of material that optimizes emotion regulation (Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004). Thus, depression, anxiety, emotional overreaction and stress are far more prevalent in younger than in older adults (Carstensen et al., 1999; 2000; Gross et al., 1997). And, overall, older adults in general possess a greater sense of control over their emotions (e.g. Lawton et al., 1992; Gross et al., 1997) that leads to greater life satisfaction and less loneliness (Diener & Suh, 1997) as well as improved emotional experience in everyday life (Carstensen, 1993; Carstensen et al., 1999; Carstensen et al., 2000).

Furthermore, age is generally associated with greater maturity and flexibility in coping with new life events leading to more complex and adaptive emotional responses (Labouvie-Vief, DeVoe, & Bulka, 1989; Diehl, Coyle, & Labouvie-Vief, 1996). For instance, with age people become more experienced, accomplished, and mature because they acquire more skills and insights for their emotional traits to become more harmonious and stable (e.g. Mirowsky & Ross, 1992). Older adults are also generally more supportive, disciplined, able, and satisfied with life (Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). They are more inclined to view problems and challenges as being a transient and manageable part of life and are better prepared to manage different unpredictable and difficult life situations (Keltner, 1996; Carstensen et al., 2000).

When applied to expatriates on international assignment, older expatriates can be expected to be better than their younger colleagues in utilizing emotions for adjusting to new cultural and living environments. Being more emotionally stable and less prone to stress and depression, older expatriates would be better in coping with and overcoming difficulties and challenges that they encounter in new life situations. Focusing on present-oriented goals thus

maximizing their emotional experiences ‘here and now’, older expatriates would be willing to invest more time and effort to optimize their general living adjustment to new environments.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Age moderates the relationship between expatriates’ emotions and CCA by positively influencing the relationship between appraisal, regulation, and utilization of emotions and general living adjustment of expatriates.

Emotions, age and interactional adjustment

Socioemotional selectivity theory also postulates that another way, in which older adults direct their attention to emotionally meaningful aspects of life, is by concentrating on and investing more social and cognitive resources in developing socially meaningful relationships to feel socially interconnected (Carstensen, 1993, 1995; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). To do that, while interacting, they tend to be quicker in returning to positive emotional states than younger people once a negative mood state is experienced (Carstensen et al., 2000). They also tend to engage in relatively more downward and less upward social comparison than do their younger counterparts (Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993) that allows them to better regulate their emotions in interactions with others. When interacting, older people appear to rely more on emotion-focused strategies: they employ less ‘confrontative’ coping and greater distancing and positive reappraisal than younger people that ultimately leads to a greater sense of emotional control (Folkman et al., 1987; Gross et al., 1997). Also, Birditt and Fingerman (2005) found that older age groups utilize more effective conflict management strategies than younger ones in tense interactions with both unfamiliar and familiar interaction targets.

Furthermore, socioemotional selectivity theory argues that with age people develop a biased tendency to filter out negative situational information (Mather & Carstensen, 2005) and to remember positive information more intensely and longer (Levine & Bluck, 1997; Charles, Mather & Carstensen, 2003). For instance, research on married couples showed that older people tend to express less physiological reactivity (Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1994), anger, belligerence, disgust, and more affection with one another (Carstensen et al., 1995). Hence, older adults appear to be more skillful in managing emotionally charged interactions (Carstensen et al., 2003).

When applied to expatriates on international assignment, older expatriates can be expected to be more skillful in using emotions in their interactions with locals in new environments. They also can feel better socially adjusted with a limited but meaningful network, whereas their younger counterparts might feel frustrated or isolated in the absence of a social network comparable to the one they have in their home country. Possessing a greater sense of emotional control and being willing to invest more social and cognitive resources to develop social relationships with the locals, older expatriates are expected to be better in understanding emotional states of the locals, regulating their own emotions when interacting with the locals, and utilizing their emotions for problem solving. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Age moderates the relationship between expatriates' emotions and CCA by positively influencing the relationship between appraisal, regulation, and utilization of emotions and interactional adjustment of expatriates.

Emotions, age and work adjustment

Focusing on meaningful goals and striving to stay socially interconnected can be very useful and helpful for older adults not only in everyday life but also more specifically in their work situations. Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts that as the relative priorities of people's goals change over time, with age they become more focused on and motivated by short-term goals, i.e. current job satisfaction, which then translates into life satisfaction. At the same time, they are less focused on longer term goals, such as overall career satisfaction (Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). It means that older adults are more motivated to utilize their emotional and cognitive resources to savor and appreciate positive experiences and emotions of their current work 'here and now', instead of projecting their hopes and ambitions into the future. Just like in everyday life situations, also in work situations the tendency of older adults to rely on emotion-focused problem-solving strategies (e.g. Watson & Blanchard-Fields, 1998) would allow them to be less sensitive to and filter out negative information (Mather & Carstensen, 2005).

Furthermore, research has shown that work behavior changes with age (e.g. Kooij et al., 2011, 2013). Older people tend to possess a stronger orientation on maintenance and loss prevention in their work behavior than their younger colleagues (Heckhausen, 1997; Freund, 2006). It means that with age people become increasingly concerned not with how to start performing better but how to avoid performing worse than before due to a loss of skills, abilities or competences (cf. Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Overall, research finds that due to the age-related changes in motivation older people in their work behavior appear to be less competitive and concerned with growth opportunities and self-actualization but increasingly focused on extrinsic job characteristics, such as good pay and having friendly co-workers (Rhodes, 1983; Kooij et al., 2011).

Finally, another stream of research, drawing on socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1993, 1995), suggests a less intense effect of psychological contract breach on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among older workers than among younger ones (Bal et al., 2008; Ng & Feldman, 2009; Bal et al., 2013). For instance, Ng and Feldman (2009) argue that with age, due to older workers' emotional maturation and increased altruism, employees' psychological contract with their organization becomes more malleable, meaning that older workers become more tolerant towards contract deviations. And Bal et al. (2013) suggest that the less intense effect can be explained by older workers' increasing focus on positive aspects of their relationship with their organizations, their improved ability to regulate their emotions in case of negative events (e.g. contract breach) and return to positive moods thereafter.

Therefore, when applied to expatriates on international assignment, it is to be expected that older expatriates with their increasing focus on extrinsic job characteristics (expatriates are usually well paid), higher tolerance towards potential psychological contract deviations, and higher motivation to invest cognitive and emotional resources to optimize their current job satisfaction, would be better able and motivated to use their EI to better adjust to their new working environments. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Age moderates the relationship between expatriates' emotions and CCA by positively influencing the relationship between appraisal, regulation and utilization of emotions and work adjustment of expatriates.

METHOD

Sample

Data was collected by surveying 322 overseas French expatriates working for Alliance Française, a government recognized public interest foundation set up under private law. The organization is a not-for-profit organization that promotes French culture and language by working in close collaboration with foreign partners in other countries. It is present in 133 countries, from Tierra del Fuego to Canada and from Cape of Good Hope to the north of Europe, as well as in India, China and the Pacific Ocean nations. There are 1071 branches of Alliance Française throughout the world.

From those 322 managers surveyed, 254 responses were obtained (a response rate of 79%). The respondents were all French nationals expatriated for three-year assignment. As the questionnaire was administrated in French, the psychometric properties of the translated scales have been screened and checked as described in the next section. The average age of the respondents was 41 years (std = 11.11) and the average experience in expatriation was around 9 years (std = 7.85). The sample was composed of 70% men and 30% women. About 54% of the respondents were married or in a partnership and 33% had children. The respondents were based in six geographic locations: Europe (15%), North America (7%), Latin America and Caribbean (37%), Africa and Indian Ocean (16%), Asia (21%), and Oceania (4%).

Measures

Cross-cultural adjustment. We used Black and Stephens's scale (1989) to measure our dependent variable. Cross-cultural adjustment reflects the level of adjustment perceived by expatriates, measured by a 14 item scale, which ranged from 1 for "very unadjusted" to 6 for

“perfectly adjusted”. It is composed of three dimensions which were tested and validated in the literature (e.g. Black et al., 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999): general living adjustment (seven items); interactional adjustment (four items) and work adjustment (three items). The French version of CCA fulfilled the required fit criteria: $\chi^2(74) = 193.60$; $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.914; CFI = 0.864; NFI = 0.853; RMSEA = 0.049. The reliability tests for the three dimensions of adjustment gave the following satisfactory results: general living ($\alpha = 0.86$), interactional ($\alpha = 0.92$) and work ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Emotional intelligence. We used the 33 items construct based on the work of Schutte et al. (1998) and developed by Mayer, DiPaolo and Salovey (1990) as our independent variable. Both exploratory (principal component analysis with *Oblimin* rotation) and confirmatory analysis supported a three dimensional structure ($\chi^2(350) = 642$; $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.821; CFI = 0.859; NFI = 0.860; RMSEA = 0.048), which is consistent with Mayer et al.’s model (1990) and prior research (e.g. Schutte et al., 2001; Austin et al., 2004; Besharat, 2007). These dimensions are defined as follow: (1) emotional expression, appraisal of emotions in the self and in others (13 items, such as e.g. “I like to share my emotions with others”); (2) emotional regulation of the self and of others (10 items, such as e.g. “When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last”); and (3) utilization of emotions in problem solving (10 items, such as e.g. “When I am in a positive mood solving problems is easy for me”). We used the factors from the principal component analysis as our EI dimensions. The scale reliability was tested by calculating Cronbach’s alphas and showed satisfactory results: expression and appraisal of emotions (self and others), $\alpha = 0.76$; regulation of emotions (self and others), $\alpha = 0.79$; utilization of emotions in solving problems, $\alpha = 0.69$.

Age. We used age as our moderating variable.

Control variables. We used culture similarity as one of the control variables based on the assumption that it can be expected that high cultural novelty will be negatively associated with the degree of CCA, especially interactional and general living adjustment (e.g. Black et al., 1991). It was measured using eight items (everyday customs, general living conditions, health care facilities, transportation system, cost of living, climate, quality and type of food, and housing conditions) adopted from Torbiorn (1982) and found in Black and Stephens (1989). These items were measured on a five-point scale (1 for “very different” and 5 for “very similar”). The reliability was confirmed with $\alpha = 0.90$. We also introduced other control variables: (i) gender operationalized as a dummy variable where “0” stood for “man” and “1” for “woman”; (ii) prior experience as a dummy variable; (iii) cohort dummies for each generation, following Howe & Strauss’s definition (2000): Baby-Boomers (1943-1960), 50 years old or more; Generation X (1961-1980), between 30 and 50 years old; Generation Y (1981-2000) younger than 30. The summary statistics for all variables are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Assessment of common method bias

We used statistical techniques to determine whether our data analysis is likely to suffer from common method bias. We first performed Harman’s one factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) by including all items of the three constructs (cross-cultural adjustment, emotional intelligence, cultural similarity) in an exploratory analysis. The factor analysis clearly showed three factors with Eigen values greater than one and the first factor accounted for less than 28

percent of the total variance. Thus, there was no evidence of unidimensionality in our data. Moreover, we followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) approach to control an unmeasured latent factor. Therefore, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis on where we let items load on both their theoretical constructs and on a latent common method variance factor. All item loadings were still significant after the inclusion of the latent factor, thus we can assume that common variance bias is not a serious threat for the interpretation of the following analyses.

Empirical strategy

Regression models were developed to analyze the data from the 254 expatriate managers. Determinants of general living, interactional and work adjustment were estimated separately. We ran models in a hierarchical logic by including respective sets of predicting variables in each sequential step: control variables (step 1), emotions (step 2), age as a moderator (step 3), and, finally, interaction terms between age and emotions (step 4). To avoid possible multicollinearity problems, all variables were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991). The influence of age is displayed in Table 2 for general living, interactional and working adjustments respectively.

FINDINGS

Step 1 models with only control variables demonstrated a non-significant effect of gender on CCA but significant relationships were found between cultural similarity and general living and work adjustment confirming that cultural similarity at least to some extent facilitates adjustment (cf. Black et al., 1991). Prior experience included as a control yielded a significant and positive direct effect only for work adjustment. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that prior

experience (as a dummy variable) had a significant effect on interactional adjustment but only until age was included, demonstrating the stronger influence of age compared to experience.

All models testing direct effects yielded significant marginal R^2 , meaning that the EI dimensions significantly improved the model and thus are important determinants of the three dimensions of CCA. It confirms extant results in the literature on EI and CCA (e.g. Gabel et al., 2005; Koveshnikov et al., 2012): the three dimensions of EI (appraisal and expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, utilization of emotions in problem solving) appeared to have a positive and significant influence on CCA.

With regard to the influence of age on CCA, our results show that age has a significant and positive effect on the three facets of adjustment: general living adjustment ($\beta = 0.019$; $p = 0.084$), interactional adjustment ($\beta = 0.098$; $p = 0.056$) and work adjustment ($\beta = 0.056$; $p = 0.072$). Somewhat contradicting the findings of Hechanova *et al.* (2003), this positive link can be interpreted as concurring with theoretical expectations of Lazarova *et al.* (2010), who suggested that resources (arguably age can be seen as a resource) are positively related to CCA. More importantly for the focus of our analysis, we found interesting results concerning the moderating role of age between expatriates' EI and CCA.

Table 2 about here

As seen from Table 2 and Figures 1 to 3, the interaction effects of age and emotions (step 4) partially supported Hypothesis 1. More specifically, the interaction effects for age and regulation of emotions ($\beta = 0.048$; $p = 0.085$) and for age and utilization of emotions ($\beta = 0.034$; $p = 0.089$) were positive and significant for general living adjustment. Interactions terms

improved R^2 from 0.29 to 0.32 ($F = 3.528$, $p < 0.01$), thus, age appears to be a facilitator of regulation and utilization of emotions on general living adjustment. No significant results were obtained in relation to the role of age for the effect of appraisal and expression of emotions on general living adjustment.

In terms of interactional adjustment, only the interaction term “age x regulation” was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.074$; $p = 0.052$) but interactions terms improved R^2 from 0.26 to 0.29 ($F = 2.925$, $p < 0.01$). As a result, although age has no moderating effect on appraisal and expression of emotions or utilizations of emotions, it facilitates the effect of regulation of emotions on interactional adjustment. Therefore, only partial support was found also for Hypothesis 2.

In terms of work adjustment, no significant moderating effects have been observed and no significant R^2 changes have been detected. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not confirmed.

Figures 1 to 3 about here

Furthermore, we took into consideration that the literature on age and emotions often assumes that age and experience are closely intertwined and can be considered as substitutes. In this case, an endogeneity problem could be suspected knowing that the influence of age is, in fact, a “hidden” consequence of expatriates’ prior experience accumulated throughout the years. Therefore, post analyses have been conducted, testing the moderating effects of prior experience on the relationship between EI and CCA. Our results (Table 3) show that experience has a less prominent impact on CCA than age. Experience seems to have a significant moderating effect only on utilization of emotions for interactional adjustment ($\beta = -0.118$; $p = 0.030$). Interestingly,

this influence appears as negative. Hence, prior experience in expatriation is a restraint of utilization of emotions for interactional adjustment. This outcome stresses the fact that age and experience, even if closely related, are not substitutable. Therefore, we conclude that the moderating effect of age seems to be more the consequence of expatriates naturally becoming more emotionally mature and skillful with age rather than the outcome of prior expatriation experiences accumulated with age.

Table 3 about here

Figure 4 about here

DISCUSSION

The analysis attempted to shed some additional light on a relatively so far unexplored area of the expatriation research, namely to improve our understanding of the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. It complements a few existing studies on the topic (e.g. Gabel et al., 2005; Lii & Wong, 2008; Koveshnikov et al., 2012) by delving deeper into nuances of this relationship – the analysis specifically examines how the relationship transforms as expatriates get older. Overall, our analysis is one of the first attempts to provide a more detailed understanding of the relationship between age, experience, EI and CCA. Our results show that the moderating effect of age on the relationship between EI and CCA is not a simple but a complex and multidimensional one. It is so because both EI and CCA are complex constructs comprising a number of dimensions, which are differentially interact with each other. However,

they are often lumped together in existing analyses that, in our view, does not allow researchers to identify important nuances of how these two constructs interact.

Theoretical contributions

In our view, our analysis makes a number of contributions. First, it reaffirms the positive and critical influence of emotions on CCA. Moreover, it goes further by developing theoretical arguments and providing empirical testing for how the relationship between expatriates' emotions and CCA function. Our analysis suggests that age acts as an important moderator facilitating the effect of different EI's dimensions on different aspects of expatriates' CCA. Thus, it deepens our theoretical understanding of the link between age and CCA, which so far has been under-explored in the literature (cf. Olsen & Martins, 2009). To the best of our knowledge, there is no theory related to the influence of age on expatriates' adjustment.

All in all, age seems to be either one of the “forgotten” and “not well understood” determinants of adjustment or implicitly considered as being of minor significance, which seems to be indicated by the fact that it is largely absent from the existing reviews of the expatriation literature or included only as a mere control variable (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Lazarova et al., 2010). If present, like in Hechanova et al.'s (2003) meta-analytical review, conflicting results are yielded: age has a negative effect on general living and interactional adjustment and a positive effect on work adjustment. In this light, our analysis theoretically justifies and empirically confirms the positive direct influence of age on the three facets of CCA. Our findings can be explained using the Job Demands and Resources model used by Lazarova et al. (2010) to develop their expatriates' work-family performance model. It appears that age can be considered as a valuable resource for expatriates to cope with their CCA.

Second, our analysis introduced and applied socioemotional selectivity theory to the phenomenon of expatriates' CCA that provided valuable theoretical insights for our understanding of expatriates' CCA. We found that indeed, as socioemotional selectivity theory predicts (e.g. Carstensen et al., 2003; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004), age facilitates the effect of regulation of emotions on CCA the most, especially general living and interactional adjustment. It means that older expatriates are better able to regulate their emotions and emotions of others in the process of adjusting to their new host environments, in terms of dealing with novel daily life situations and when interacting with local people. Among other dimensions, age also appears to facilitate the effect of utilization of emotions on general living adjustment. Other relationships do not appear to be significant.

These differential results for the three dimensions of CCA can also be explained by arguments derived from socioemotional selectivity theory. For instance, somewhat contrary to what we hypothesized, it can also be argued based on socioemotional selectivity theory that, as suggested by Carstensen et al. (2000), precisely because older age groups strive to optimize their positive over negative experiences, older expatriates can be more vulnerable than younger ones to various challenges in their CCA while on assignment. Whereas older people are motivated to prioritize emotionally meaningful relationships in their lives (see Carstensen et al., 1999); it may potentially limit their flexibility in and adaptability to their new working and cultural environments where not all work-related and work-unrelated relationships are necessarily emotionally meaningful for the expatriates in question.

Further, age also brings decline, decreased energy and activity, which in turn implies a shift from active to passive emotions (Ross & Mirowsky, 2008). Together with a natural physiological decline, people's sense of controlling their own lives also decreases with age

(Mirowsky, 1997). An awareness of limited time left to live increases the sense of personal powerlessness which is associated with a declining ability and motivation to use energy and emotions, and to control different aspects of one's own life (Ross & Mirowsky, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that older age is associated with calmness, slowness and serenity rather than excitement and action. All these factors can potentially harm the ability of older expatriates to use emotions for better general living, interactional and work adjustment. Having said that, more research is clearly needed to further and deepen our understanding of how age differentially influences different dimensions of expatriates' CCA. However, our study illustrates that socioemotional selectivity theory provides a relevant and helpful theoretical tool to do that.

Finally, our analysis also puts some doubts onto one of the assumptions in the literature, namely that age is synonymous to experience. Our results show that it is at least not completely true. Age and experience are not fully substitutable and the moderating effect of age on the relationship between EI and CCA seems to be stronger than that of experience. The latter is only significant and negative for the effect of utilization of emotions on interactional adjustment thus making experience a partial restraint. Several arguments can explain this finding. One possible reason why experience, contrary to age, does not seem to accumulate positive advantages for expatriates may stem from the fact that prior experiences in expatriation are often not comparable and compatible between each other. For instance, if an expatriate possesses some experience from a number of assignments in Middle East or Asia, it would not necessarily make his / her adjustment easier when on assignment somewhere in Europe or Africa.

Furthermore, it can be argued that expatriates who have extensive prior experience may be less motivated to utilize their EI for CCA that can impart their willingness to adjust to their new environments. For very experienced expatriates just another overseas assignment may be

taken on and justified by e.g. personal retirement strategies, career survival concerns, financial greed or glamorous lifestyle. Once very experienced and not any more very motivated, expatriates may accept just another assignment in their portfolio of international assignments for just these kinds of reasons (e.g. Osland, 2001; Selmer, 2004). Obviously, in these situations the expatriates are not very eager to mobilize their EI to learn about another culture and adapt to their new work and living environments (e.g. Teagarden & Gordon, 1995). Moreover, experience can also have negative consequences for expatriates' CCA by causing cognitive overconfidence. Russo and Schoemaker (1992) distinguish between four cognitive causes of overconfidence that can be applied, we would argue, to the case of experienced expatriates: availability (overconfidence in supposedly imagining all the ways that events can unfold); anchoring (overconfidence due to the tendency to anchor on one value or idea and not adjust away from it sufficiently); the confirmation bias (overconfidence from leaning toward one perspective and seeking support for it when making predictions or forecasts); and hindsight (overconfidence from assumption that the world is more predictable than it really is).

Thus, experienced expatriates may turn out to be overconfident in their ability to handle a wide variety of situations in not always efficient ways. They can anticipate challenges but they are also likely to be overconfident that they will overcome these challenges because they have done so before. This view can prevent them from being realistic thereby enhancing their chances to be maladjusted on their assignment. These are some of the possible reasons for why age and experience cannot be treated as substitutes in the expatriation literature. However, future research is clearly needed to understand better the differences between the effects of age and prior experience on expatriates' CCA.

Limitations and future research

Our analysis has several weaknesses that need to be taken seriously when interpreting our results. First, it uses a self-report items questionnaire. To address this limitation we conducted a number of robustness checks, which showed that common method variance bias did not affect the quality of the results nor their interpretation. It should be noted also that we used the self-perceived measures because we focused exclusively on how the expatriate himself / herself feels adjusted on his or her new assignment. It was then combined with the self-perceived measures of his or her own emotions. Using external, not self-perceived measures instead could potentially bias our results due to the possibility that being on international assignment, expatriates can behave in public as being well adjusted in front of their colleagues and superiors without actually feeling so in reality.

Second, our analysis is based on a cross-sectional data meaning that different age groups are compared at a single point in time. The first potential problem of such a design is that age-group differences emerging from a cross-sectional data analysis can be attributed to the sample selection. However, in this study our sample is very representative and almost exhaustive covering 79% of all expatriate managers working at Alliance Francaise. The second potential problem in a cross-sectional design is known as cohort variation. Here, differences between age groups may be attributed to generational differences and, in fact, have nothing to do with age *per se*. To address this issue, in our models we used generational cohorts as controls. Moreover, our findings generally fit into a reliable pattern of findings in extant literature that suggests that emotionally people become more skillful and stable with age. Still, more longitudinal research designs would be highly relevant for future research.

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TABLE 1**Correlations and Cronbach's alphas**

	Mean	Std	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. General living adjustment	4.91	0.77	(0.86)								
2. Interactional adjustment	4.93	0.94	0.63	(0.92)							
3. Work adjustment	5.00	0.78	0.64	0.63	(0.81)						
4. Appraisal of emotions	0	1	0.28	0.31	0.27	(0.76)					
5. Regulation of emotions	0	1	0.27	0.23	0.26	0.18	(0.79)				
6. Utilization of emotions	0	1	0.39	0.37	0.49	0.24	0.25	(0.69)			
7. Age	40.79	11.11	0.11	0.18	0.22	0.00	0.08	0.09	-		
8. Experience in expatriation	9.34	7.85	0.09	0.15	0.15	0.03	0.17	0.08	0.63	-	
9. Cultural similarity	2.86	0.98	0.35	0.12	0.24	0.02	0.15	0.17	0.03	0.02	(0.90)

N = 254. All correlations are significant at the $p < .05$ level. Cronbach's alphas in brackets.

TABLE 2
Determinants of cross-cultural adjustment: the influence of age

	General living adjustment				Interactional adjustment				Work adjustment			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Constant	4.075*** (0.181)	4.231*** (0.168)	4.270*** (0.198)	4.247*** (0.199)	4.247*** (0.234)	4.444*** (0.216)	4.675*** (0.253)	4.651*** (0.254)	4.230*** (0.186)	4.433*** (0.164)	4.561*** (0.192)	4.547*** (0.195)
<i>Control variables</i>												
Female	0.067 (0.113)	0.027 (0.105)	0.018 (0.108)	0.005 (0.107)	0.251* (0.146)	0.209 (0.135)	0.156 (0.137)	0.137 (0.137)	0.16616 (0.116)	0.122 (0.102)	0.093 (0.105)	0.087 (0.105)
Cultural similarity	0.261*** (0.053)	0.206*** (0.049)	0.206*** (0.049)	0.215*** (0.049)	0.114* (0.068)	0.046 (0.064)	0.043 (0.063)	0.05 (0.064)	0.189*** (0.054)	0.116** (0.048)	0.115** (0.048)	0.118** (0.049)
Prior experience	0.144 (0.115)	0.109 (0.106)	0.082 (0.129)	0.094 (0.129)	0.418*** (0.149)	0.361*** (0.137)	0.199 (0.165)	0.221 (0.165)	0.349*** (0.118)	0.305*** (0.104)	0.215* (0.125)	0.225* (0.126)
Generations controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>Dependent variables</i>												
Appraisal and expressions		0.12*** (0.049)	0.119** (0.049)	0.100* (0.055)		0.186*** (0.063)	0.182** (0.063)	0.169*** (0.069)		0.089* (0.048)	0.087* (0.048)	0.092* (0.053)
Regulation		0.088* (0.05)	0.089* (0.050)	0.130** (0.056)		0.081* (0.064)	0.088* (0.064)	0.149** (0.072)		0.078* (0.049)	0.083* (0.049)	0.101* (0.055)
Utilization		0.191*** (0.050)	0.193*** (0.050)	0.204*** (0.053)		0.255*** (0.065)	0.266*** (0.065)	0.244*** (0.067)		0.296*** (0.049)	0.302*** (0.049)	0.292*** (0.052)
<i>Moderator variable</i>												
Age			0.017* (0.046)	0.019* (0.046)			0.103* (0.059)	0.098* (0.059)			0.057* (0.045)	0.056* (0.045)
<i>Interactions</i>												
Appraisal x age				-0.015 (0.032)				0.008 (0.041)				0.014 (0.031)
Regulation x age				0.048* (0.029)				0.074** (0.037)				0.025 (0.029)
Utilization x age				0.034* (0.031)				-0.032 (0.040)				-0.017 (0.031)
R-square	0.137	0.287	0.287	0.317	0.078	0.248	0.260	0.286	0.135	0.347	0.353	0.367
R-square change		0.151	0.001	0.029		0.170	0.012	0.025		0.223	0.006	0.004
F change		13.060	0.143	3.528		13.933	3.032	2.925		21.381	1.617	0.205
Sig. F change		<0.01	0.706	<0.01		<0.01	0.083	< 0.01		<0.01	0.205	0.791

*N = 254. Standard deviation in brackets. * $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$*

TABLE 3**Determinants of cross-cultural adjustment:
The influence of experience (reduced results)**

	General Adjustment Step 4	Living Adjustment Step 4	Interactional Adjustment Step 4	Work Adjustment Step 4
<i>Control variables</i>				
Prior experience	0.078 (0.129)		0.188 (0.164)	0.209 (0.126)
<i>Moderator variable</i>				
Age	0.018* (0.046)		0.106* (0.058)	0.058* (0.045)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Appraisal x prior experience	-0.010 (0.056)		0.023 (0.071)	0.019 (0.055)
Regulation x prior experience	0.011 (0.051)		0.047 (0.037)	-0.009 (0.049)
Utilization x prior experience	-0.037 (0.043)		-0.118*** (0.054)	-0.050 (0.042)
R-square	0.301		0.279	0.292
R-square change	0.004		0.019	0.006
F change	0.300		1.606	0.564
Sig. F change	0.826		0.190	0.639

N = 254. Standard deviation in brackets. * $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

FIGURE1
Moderation Effect of Age on the Relation between
Regulation of Emotions and General Living Adjustment

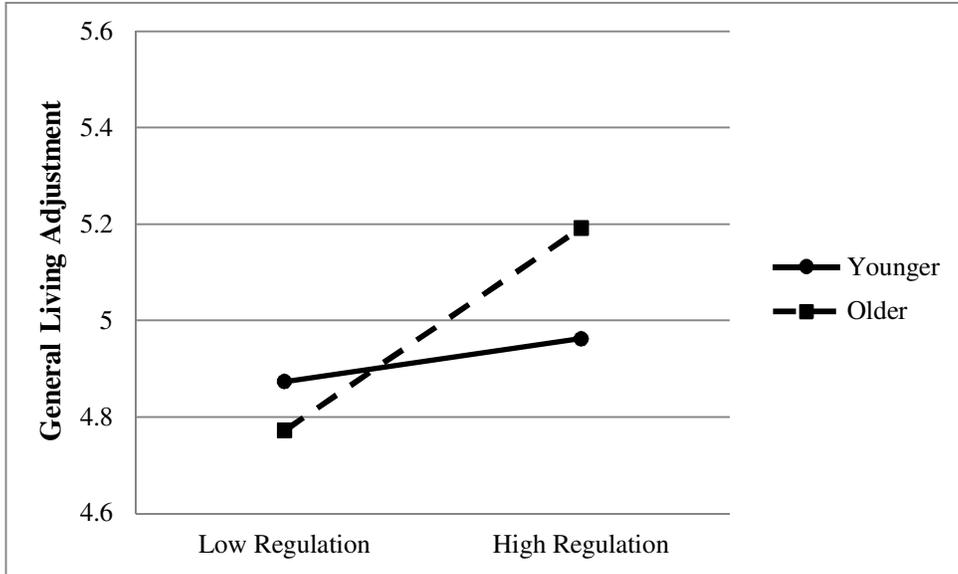


FIGURE2
Moderation Effect of Age on the Relation between
Utilization of Emotions and General Living Adjustment

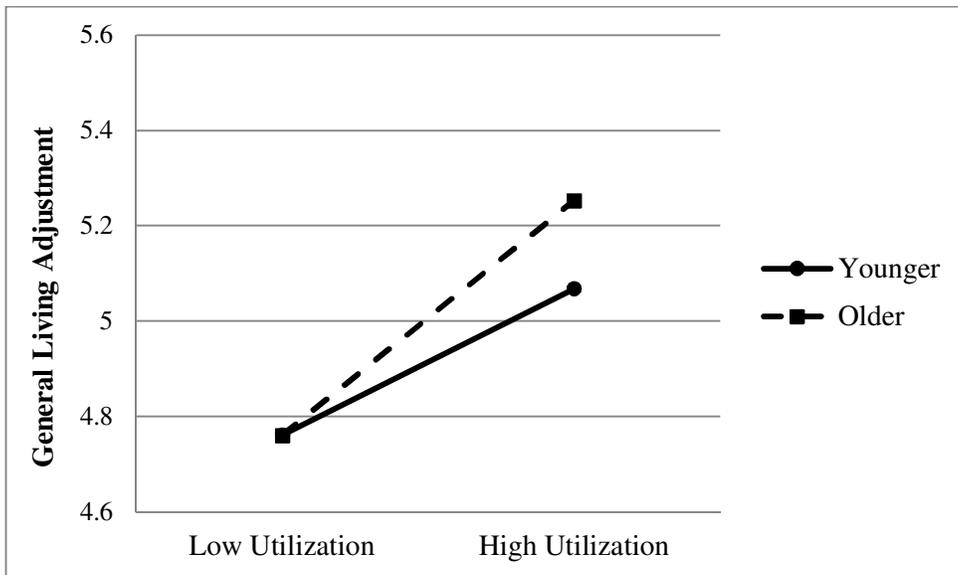


FIGURE3
Moderation Effect of Age on the Relation between
Regulation of Emotions and Interactional Adjustment

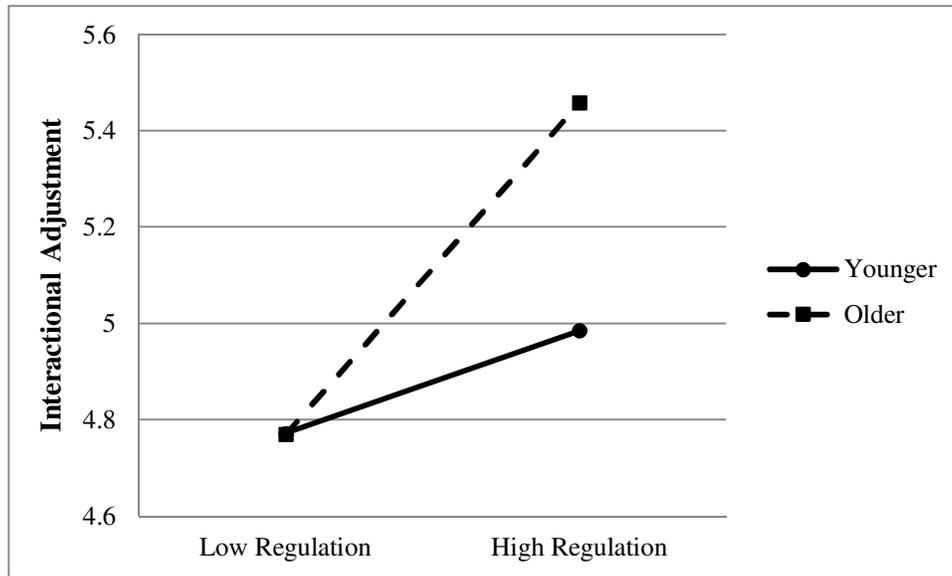


FIGURE4
Moderation Effect of Experience on the Relation between
Utilization of Emotions and General Living Adjustment

