



# Just like a fine wine? Age, emotional intelligence, and cross-cultural adjustment



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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we use socioemotional selectivity theory to shed light on the role of expatriates' age in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) of expatriates on assignment. We test our hypotheses using hierarchical regression models and a sample of 254 French expatriate managers. Our analysis reveals a number of interesting findings. First, we find that age is a facilitator of regulation and utilization of emotions on general living adjustment and of regulation of emotions on interactional adjustment. Second, our complementary analyses show that expatriates' prior expatriation experience affects the relationship between EI and CCA differently and less prominently than age. Overall, our analysis is one of the first attempts to provide a more detailed theoretical understanding of the relationships between age, expatriation experience, EI and CCA in the context of expatriation.

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## 1. Introduction

Up to now the role of age remains largely unexplored and under-theorized in expatriation literature: expatriates' age is commonly used as a control variable, however, it is rarely examined as a potential predictor of international assignment outcomes (cf. Olsen & Martins, 2009). At the same time, the literature on lifespan development psychology suggests that peoples' emotions, motivations and attitudes tend to develop and change throughout their lifespan (Carstensen, 1993, 1995; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). Bringing these two streams of literature together, in this paper we apply socioemotional selectivity theory to examine the role of expatriates' age in moderating the relationship between their emotional intelligence (EI) and cross-cultural adjustment (CCA).

CCA, defined as the degree of an expatriate's psychological comfort in new cultural and work-related contexts (e.g. Black & Stephens, 1989; Caligiuri, 1997), was shown to be a challenging (e.g. Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri, 2000) and emotionally demanding

(Gabel, Dolan, & Cerdin, 2005; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013) process. It is generally conceptualized as comprising three dimensions: general living, interactional, and work adjustments (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black & Stephens, 1989; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). A wide range of different factors has been identified to influence expatriates' CCA (for reviews see Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). Among these factors, the interest in the emotional aspect of expatriation, most often conceptualized as emotional intelligence (EI), has been gaining attention (e.g., Gabel et al., 2005; Koveshnikov, Wechtler, & Dejoux, 2014).

EI is defined as an enduring personal trait which underlines the person's ability to adaptively identify, understand, manage, and harness emotions of both in self and others and use these emotions to facilitate cognitive processing (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al., 1998). Generally, research finds support for the importance of EI for expatriates' CCA.

Therefore, given that EI is important for expatriates' CCA and an expatriate's EI is likely to change over his/her lifespan, there may be an important link between these variables that unfortunately up to now remained largely unexplored in expatriation literature. To address this gap, in this paper we draw on lifespan development psychology, and more specifically on socioemotional selectivity theory which examines how people's emotions, motivations and attitudes change over their lifespan (Carstensen, 1993, 1995;

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Carstensen et al., 1999), to suggest that age can be an important moderating factor in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. Additionally, we shed some light on whether age and expatriation experience can be treated interchangeably or the two are theoretically distinct constructs that have different effects on how expatriates use their EI for CCA. We adopt a quantitative design and test hypotheses derived from socioemotional selectivity theory on a sample of 254 expatriates.

The paper is organized as follows. Drawing on socioemotional selectivity theory, in the next section we develop a number of hypotheses concerning the moderating role of age in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. Then, we test our hypotheses using hierarchical regression models and report our findings. The final section discusses the paper's findings, their implications, and the suggestions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Age, emotions and cross-cultural adjustment

The literature on expatriation has noted a number of personal characteristics that can potentially influence CCA (for overviews see Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003). In this study we focus on the influence of age, which has so far been left with little attention. In fact, age is not included as a potential predictor of CCA in main theoretical frameworks, all of which are based on thorough analyses of existing literature (e.g. Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou'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 it is included, the analyses yield mixed results (for summary see Hechanova et al., 2003): age appears to have negative influence on general living and interactional adjustment but positive on work adjustment.

On the other hand, recently more practitioner-oriented sources<sup>1</sup> have started to question the widely-established assumption that younger professionals are likely to adjust better to new locations and cultures than their older colleagues. The reality seems to be that driven by their ambition and eagerness to travel, younger professionals often fail to engage themselves in true cultural adjustment and are often caught unprepared when cultural differences emerge and get in the way of doing business. Meanwhile, older professionals are seen as having a number of advantages over their younger colleagues, namely they are more flexible, have more freedom to move, and possess steady temperament, calmness, and confidence of more mature individuals. Thus, these arguments suggest that, counterintuitively, age might have a positive association with CCA. However, academic literature on the topic has been rather rare. Therefore, there is a need to develop specific theoretical arguments concerning the role of age in expatriates' CCA (cf. Olsen & Martins, 2009).

It should be noted that whereas age remained relatively rarely examined in the literature, substantially more attention has been devoted to the role of expatriation experience in CCA (e.g., Aryee & Stone, 1996; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Kim & Slocum, 2008; Takeuchi & Chen, 2013; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). Moreover, whereas it seems to be plausible to argue that age and professional experience are closely related and thus can be treated

as interchangeable, yet we think that there are reasons to expect age and prior expatriation experience to have differential effects on expatriates' CCA. Experience, on the one hand, is likely to be contingent on specific assignment (e.g., the type, the duration and the complexity of task to accomplish) and/or context-related factors (e.g., national cultural similarity, the nature of local organizational practices and cultures). It is not likely to be directly transferrable between different contexts and assignments due to its specific and idiosyncrasy. On the other hands, age as a personal demographic characteristic of an expatriate cannot be attributed to any external factors. With age expatriates are likely to develop more generic emotional and cognitive skills, which are less likely to be bound by any specific assignment- or context-related factors and thus can be applied to diverse contexts and situations.

In this study, we use socioemotional selectivity theory to develop theoretical links between age, EI and CCA. It is a life span theory of how time horizons shape human motivation and attitudes (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005; Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselrode, 2000; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004). It suggests that people's age, emotions and attitudes are closely intertwined and personal goals are always set in a temporal context. When people perceive time as expansive, which is typical for younger adults, they tend to concentrate on preparing for 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 emotions regulation (i.e. control over emotions that an individual experiences and expresses).

The literature on EI tends to suggest that with age individuals are likely to become more emotionally intelligent because their emotional functioning tends to improve in middle and later adulthood (e.g., Mayer et al., 1999; Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, & Sitarenios, 2002; Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005). More specifically, Carstensen et al. (2000) suggest that age is associated with more differentiated emotional experience. Also, periods of highly positive emotional experience are more likely to endure and periods of highly negative emotional experience are likely to be less stable among older people. Taken together, these findings seem to support the idea that emotional abilities, such as EI, improve with age.

Hence, socioemotional selectivity theory appears to be relevant for theorizing the role of age as a moderator in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA. We now turn to developing our hypotheses based on this theory.

### 2.2. Age, emotional intelligence and general living adjustment

Socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that as people get older they increasingly direct their 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, the present-oriented goals (i.e. 'here and now') that maximize emotional meaning of life become more relevant. To accomplish this, older adults tend to be better at regulating their emotions by avoiding negative but intensifying positive emotional states and being more flexible in adjusting their emotional reactions and experiences in response to different life situations (Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004).

Younger adults have a tendency to process negative information more thoroughly than positive information and weigh negative information more heavily in impression formation, memory and decision making (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). In contrast, older adults tend to favor

<sup>1</sup> Bar-Pereg, M. (2012). Young, single, new job, new country? (March 2012), [http://www.expatica.com/nl/essentials\\_moving\\_to/relocation/young-single-new-job-in-new-country\\_12968.html](http://www.expatica.com/nl/essentials_moving_to/relocation/young-single-new-job-in-new-country_12968.html), accessed 26.8.2014. BBC: Freedom to move: Older professionals in new life abroad (January 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-16591514>, accessed 26.8.2014. Global Relocation Trends Survey (2011), Brookfield Global Relocation Services. [http://www.brookfieldgrs.com/knowledge/grts\\_research/grts\\_media/2011\\_GRTS.pdf](http://www.brookfieldgrs.com/knowledge/grts_research/grts_media/2011_GRTS.pdf), accessed 26.8.2014.

information that furthers their emotional satisfaction, so that their attention and memory are biased in favor of information that optimizes their ability to regulate emotions (Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004). Thus, depression, anxiety, emotional overreaction and stress are 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. Gross et al., 1997; Lawton, Kleban, Rajagopal, & Dean, 1992), which leads to greater life satisfaction and less loneliness (Diener & Suh, 1997), as well as improved emotional experience in everyday life (Carstensen, 1993).

Furthermore, age is generally associated with greater maturity and flexibility in coping with new life events leading to more complex and adaptive emotional responses (Diehl, Coyle, & Labouvie-Vief, 1996; Labouvie-Vief, DeVoe, & Bulka, 1989). For instance, with age people become more experienced, accomplished, and mature because they acquire more skills and insights conducive to their emotional traits becoming 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. They are better prepared to manage different unpredictable and difficult life situations (Carstensen et al., 2000; Keltner, 1996).

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 a new environment. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

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

### 2.3. Age, emotional intelligence and interactional adjustment

The 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). When interacting, they tend to be quicker in returning to positive emotional states than younger adults 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 their younger counterparts (Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993). It allows them to better regulate their emotions in interactions with others. When interacting, older adults appear to rely more on emotion-focused strategies: they employ less 'confrontative' coping and greater distancing and positive reappraisal than younger adults that ultimately leads to a greater sense of emotional control in interactions with others (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 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 (Charles, Mather, & Carstensen, 2003; Levine & Bluck, 1997). For instance, research on married couples showed that older adults tend to express less physiological reactivity (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994), anger, belligerence, disgust, and more affection with one another (Carstensen, 1995). Thus, older adults appear to be more skillful in managing emotionally charged interactions (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003).

When applied to expatriates on international assignment, older expatriates can be expected to be more skillful in using emotions in their interactions in new environments. They can also 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' EI and CCA by positively influencing the relationship between appraisal, regulation, and utilization of emotions and interactional adjustment.

### 2.4. Age, emotional intelligence 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 work-related situations. Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts that with age adults 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 become 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, 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) allows 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, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dijkers, 2011; Kooij et al., 2013). Older employees tend to possess a stronger orientation on maintenance and loss prevention in their work behavior than their younger colleagues (Freund, 2006; Heckhausen, 1997). It means that with age employees 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 employees 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 (Kooij et al., 2011; Rhodes, 1983).

Finally, another stream of research, drawing on the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1993, 1995), suggests a



less intense effect of psychological contract breach on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among older employees than among younger ones (Bal, De Lange, Jansen, & Van der Velde, 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2009). For instance, Ng and Feldman (2009) argue that with age, due to older employees' emotional maturation and increased altruism, employees' psychological contract with their organization becomes more malleable, meaning that older employees become more tolerant towards contract deviations. And Bal et al. (2013) suggest that the less intense effect can be explained by older employees' 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, 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 adjust to their new working environments more effectively. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

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

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Sample

Data were collected by surveying expatriates working overseas for a French public interest foundation set up under private law. It is a not-for-profit organization that aims at promoting French culture and language abroad by working closely with foreign partners in other countries. Currently, it is present in 133 countries around the world. We chose to focus on surveying one organization and expatriates of one nationality because in this way, controlling for our respondents' organization and their country of origin, we could minimize the impacts of their non-comparable home-host experiences and cultural backgrounds on our results.

The data was collected through a survey, which was administered in French. The choice of language was dictated by our concerns that not all of our respondents are fluent and comfortable in using English. The survey was sent out by email by the head of the organization's International Human Resource Management department. All the expatriates at the moment employed by the organization ( $n = 340$ ) were contacted. Two hundred and fifty-four of them responded to our questionnaire (response rate of 75%).

Because the questionnaire was administered in French, we undertook several measures to ensure the validity of the used constructs. First, we adopted French translations of the two key constructs in our study from existing literature where it has been previously translated and validated: the EI measure from Haag and Laroche (2009) and the CCA measure from Cerdin (1996, 1998). Then, translating the other measures, such as age and control variables, we took a great care in ensuring their proper and adequate translation. The adopted and translated measures were pretested on a number of French native speakers to ensure that there were no ambiguities and misunderstandings in how the measures were read and interpreted. Additionally, we have tested and validated the psychometric properties of the translated scales (see below).

The average age of the respondents was 41 years ( $SD = 11.11$ ) and the average experience in expatriation was around nine years

( $SD = 7.85$ ). In the sample 70% were men, about 54% were married or in partnership and 33% had children. The geographic distribution of the respondents was as follows: Europe (15%), North America (7%), Latin America and Caribbean (37%), Africa and Indian Ocean (16%), Asia (21%), and Oceania (4%).

#### 3.2. Measures

*Cross-cultural adjustment.* We used Black and Stephens's scale (1989) to measure CCA. As noted before, we adopted a French translation of the measure found in Cerdin (1996, 1998). The measure comprises 14 items measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 for "very unadjusted" to 6 for "perfectly adjusted". It consists of three dimensions and the three-dimensional structure has previously been tested and validated in the literature (e.g. Black et al., 1991; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Shaffer et al., 1999): general living adjustment (seven items, e.g. cost of living); interactional adjustment (four items, e.g. interacting with host nationals outside of work) and work adjustment (three items, e.g. performance standards and expectations). The validity and reliability of the measure were examined and confirmed. The French version of the construct fulfilled the required fit criteria:  $\chi^2(74) = 193.60$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; GFI = 0.914; RMSEA = 0.049. Cronbach's alphas for all three dimensions were satisfactory: general living ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), interactional ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and work ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

*Emotional intelligence.* To measure EI we used the 33 items construct based on the work of Schutte et al. (1998) and developed by Mayer, Di Paolo, and Salovey (1990). As noted above, we used a French translation of the measure developed and validated in Haag and Laroche (2009). As such, the adopted construct has been widely used in prior literature (see Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004 for an overview) where it has often been conceptualized and operationalized as consisting of three dimensions (e.g., Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2004; Mayer et al., 1990; Schutte et al., 2001). A confirmatory factor analysis of our data supported the three-dimensional structure of the construct: ( $\chi^2(350) = 642$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; GFI = 0.821<sup>2</sup>; RMSEA = 0.048). The three dimensions are the following ones: (1) emotional expression and appraisal of emotions in self and others (13 items, such as e.g. "I am aware of my emotions as I experience them"); (2) emotional regulation of self and others (10 items, such as e.g. "When I am in a positive mood solving problems is easy for me"); and (3) utilization of emotions in problem solving (10 items, such as e.g. "When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas"). Cronbach's alphas indicated satisfactory inter-item reliability: expression and appraisal of emotions (self and others),  $\alpha = 0.76$ ; regulation of emotions (in self and others),  $\alpha = 0.79$ ; utilization of emotions in solving problems,  $\alpha = 0.69$ .

*Age.* Age is a continuous variable, which was measured chronologically (e.g., Cleveland & Shore, 1992) as number of years. The youngest expatriate in our sample was 24 years old and the oldest 62 (range = 38). To illustrate the interaction effects in the interaction plots we used the median of age in the sample (40 years old). This cut-off also captures empirically meaningful life-cycle phases in a lifetime of an adult, such as the middle adulthood (24–40 years old), on the one hand, and the late adulthood/pre-retirement (41–65), on the other hand (see Bromley, 1966).

*Control variables.* To control for country and culture effect we included cultural similarity as a control variable. We adopted a subjective measure of cultural similarity as experienced by the expatriates themselves (Torbiorn, 1982). In our view, this measure

<sup>2</sup> Although the GFI statistic is somewhat lower than the traditional rule of thumb of  $\geq 0.90$ , we still consider it to be useable for our purposes as it is theoretically meaningful and the statistic obtained is the best compared to alternative specifications of this scale (i.e., one, two, four and six factor solutions).

**Table 1**  
Correlations and Cronbach's alphas.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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	4.34	0.60	0.28	0.31	0.27	(0.76)				
5. Regulation of emotions	4.85	0.52	0.27	0.23	0.26	0.18	(0.79)			
6. Utilization of emotions	4.29	0.74	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. Cultural similarity	2.86	0.98	0.35	0.12	0.24	0.02	0.15	0.17	0.03	(0.90)

N = 254. Coefficients larger than 0.08 are significant at  $p < 0.05$  level. Cronbach's alphas in brackets.

has the advantage of integrating the perceived cultural similarity between the home and host countries, as it is perceived by the expatriates themselves, without making any “objective” inferences concerning what countries are supposed to be more or less culturally similar to France (the home country in our sample). It was measured with eight items (e.g. everyday customs, climate, or housing conditions) adopted from Torbiorn (1982) and found in Black and Stephens (1989). The items were measured on a six-point Likert scale (1 for “very different” and 6 for “very similar”). The psychometric properties of the construct were acceptable ( $\chi^2(72) = 194.20$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; GFI = 0.896; RMSEA = 0.051). Cronbach's alphas indicated satisfactory inter-item reliability:  $\alpha = 0.90$ . We also introduced gender as a control variable. It was operationalized as a dummy variable where “0” stood for “man” and “1” for “woman. The summary statistics for the variables is shown in Table 1 below.

### 3.3. Assessment of common method bias

To control for common method variance (CMV) bias, we employed several *ex ante* and *ex post* measures, as recommended by Chang et al. (2010). First, we tried to avoid CMV during the research design stage. To prevent the social desirability bias, it was explained to the respondents that there are no right or expected answers and their anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Further, the items were ordered randomly throughout the questionnaire (not all of the items are used in this study). We ensured that the items are unambiguously and concisely formulated by piloting the instrument on several academic colleagues of ours who were French natives

Second, we used several statistical techniques to determine *ex post* whether our data analysis is likely to suffer from CMV. For starters, we performed a Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) by including all items of the three constructs (cross-cultural adjustment, emotional intelligence, cultural similarity) into an exploratory factor analysis. The analysis returned three factors with eigenvalues greater than one and the first factor accounted for less than 28% of the total variance. Thus, there was no evidence of unidimensionality in our data. Then, we followed Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff's (2003) approach to control for an unmeasured latent factor and performed a confirmatory factor analysis where we let items load on both their theoretical constructs and on a latent CMV factor. All item loadings were still significant after the inclusion of the latent factor. Finally, we used the CFA marker technique (Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010). We estimated a series of models as described in Williams et al. (2010): a baseline model, method-C model, method-U model, and method-R model (see Table 2). A comparison of the change in fit between these models is assessed as a statistical test for detecting CMV. The results summarized in Table 2 do not provide any evidence of CMV bias influencing our analyses.

Further, CMV is more likely to emerge in simplistic models (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010), whereas our theory-driven hypotheses led us to test interaction effects. The complex nature of our model can thus be expected to reduce CMV. Moreover, Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010) showed that CMV does not create artificial interaction effects. All in all, based on the described tests we can reasonably conclude that CMV neither influences our results nor biases the interpretation of our findings.

### 3.4. Empirical strategy

Regression models were developed to analyze the data. Determinants of general living, interactional and work adjustment were estimated separately. We ran models hierarchically by including respective sets of predicting variables in each sequential step as follows: control variables (Step 1), EI and age (Step 2), and interaction terms between age and EI (Step 3). To avoid possible multicollinearity problems, the variables were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991). VIF values ranged from 1 to 2 suggesting no multicollinearity issues. The direct and interactional influences of age are displayed in Table 2 for general living, interactional and work adjustments respectively.

## Findings

Table 3 below presents our results. In Step 1 we included only control variables. The models yielded a non-significant effect of gender on CCA but significant relationships were found between cultural similarity and all three facets of CCA confirming the positive association between CCA and cultural similarity (cf. Black et al., 1991). All models testing direct effects of EI on CCA in Step 2 yielded significant marginal  $R^2$  (all at  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning that the EI dimensions and age significantly improved the models and thus are important determinants of the three facets of CCA.

Together with age the three dimensions of EI have explained additional 16.4% of variance in general living adjustment (appraisal:  $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; regulation:  $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ; utilization:  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), additional 17.6% of variance in interactional adjustment (appraisal:  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; regulation:  $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ; utilization:  $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and additional 28.4% of variance in work adjustment (appraisal:  $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; regulation:  $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ; utilization:  $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It confirms prior results in the literature on EI and CCA (e.g. Gabel et al., 2005; Koveshnikov et al., 2014): the three dimensions of EI (appraisal and expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, utilization of emotions in problem solving) appear to have positive and significant associations with CCA.

With regard to the influence of age on CCA, somewhat contradicting the meta-analysis of Hechanova et al. (2003) but in line with Selmer (2001), our results in Step 2 also show that age has a significant and positive association with the three facets of

**Table 2**  
CFA marker technique results.

Model	Chi-square	Df	CFI
CFA	2546	2646	0.82
Baseline model	2589	2666	0.80
Method-C model	2586	2665	0.76
Method-U model	2603	2596	0.77
Method-R model	2615	2640	0.80
Chi-square model comparison tests	$\Delta$ Chi-square	$\Delta$ df	Critical value, $\alpha=0.05$
Baseline model vs method-C model	3.27	1	3.84
Method-C model vs method-U model	17.65	69	>79
Method-U model vs method-R model	12.59	44	>56

Baseline model: Correlations between the marker construct and the constructs are forced to zero.

Method-C: From the baseline model, factor loadings from the marker construct to each construct item are added and constrained to be equal (noncongeneric perspective).

Method-U: From the baseline model, factor loadings from the marker construct to each construct item are added and freely estimated (congeneric perspective).

Method-R: From the baseline model, the independent–dependent construct correlation was constrained to its unstandardized value from the baseline model.

adjustment: general living adjustment ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), interactional adjustment ( $\beta = 0.14$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and work adjustment ( $\beta = 0.12$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). More importantly for the focus of our analysis, we found interesting results concerning the moderating role of age in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA.

As seen from Table 3 and Figs. 1–3, the interaction effects of  $age \times EI$  (Step 3) partially supported Hypothesis 1. More specifically, the interaction terms of  $age \times regulation$  ( $\beta = 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and of  $age \times utilization$  ( $\beta = 0.03$ ;  $p < 0.1$ ) were positive and significant for general living adjustment. The interaction terms improved  $R^2$  from 0.28 to 0.32 ( $F$  change = 3.72,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus, age appears to be a facilitator of regulation and utilization of emotions for general living adjustment. No significant results were obtained for the role of age in moderating the relationship between appraisal and expression of emotions and general living adjustment.

In terms of interactional adjustment, only the interaction term  $age \times regulation$  was positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.07$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The interaction terms improved  $R^2$  from 0.25 to 0.29 ( $F$  change = 3.22,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, although age had no moderating effect neither for appraisal and expression of emotions nor

**Table 3**  
Determinants of cross-cultural adjustment: the influence of age.

	General living adjustment			Interactional adjustment			Work adjustment		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Constant	4.15*** (0.16)	4.36*** (0.16)	4.36*** (0.16)	4.42*** (0.22)	4.64*** (0.20)	4.64*** (0.25)	4.39*** (0.17)	4.53*** (0.15)	4.53*** (0.20)
<i>Control variables</i>									
Female	0.08 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.19 (0.14)	0.12 (0.12)	0.11 (0.13)	0.07 (0.17)	0.02 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)
Cultural similarity	0.19** (0.07)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.12*** (0.07)	0.04 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.20*** (0.06)	0.12** (0.05)	0.12** (0.05)
<i>Independent variables</i>									
Appraisal and expressions		0.12** (0.05)	0.10** (0.06)		0.19** (0.06)	0.17*** (0.07)		0.09** (0.05)	0.09** (0.05)
Regulation		0.09* (0.05)	0.13** (0.06)		0.09* (0.06)	0.14** (0.07)		0.08* (0.05)	0.10* (0.06)
Utilization		0.19*** (0.05)	0.20*** (0.05)		0.28*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.07)		0.31*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.05)
Age		0.06** (0.03)	0.06** (0.05)		0.14*** (0.04)	0.14*** (0.04)		0.12*** (0.03)	0.12** (0.05)
<i>Interactions</i>									
Appraisal $\times$ Age			-0.02 (0.03)			0.01 (0.04)			0.02 (0.03)
Regulation $\times$ Age			0.05** (0.03)			0.07** (0.04)			0.02 (0.03)
Utilization $\times$ Age			0.03* (0.03)			-0.03 (0.04)			-0.02 (0.03)
R-square	0.12	0.28	0.32	0.08	0.25	0.29	0.06	0.35	0.35
R-square change		0.16	0.03		0.18	0.03		0.28	0.00
F change		13.23	3.72		13.42	3.22		21.12	0.21
Sig. F change		<0.01	<0.01		<0.01	<0.01		<0.01	0.79

N = 254. Standard deviation in brackets.

\*  $p \leq 0.10$ .

\*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

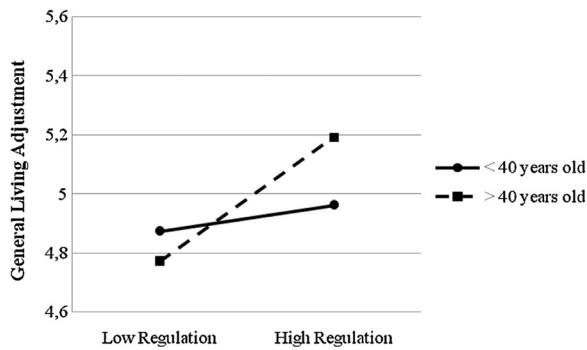


Fig. 1. Moderation effect of age on the relation between regulation of emotions and general living adjustment.

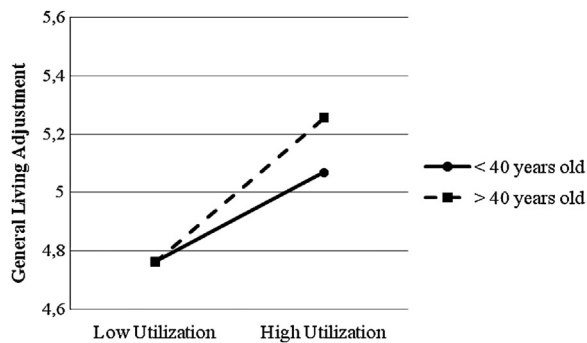


Fig. 2. Moderation effect of age on the relation between utilization of emotions and general living adjustment.

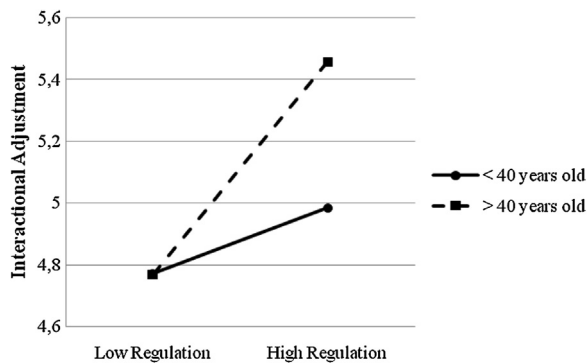


Fig. 3. Moderation effect of age on the relation between regulation of emotions and interactional adjustment.

utilizations of emotions, it moderated the relationship between regulation of emotions and interactional adjustment. Therefore, only partial support was found for Hypothesis 2. In terms of work adjustment, neither significant moderating effects nor significant  $R^2$  changes have been detected. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not confirmed.

Finally, we also conducted a post hoc analysis to shed some light on whether age and expatriation experience are in fact different in their influences on how expatriates use their EI for CCA when on assignment. We examined moderation effects of expatriation experience on the relationship between EI and CCA. In contrast to the chronological nature of age, experience is a time-related measure (see *Schaie, 1988*). We measured expatriation experience as the number of years a respondent worked as an

expatriate. The median number of years of experience as an expatriate was 1.41. We rounded off the median and adopted a cutoff point of 1 year to plot the interaction effects of expatriation experience on the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA.

Our results (see *Table 4* and *Fig. 4*) show that expatriation experience has a different and less prominent influence on CCA than age. It has a significant moderating effect only on the relationship between utilization of emotions and interactional adjustment ( $\beta = -0.12$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Interestingly, the effect appears to be negative. This outcome suggests that age and expatriation experience – even if closely related – are not necessarily interchangeable. Therefore, we conclude that the moderating effect of age seems to be more the consequence of expatriates naturally becoming emotionally mature and skillful with age rather than the outcome of prior expatriation experiences accumulated with age.

#### 4. Discussion

Our analysis is one of the first attempts to provide a more detailed understanding of the relationships between age, expatriation experience, EI and CCA in the context of expatriation. We think that it is a timely topic to shed some light on considering the latest developments in international expatriation: whereas the number of expatriates and the average number of assignments per expatriate are increasing, the average age of expatriates seems to be decreasing.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, as it was mentioned above, recently several practitioner-oriented sources suggested that in fact older expatriates may be better able to fit in and adjust to the host country than their younger colleagues supposedly due to their better social skills and stronger feelings of well-being in relation to the adjustment process. Against this background, 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.

Both EI and CCA are complex constructs comprising a number of dimensions, which interact differentially with each other. However, in existing analyses these dimensions are often lumped together thus, in our view, preventing researchers from identifying important nuances of how the two constructs interact. Complementing prior literature, we find 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 expatriates' prior expatriation experience affects the relationship between EI and CCA differently than age.

##### 4.1. Theoretical contributions

In our view, the analysis makes three key contributions. First, it reaffirms the positive and critical influence of EI on CCA among expatriates. Moreover, it goes further by developing theoretical arguments and providing an empirical examination for how the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA functions. Our analysis suggests that age acts as an important moderator facilitating the effect of EI's dimensions on different facets 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.

Up to now very little attention has been devoted to the role of age in expatriates' CCA, which is indicated by the fact that it is

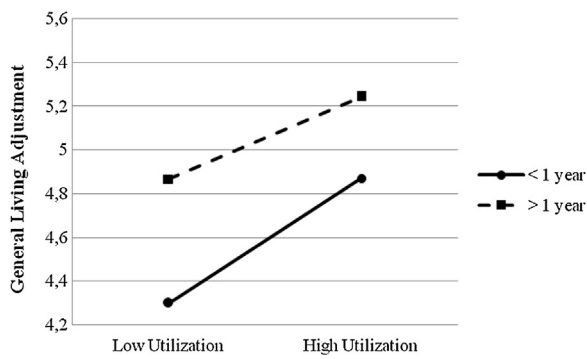
<sup>3</sup> Please see <http://m.mercer.com/press-releases/1521435?detail=D> (accessed on 31.3.2014).



**Table 4**  
Determinants of cross-cultural adjustment: the influence of experience (reduced results).

Moderator variable	General living adjustment	Interactional adjustment	Work adjustment
	Step 3	Step 3	Step 3
Expatriation experience	0.10** (0.05)	0.20*** (0.06)	0.13*** (0.05)
<i>Interaction terms</i>			
Appraisal × Expatriation experience	−0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.07)	0.02 (0.06)
Regulation × Expatriation experience	0.01 (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)	−0.01 (0.05)
Utilization × Expatriation experience	−0.04 (0.04)	−0.12*** (0.05)	−0.05 (0.04)
R-square	0.30	0.28	0.29
R-square change	0.00	0.02	0.01
F change	0.30	3.11	0.56
Sig. F change	0.83	≤0.01	0.64

N = 254. Standard deviation in brackets. \*  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .



**Fig. 4.** Moderation effect of experience on the relation between utilization of emotions and interactional adjustment.

largely absent from 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, mixed results are yielded. In this light, our analysis theoretically justifies and empirically confirms the positive role of age in enabling expatriates to utilize their EI for better CCA.

Second, our analysis introduced and applied socioemotional selectivity theory to the phenomenon of expatriates' CCA. It allowed us to provide valuable theoretical insights for our understanding of the phenomenon. Generally, our results indicate that expatriates' age has positive associations with all three facets of CCA. Moreover, going beyond this general finding, we found that indeed, as socioemotional selectivity theory predicts (e.g. Carstensen et al., 2003; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004), age facilitates to the largest extent the relationship between regulation of emotions and CCA, especially its general living and interactional adjustment facets. 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 EI dimensions, age also facilitates the relationship between utilization of emotions and general living adjustment. Other relationships do not appear to be significant. To verify our results, more research is needed to further and deepen our understanding of how age differentially influences different dimensions of expatriates' CCA. However, this study shows that socioemotional selectivity theory can be a relevant and helpful theoretical tool to address this phenomenon.

Finally, our analysis also confirms that age and expatriation experience cannot and should not be treated as interchangeable. Whereas the two are positively correlated and closely related, they are theoretically distinct constructs (cf. Ng & Feldman, 2009). As we argued above, age triggers certain physiological changes in an expatriate making him/her more emotionally mature and intelligent in a more generic sense. Whereas accumulated expatriation experience is likely to be bounded by the idiosyncrasies of prior expatriation assignments and the associated cultural and organizational contexts (see e.g. Avolio & Waldman, 1994; Forteza & Prieto, 1994). Indeed, we found that age and experience have different moderating effects on the relationship between EI and CCA. The latter was significant and negative for the relationship between utilization of emotions and interactional adjustment thus acting as a restraint. Several arguments can explain this finding. One possible reason why expatriation experience, contrary to age, does not seem to accumulate positive advantages for expatriates may stem from the fact that prior expatriation experiences are not necessarily 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 experienced, but not necessarily senior, expatriates yet another overseas assignment may be taken on and justified by e.g. career survival concerns, financial greed, or glamorous lifestyle. Once experienced and possibly not any more very motivated, expatriates may accept another assignment in their portfolio of international assignments for these kinds of reasons (e.g. Osland, 2001; Selmer, 2004). In such 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 also be applied 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 novel situations. They can anticipate challenges but they are also likely to be overconfident that they will overcome these challenges because they have done so before. It 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 expatriation experience cannot be treated as interchangeable in the expatriation literature. However, future research is needed to understand better the differences between the effects of age and prior experience on expatriates' CCA.

#### 4.2. Practical implications

This study has practical implications. Expatriation and the benefits that it offers are crucial for many contemporary organizations conducting international business. At the same time, it is a risky enterprise which can be very costly if an expatriate returns home prematurely. Takeuchi et al. (2005) estimate that the early return of a typical expatriate is estimated to cost from \$250,000 to \$1.25 million. Thus, the choice of potential expatriates is crucial for organizations. Age is a basic demographic characteristic, which is taken into account when selecting candidates for expatriation assignments. From an HRM perspective, our findings suggest that age is a positive personal characteristic complementary to the skills required to succeed on a specific assignment. Unlike the common sensical idea that younger expatriates may be more flexible and adaptable, and may cope better with new and unfamiliar situations and circumstances, our analysis implies that age and maturity, that comes with it, can be beneficial for expatriates to adjust to new cultural environments.

#### 4.3. Limitations and future research

Our analysis has several limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting our results. First, all our measures are self-reported. To address this limitation, we conducted several robustness checks which indicated that the CMV bias is not likely to affect neither our results nor their interpretations. It should also be noted that we deliberately used the self-reported measures because we wanted to get at the expatriates' own subjective evaluations of their CCA and EI abilities. Using external, not self-perceived, measures instead, could have potentially biased our results due to the possibility that on assignment expatriates can behave as well adjusted in front of their colleagues and superiors without actually feeling so in reality. Furthermore, CCA is a multidimensional concept that measures several facets of an expatriate's life abroad. And the three facets are not necessarily synchronized (see Pedersen, 1995) or easily observable and assessable by the expatriate's colleagues or superiors. As such, only the expatriate him/herself is able to adequately measure his/her degree of CCA.

Second, our analysis is based on a cross-sectional data meaning that we compared different age groups at a single point in time. The first potential problem of such a design is that the 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 75% of all expatriate managers in the case organization. The second potential problem in a cross-sectional design is known as cohort variation. Here, the differences between age groups may be attributed to the generational differences, whereas they may have nothing to do with age *per se*. To address this issue, in our models we ran additional models with generational cohorts as controls.

The results remained consistent across the models specifications. Nonetheless, longitudinal research designs would be highly relevant for future research.

Third, this study is limited to professional expatriates working for the public French organization. The idiosyncratic nature of our sample may limit the generalizability of our results. Yet, our sample consists of expatriates roughly between 30 and 52 years old and appears to be a good representation for the population of expatriates in contemporary international business world. Moreover, it seems plausible to suggest that the theoretical arguments developed and tested in this paper based on socioemotional selectivity theory concerning the moderation effects of age on the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA are likely to apply to other contexts and other types of expatriates, such as for example self-initiated expatriates.

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