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Conflict Resolution Styles as Mediators of Female Childhood Sexual Abuse Experience and
Couple Relationship Satisfaction and Stability in Adulthood

Ashlee E. Sloan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Conflict Resolution Styles as Mediators of Female Childhood Sexual Abuse Experience and Couple Relationship Satisfaction and Stability in Adulthood

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Post-traumatic stress theory applied to the experience of female incestuous childhood sexual abuse survivors (ICSA) suggests that the trauma may result in negative psychological consequences affecting relationships in adulthood. This study sought to explore the relational consequences of ICSA, specifically focusing on conflict resolution styles (CRS), relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. This research used data from the RELATionship Evaluation questionnaire. Participants included 487 heterosexual couples in which only the female partner experienced ICSA compared to a comparison group of 1827 couples in which neither partner experienced ICSA. Analyses tested for differences in the frequencies of reported CRS (Gottman 1994) for ICSA and non-ICSA groups. A path analysis also explored the mediating effects of CRS on the relationship between ICSA, and self and partner reported relationship satisfaction and stability. Significant differences in the reports of types of CRS were found for ICSA versus non-ICSA groups. Path analysis showed that although ICSA and CRS were negatively related to relationship satisfaction and stability, the mediating effects of CRS types were not found. Ways clinicians may want to focus on CRS when treating couples reporting low relationship satisfaction are discussed.

Keywords: Gottman conflict styles, childhood sexual abuse, relationship satisfaction

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Introduction

Clinical assessment of incestuous childhood sexual abuse (ICSA) in individuals presenting for relational therapy is important because the psychological effects experienced by ICSA survivors may extend beyond the initial trauma of ICSA into adult functioning and interpersonal relationships. Although this significance may be understood by some, Harway and Faulk (2005) argue that therapists are rarely trained to identify sexual abuse trauma origins of relational issues being presented in therapy.

Research has reported a wide range of percentages of women with CSA experience. In a 2001 survey based on the 1990 United States census, 13.5% of adult females surveyed reported having experienced CSA, although this report is most likely an underestimate because the survey excluded those in treatment programs, jails, prisons, or those who were homeless (Molnar, et. al., 2001). A child survey including ages 10-16 reported only a 3.2% prevalence of girls having experienced CSA (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). However, this may also be a gross underestimate because not only does it tend to contradict with other percentage literature, but this survey left out high risk children, like children in households without phones, alienated and angry children not inclined to participate, children with serious disabilities, and children in correctional and mental health facilities. Other reports have gone as high as 27% - 30% (Finkelhor, et. al., 1990; Finkelhor, et. al., 1997) of women having experienced CSA in the United States. These discrepancies may be due to the format of the surveys given (ex. child survivor self report vs. adult survivor self report) or perhaps to CSA survivors being at different stages in processing their trauma, including feeling ambivalence about sharing their experience with others.

Overall, a significant portion of the female population has experienced CSA. Some of these women experience negative traumatic effects as a result of CSA—effects that tend to ripple into adult intimate relationships and may present in therapy (Larson & Lamont, 2005). There is a gap in the CSA literature regarding adult interpersonal functioning of CSA survivors. Davis and Petretic-Jackson (2000, p.294) criticized that “overall there has been a relative neglect of interpersonal issues...neglecting the aspects of social functioning that involve the absence of positive social interactions.” This point was further supported by Briere and Elliott (1994, p.64), who suggested that “only a second wave of research focusing on potential ameliorating or exacerbating variables in the genesis of abuse effects can provide a more complete picture of the complexities of childhood sexual victimization and its psychological impacts.”

Clearly, little research has studied possible factors that influence adult interpersonal functioning in CSA survivors. In considering which factors to explore, Martinson, et. al. (2010, p.214) suggested that there are “attitudinal, personality, affect regulation, and interpersonal differences [such as empathic communication, stonewalling, flooding in conflict management, contempt/defensiveness, etc.] between those who have come to terms with family-of-origin issues and those who have not.” Specific variables that have been explored include age of initial molestation, extension and frequency of abuse, incestuous or non-incestuous CSA, the presence or absence of force, and the number of perpetrators (Conte & Schuerman, 1987).

The purpose of this study is to explore the possible mediating relationship of Gottman’s (1994) conflict resolution styles (CRS) between the trauma of female ICSA and reported relationship satisfaction and stability in adult committed relationships. Increased awareness and understanding in this area can better help educators, clinicians, and future researchers understand the specific conflict resolution needs of this traumatized population and their spouses.

Theoretical Approach

Several theories may provide a strong foundation for understanding the adult interpersonal effects of ICSA, including “post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) perspective, attachment theory, contextual behavioral perspective, and interpersonal schema theory” (Dillo, 2001). The PTSD perspective is the most common and widely applied model in literature to ICSA. However, there is some disagreement among scholars concerning the applicability of this model to all ICSA incest survivors. Some suggest that the PTSD symptoms are universal to ICSA experience, while others suggest it occurs in only a minority of survivors (Briggs & Joyce, 1997). PTSD theory was used for this study because it suggests that the trauma of experiencing CSA has psychological consequences that are generally considered to be long lasting (Briggs & Joyce, 1997), and therefore more likely to affect committed relationships in adulthood.

As described by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), PTSD from children may originate from “developmentally inappropriate sexual experiences without threatened or actual violence or injury.” This may result in relational consequences, including feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, restricted range of affect, irritability or outbursts of anger, hyper vigilance, and efforts to avoid conversations regarding the trauma, etc. CSA survivors may experience a series of developmental stages of trauma recovery that interfere with daily life (Fleming, 1997; Brier 1992), mirroring many of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Walker, et. al., 2011; Harway & Faulk, 2005; Brier, 1992). Throughout the process of healing from the trauma of ICSA, some behaviors and initial reactions may fade over time, while others may become increasingly more potent and complicated (Brier, 1994).

Review of Literature

ICSA and Psychological Effects

Many clinical concerns, such as depression, post-traumatic stress, anger, intimacy issues, etc., have been associated with ICSA experience (Neumann et al., 1996). Compared to 21.3% of adult women with depression in the general population, 39.1% of women CSA survivors report depression, and 48.5% of women in the general population report mood, anxiety, or substance abuse disorders, compared to 78% of female CSA survivors (Kessler, Abelson, & Zhao, 1998). These psychological effects of CSA may be due to the disruption of normative psychological development from the trauma of CSA.

Normative psychological development for children includes a sense of security in trusting adults. If that security is shattered children may feel betrayed. This may be especially true if the child processes that the harm from the adult was intentional, selfish, or that the adult was lying to them about the nature of the act (Briere, 1992). Davis and Petretic-Jackson (2000) further explain that this betrayal by a primary caregiver translates into distorted expectations of future committed relationships. They may become more emotionally sensitive to betrayal, having a heightened loss of trust in others and may react strongly to validation of this expectation with anger—negatively impacting their capacity to develop healthy relationships. The experience of incestuous CSA may distort adult committed relationships.

ICSA and Adult Relationships

Female ICSA survivors tend to see themselves as unworthy of healthy relationships (Conte & Schuerman, 1987) or wish to avoid becoming involved in a relationship. For example, Larson and Lamont (2005) indicated that women ICSA survivors may wait one and a half years longer on average than non-ICSA survivors to marry due to developed expectations that

marriage will be difficult, unsatisfactory, and present with high levels of conflict. Compared to a community sample, ICOSA survivors often perceive their committed relationships as more poorly adjusted (Feinauer, Callahan, & Hilton, 1996). As a result of skewed perceptions of relationships from the trauma of ICOSA, these women may report being less satisfied and stable in their relationships.

ICOSA and Relationship Satisfaction

Female ICOSA experience has been found to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction (Nelson & Wampler, 2000; Dilillo, 2001; Hunter, 1991). This may be related to other findings, specifically that ICOSA survivors and their partners report higher levels of emotional intensity (Nelson & Wampler, 2002) and female ICOSA couples experience greater contempt and defensiveness in their relationships (Walker et al., 2011). Female ICOSA survivors also tend to perceive their partners as more controlling and uncaring than non-ICOSA women (Mullen, et. al., 1994), as well as more neurotic and conflict prone (Busby, Walker, & Holman, 2011).

ICOSA and Relationship Stability

ICOSA is related to decreased relationship stability in adult relationships, specifically in that ICOSA experience is related to more youth risk taking, pre-developmentally appropriate cohabitation, and repeating relationships with abusive partners (Friesen, et al., 2010). ICOSA victims have also been found to separate or divorce more than those without ICOSA experience (Dilillo, 2001; Finkelhor, et. al, 1989).

ICOSA and Mediators of Relationship Satisfaction and Stability

Little research has been conducted to explain the mechanisms or mediating factors through which female ICOSA impacts adult heterosexual intimate relationships. One study with

low income community women found that perceptions of powerlessness and betrayal served as a mediator between severity of sexual abuse and maladaptive partner relationships (Kallstrom-Fuqua, et. al., 2004). Another community based study discovered that sexual risk taking and aggression before marriage negatively mediated the relationship between CSA and relationship satisfaction (Testa, et. al., 2005), while another study found that a history of CSA negatively affected marital satisfaction as mediated by the presence of increased youth sexual risk taking (Friesen, et. al., 2010). However, none of these studies accounted for the conflict resolution styles of ICSA survivors and their partners that likely are related to youth risk taking behaviors and poor relationship quality.

ICSA and Disrupted Adult Relationship Communication

We posit that one important factor to be explored is disrupted communication skills in ICSA survivors. Twenty-three percent of ICSA victims have report feeling no “meaningful communication” with their partners, whereas only 6% of non-abused women report the same (Mullen, et. al., 1994). Partners of survivors also report relationship issues. For example, some report feeling isolation, pain, anger, frustration, dissatisfaction (Reid, et. al., 1995), resentment, or powerlessness (Harway & Faulk, 2005). Barcus (1997) also found that husbands of female ICSA survivors felt rage, confusion by their spouse’s mood swings, and less interest in sex.

Conflict Resolution Styles: An Explanation

Gottman (1994) explained that there are four conflict resolution styles used by couples. Three of these are regulated (stable) styles of conflict resolution, and one is unregulated (unstable). The three regulated conflict styles are: validating, volatile, and conflict-avoidant. The unregulated conflict style is hostility. Gottman determined that regulated relationships were

the most stable because they maintained a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions, whereas the unregulated were least stable and more prone to stonewalling and defensiveness.

Conflict Resolution Styles as Mediators of ICSA and Relationship Satisfaction

Holman (2003) found that conflict styles, in order from the associated lowest reported relationship satisfaction to the highest, were: hostile, volatile, avoidant, and validating styles. Busby and Holman (2009) also studied marital mismatches of conflict style types and their reported relationship variable trends. There is support for a “one is enough” idea that if one spouse is considered hostile, there is a drop in relationship satisfaction. Similarly, if one spouse is perceived as validating, relationship satisfaction is reported higher by both partners. They also determined that in general couples with matched validating styles were more satisfied and stable and more likely to report less problems in the relationship.

Summary and Research Questions

Research has yet to discover the relational impact of female ICSA experience on committed relationships in adulthood, specifically, CRS. This study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are female ICSA survivors’ self-reports of their conflict resolution styles (i.e. avoidant, validating, volatile, or hostile) compared to women with no ICSA background, and what are male partner’s conflict resolution style self report? (2) What do women ICSA survivors report *their male partner’s* conflict resolution style to be as compared to women with no ICSA background, and what are the *male partner’s* report of their female partner’s conflict style? (3) Does conflict resolution style (*as reported by the partner*) significantly mediate the relationship between ICSA experience and self-reported relationship satisfaction and stability?

Methods

Sample

The participants in this study include female ICSA survivors in married, engaged, remarried, cohabiting, or serious dating relationships. Couples for this study were selected for the ICSA group if the female partner had experienced CSA from a family member (incest) as defined by immediate blood or step relations, including extended relatives. Abuse from a family member was selected as the type of ICSA because the nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim is one variable that has a significant influence on the psychological outcome ICSA trauma (Ketring, & Feinauer, 1999) and females are more likely to be abused by a family member than a non-family member (Finkelhor, 1990). Sibling perpetrators as well as parental figure perpetrators were included, as the effects of sexual abuse from a sibling have been found to be as psychologically distressing as parental abuse (Cyr, et. al, 2002).

Couples for this study were included if the female ICSA survivor and her partner answered the sexual abuse, relationship satisfaction, relationship instability, and conflict style subscales on RELATE with both self-reports and reports of their partner. Busby and Tanaguchi (2000) explained that by using systems questioning to obtain ratings from both the ICSA survivors and their partners, research can enhance understanding of perceptual differences in couple relationships, and their clinical implications.

Participants and Control Variables

Participants answered the RELATE questionnaire individually, each being referred by varying sources. Of the couples who answered how they were referred to RELATE, 40.3% ($N=559$) had been referred by an instructor, 18.5% ($N=256$) by a relationship educator or therapist, 8.7% ($N=121$) by clergy, 14.1% ($N=196$) by a friend or family member, while 5.1%

($N=71$) found RELATE through an internet search, 0.5% ($N=7$) through a newspaper or magazine ad, 1.3% ($N=18$) through an online ad, and 11.4% ($N=158$) through other unspecified means.

Due to the RELATE sample including a broad range of participants, only heterosexual couples in committed relationships (married, engaged, remarried, cohabiting, or seriously dating) in which only the female partner experienced incest in her family of origin were included the comparison group used in this study. Couples in which both partners experienced childhood trauma show an increase in PTSD, anxiety, somatization, hostility, phobic anxiety, and depression than the one-partner ICSA group, while simultaneously showing higher relationship quality, thus suggesting that couples with shared childhood trauma may have similar interaction patterns and thus be better matched to their partner (Lev-Wiese & Amir, 2003). For this reason, only committed relationships in which the male partner experienced no physical or sexual abuse was included in this study. We acknowledge that some consider sexual abuse a form of physical abuse. In our analysis, we found that only 27% ($N=597$) of the women ICSA survivors in our sample reported having experienced no other forms of physical violence at home. Therefore, since such a small group of ICSA survivors reported no violence at home, we determined it may be more clinically applicable to exclude violence at home as a control variables, especially with the possibility that the experiences of sexual abuse may have been paired with the experience of violence.

These criteria resulted in a participant sample of 487 couples in the female ICSA incest survivor group. See Table 1 for age, education, and racial demographic data. The comparison non-ICSA group included 1827 couples. See Table 2 for age, education, and racial demographic data of the comparison group. The demographics of these participant samples show differences

in age, ethnicity, and level of education. That is, females without ICSEA experience were oldest (range = 18-79 years), non-ICSEA couples were the most highly educated, and ICSEA couples were more racially diverse. Although matching the two groups was considered, it was determined that it would be too complicated to match the data on these and other variables (e.g. length of relationship) and that instead these variables would be better controlled for as covariates. These demographic differences were controlled in the structural equation model that tests for the mediating relationship of the conflict resolution style on relationship satisfaction and stability.

At the time they took the questionnaire, the average length of relationship for non-ICSEA couples was 4.5 years (S.D. = 2.43) and the average length of relationship for ICSEA couples was 4.9 years (S.D. = 2.85). Length of relationship was controlled in this study because research suggests that as a couple's relationship matures, there is an increase in positive affect (Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001) that may impact relational functioning.

Frequency of ICSEA experience (a factor of severity) was controlled in this study because previous research shows that frequency of ICSEA experience impacts the severity of the psychological response to the trauma of CSA (Briggs & Joyce 1997). A heightened psychological response to the trauma may impact relationships in adulthood, specifically relationship satisfaction and stability (Nelson & Wampler, 2000; Dillillo, 2001; Hunter, 1991). Since this research focused on ICSEA as a group membership variable (e.g. ICSEA or non-ICSEA experience), frequency of abuse was not studied as an independent variable.

Measures

Data were obtained using the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE) questionnaire, a three hundred item questionnaire found online at www.relate-institute.org. This assessment consists of specific variables and scales as developed by social scientists using statistical,

qualitative, educational, and psychological standards to ensure validity. RELATE is designed to assess the challenges and strengths in dating, engaged, or married relationships, and to evaluate individual, cultural, and family of origin elements of relationships. After completing the questionnaire, participants receive feedback to review either individually, as a couple, or with a therapist. The reader is referred to Busby, et.al (2001) for a more thorough understanding of RELATE and its theoretical foundation. Reliability analyses show that the scales within RELATE have reliability scores ranging from .70 to .90 (internal consistency) and test-retest reliability scores ranging from .63 to .95. Factor analyses for construct validity show that all correlations range from .45 to .65, showing a strong yet distinct relationship between the specific constructs. The specific scales to be used in this study are outlined and explained below.

RELATE sexual abuse measure. Experience of intra-family sexual abuse was assessed in RELATE using the following question: “From the following list of family members, select the person who was most sexually abusive toward you.” Response choices include: 1)Brother 2)Sister 3)Father 4)Mother 5) Step or Foster Father 6)Step or Foster Mother 7)Another Relative 8)No family member was sexually abusive toward me. This question was recoded as 1) a family member sexually abused me (inclusive of responses 1-7), or 0) no family member sexually abused me (inclusive of response 8) to create ICSA and non-ICSA groups.

Conflict resolution style measure. Conflict resolution style was assessed using one question in RELATE (Holman & Jarvis, 2003) with a response choice of four empirically common conflict resolution style types identified by Gottman (1994) for oneself and for one’s partner. These include Gottman’s four styles of: 1) Avoidant 2) Volatile 3) Validating 4) Hostile. Respondents rated themselves and then their partner by placing an “x” next to the style

that most closely describes them and their partner during *most* conflicts. Both the self report and the report of one's partner's behavior or style are described in the questionnaire as follows:

Rating of Self

1. Avoidant: I avoid conflict. I don't think there is much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seems to make matters worse. I think that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.
2. Validating: I discuss difficult issues but it is important for me to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. I prefer to let others know that their opinions and emotions are valued even if they are different than mine. When arguing, I try to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
3. Volatile: I debate and argue about issues until they are resolved. Arguing openly and strongly doesn't bother me because this is how differences are resolved. Although sometimes my arguing is intense that is okay because I try to balance this with kind and loving expressions. I think passion and zest actually leads to a better relationship with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
4. Hostile: I can get pretty upset when I argue. When I am upset at times I insult my partner by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions my partner finds it difficult to listen to what I am saying because I am trying to make a point. Sometimes I have intensely negative feelings toward my partner when we have a conflict.

Rating of Partner

1. Avoidant: My partner avoids conflict. She/he doesn't think there is much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seems to make matters worse. She/he thinks that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.
2. Validating: My partner discusses difficult issues but it is important for her/him to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. She/he prefers to let others know that their opinions and emotions are valued even if they are different than hers/his. When arguing, she/he tries to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
3. Volatile: My partner debates and argues about issues until they are resolved. Arguing openly and strongly doesn't bother her/him because this is how differences are resolved. Although sometimes her/his arguing is intense that is okay because she/he tries to balance this with kind and loving expressions. She/he thinks passion and zest actually leads to a better relationship with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
4. Hostile: My partner can get pretty upset when she/he argues. When she/he is upset at times she/he insults me by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions she/he finds it difficult to listen to what I am saying because she/he is trying to make a point. Sometimes she/he has intensely negative feelings toward me when we have a conflict.

Holman and Jarvis (2003) showed these four couple-conflict types—similar to Gottman’s (1994) conflict styles—can be reliably identified using survey methods, and the measures are considered to be both valid and reliable.

Relationship satisfaction measure. Relationship satisfaction was assessed in a seven item subscale from RELATE for each partner (Cronbach’s alphas ranged from .86 to .87). The possible scores for each item ranged from 1-5 using a Likert Scale. Responses categories included 1) Very Dissatisfied 2) Dissatisfied 3) Neutral 4) Satisfied 5) Very Satisfied. The questions asked “How satisfied are you with the following?” 1)The physical intimacy you experience 2)The love you experience 3) The conflicts you resolve 4)The relational equality you experience 5)The amount of time you have together 6)The quality of your communication 7)Your overall relationship with your partner. Scores for each partner were summed and divided by seven to create a mean satisfaction score (range= 7-35). Higher satisfaction scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Both the partner and self reports were used because Busby, Holman, and Tanaguchi (2001) found that the rating of the partner’s satisfaction is more indicative of true relationship satisfaction than self report.

Relationship stability measure. Relationship instability was assessed in a 3 item subscale from RELATE for each partner (Cronbach’s α s ranged from .794 to .802). Questions asked: 1)How often have you thought your marriage might be in trouble? 2) How often have you and your partner discussed ending your marriage? 3)How often have you broken up or separated and then gotten back together? Possible scores ranged from 1-5 using a Likert Scale. Possible responses included: 1) Never 2) Rarely 3) Sometimes 4) Often 5) Very Often. Scores for each partner were summed and divided by three to create an instability score (range= 3-15).

Analysis

First, two independent groups for comparison were created. The first group (ICSA) is comprised of couples in which only the female partner experienced ICSEA. The second group (Non ICSEA) includes couples in which the female partner did not experience violence in her family of origin or CSA. Male partners in both groups reported no ICSEA or violence in their family of origin.

Research Question 1

Questions 1 and 2 were answered by using a 2x4 Chi Square analyses. Chi Square (McCall, 1975) is an analysis tool used to determine a statistically significant relationship between two nominal variables. It does this by comparing expected and observed frequencies of a given variable using nominal data.

For research question one, a chi-square tested for a significant difference in CRS between ICSEA survivor couples and non-ICSEA survivor couples. The analysis first considered how female ICSEA survivors rated their own CRS, as compared to females in the comparison group. Secondly, analysis explored how female ICSEA survivors rated their partner's CRS, as compared to non-ICSEA females' ratings of their partners. These two analyses were also conducted to compare the male partner groups, including reports of self and partner CRS. Once the overall chi-square statistic was obtained, a step down analysis was conducted to determine the significance within each group of comparisons. See table 3 for complete chi-square results for male and female self-report of CRS.

Females. Analysis showed an overall significant difference in self-reported conflict styles between ICSEA and non-ICSEA groups, $\chi^2(3, N=2314) = 17.42, p < .001$. Step down analyses revealed significant differences in two conflict style groups when comparing the ICSEA

and non-ICSA groups: volatile, $\chi^2 (1, N=872) = 4.542, p=.033$, and hostile, $\chi^2 (1, N=436) = 5.357, p=.021$. That is, the ICSA groups reported more frequent use of volatile and hostile CRS than non-ICSA groups.

Males. Analyses also showed a significant difference in conflict styles between ICSA and non-ICSA groups by male report of his own CRS, $\chi^2 (3, N=2314) = 13.680, p = .003$. Step down analysis revealed that they were significantly more likely than non-CSA males to report a hostile style of CRS, $\chi^2 (1, N=1464) = 12.686, p < .00$.

In summary, these analyses show that frequencies of female self-report of conflict resolution style appear to be different between ICSA and non-ICSA groups, in that they are more volatile and hostile. Frequencies of ICSA male self-report conflict resolution styles were significantly different from non-ICSA males in that they more frequently reported hostility.

Research Question 2

For research question two, chi-square analyses tested for differences between female ICSA and non-ICSA groups in their report of their perceptions of their male partner's CRS. The same procedure was used to test for differences between male ICSA and non-ICSA groups as to how they perceive their female *partner's* CRS.

Females. See table 4 for complete chi-square results of the female's report of partner CRS. Analysis showed a significant difference in reported partner conflict styles between ICSA and non-ICSA groups, $\chi^2 (3, N=2314) = 10.873, p = .012$. Step down analysis revealed that significantly higher percentages of ICSA women report their male partners to have hostile conflict styles, $\chi^2 (1, N=1441) = 9.821, p = .002$, than non-ICSA women.

Males. See table 4 for complete chi-square results of male partner report of CRS. Again, analyses showed a significant difference in conflict styles between groups, $\chi^2 (3, N=2314)$

=15.67, $p < .01$. Step down analysis revealed that significantly higher percentages of men in committed relationship with ICSA women reported their ICSA partners to have hostile conflict styles, $\chi^2(1, N=1412) = 15.39, p < .001$.

In summary, analyses showed that frequencies of female and male reports of partner conflict resolution styles were significantly different across ICSA and non-ICSA groups in that ICSA couples reported higher frequencies of hostile conflict styles.

Research Question 3

The last research question explored the possible mediating effect of conflict resolution styles on relationship satisfaction and stability. See table 5 for mean scores and standard deviations for both groups as well as the combined groups on self-reported relationship satisfaction and stability. A visual examination showed that ICSA groups on average had lower relationship satisfaction than non-ICSA groups. ICSA groups had more instability than non-ICSA groups. As a total sample, most couples reported being satisfied and stable in their relationship.

Covariates. The mediation model controlled for the effects of relationship length, education, race, and frequency of abuse.

Independent variables. Three independent variables were incorporated in this model: (1) female ICSA or non-ICSA (dummy coded to 1=ICSA and 0=no ICSA), (2) male partner's report of her conflict resolution style, and (3) female partner's report of his conflict resolution style. The latter two variables were hypothesized to be mediator variables between CSA groups and relationship satisfaction and stability. These mediators were dummy coded from the original conflict resolution styles. Knowing that validating conflict styles are more commonly reported in all samples and more positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Holman 2003), and

that our research focused on the less common conflict styles, we studied the three non-validating styles separately (e.g. hostile, volatile, and avoidant) in comparison to the other styles. Hostility was recoded to: 1=hostile, 0=the other three styles. Volatility was recoded to: 1=volatile, 0=the other three styles. Avoidance was recoded to: 1=avoidant, 0=the other three styles. Variables MAvoid, MVolatile, and MHostile are the male's report of the female partner's conflict style (e.g. avoidant, volatile, or hostile). Variables FAvoid, FVolatile, and FHostile are the female partner's report of the male partner's conflict resolution style.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables in the path model were the male reports of relationship satisfaction and instability, and the female reports of relationship satisfaction and instability. Although these satisfaction and stability scales are well established in literature (Busby, et. al., 2001), a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to ensure satisfactory measurement of them as latent variables.

To answer this research question, the analyses were conducted in the two following steps. First, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate how well relationship satisfaction and stability were measured by the subscales (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). We compared two measurement models to examine the measurement invariance of relationship satisfaction and stability between the male and female respondents. The first model was specified to have the factor loadings freely estimated. The second model had all the factor loadings constrained to be equal across the male and female respondents. The Wald Chi-square tests revealed that the majority of the factor loadings were invariant while a few were variant as indicated by asterisk in Table 6 ($\chi^2_{dif} = 79.78, df_{dif} = 5, p < .00$). This second model, where the majority of the factor loadings were held invariant, and a few were allowed to vary, as indicated in Table 6, fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 1387.00, df = 156, p = 0.00, CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .06$) and was used

throughout the rest of the analysis. As a note, these tests were based on the unstandardized estimates so the standardized factor loading estimates appear to be similar or identical.

Second, the structural equation model (SEM) was estimated to test the possible mediating effects of CRS on relationship satisfaction and stability. We used the freely estimated model as a baseline, and imposed constraints in order to simplify and enhance the model's interpretation power. The effects that differed between the two respondents, and therefore were left unconstrained to vary between partners included: (1) The effect of male report of female avoidance on ICSA, between female report of male avoidance on ICSA (2) female report of male avoidance on frequency of abuse, between male report of female avoidance on frequency of abuse (3) male report of female volatility on relationship length, between female report of male volatility on relationship length (4) male report of relationship satisfaction on relationship length, between female report of relationship satisfaction on relationship length (5) male report of relationship stability on male report of female volatility, between female report of relationship stability on female report of male volatility (6) male report of relationship stability on male reported educational level, between female report of relationship stability on female reported educational level (7) male report of relationship satisfaction on female partner ICSA experience, and female report of relationship satisfaction on female ICSA experience, and (8) male report of relationship stability on female ICSA experience, between female report of relationship stability on female ICSA experience. The final structural equation model estimated had good model fit (chi square = 1720.833, $df=483$, $p = 0.00$; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) =.954; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .96; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMEA) =.049; Weighted Root Mean Square Residual (WRMR) =1.925). The results of the path model are illustrated in Figure 1 with standardized regressions and associated levels of significance.

The software for these models was using MPlus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2013). Missing values were dealt with by the maximum likelihood estimation.

Structural equation model results. This model shows the significant paths for all relationships between ICSA experience and partner reports of CRS, along with self-reported relationship satisfaction and instability. The variables that target the male report of the female partner's conflict resolution styles are: male report of female partner avoidance, male report of female partner volatility, and male report of female partner hostility. The variables that target the female report of the male partner's conflict resolution styles are: female report of male partner avoidance, female report of male partner volatility, and female report of male partner hostility. Again, these three variables (avoidant, volatile, and hostile) were included in the SEM model, while validation was excluded from the model because validation is commonly reported among the majority of participants and generally known to be more positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Holman 2003). Our research was more interested in understanding the three non-validating styles separately (e.g. hostile, volatile, and avoidant) in comparison to all other styles (including validation). Also, for the SEM model to be statistically sound, we needed to compare each style to a similar baseline style, which in this case, was validation. Four independent variables measured relationship satisfaction. For males, the two variables were: male self-report of rsatisfaction (relationship satisfaction), and male self-report of rinstability (relationship instability). For females, the two variables were: female self-report of rsatisfaction, and female self-report of rinstability.

Direct effects. ICSA experience is significantly negatively related to male ($\beta = -.15, p < .01$) and female relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$). ICSA experience is also significantly directly related to male ($\beta = .16, p = .02$) and female ($\beta = .16, p = .02$) reports of

partner volatility. ICSA experience was not significantly directly related to either hostile or avoidant conflict styles.

Each of these conflict resolution styles were directly negatively related to relationship satisfaction, and positively related to instability, with one exception, the relationship between female report of partner volatility and her self-reported relationship instability, which was non-significant. Also, one conflict style, hostility, was much more strongly related to relationship satisfaction and instability than the others as reported by both partners. Male report of female partner hostility was significantly and highly negatively related to male report of relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.56, p < .00$) and positively related to instability ($\beta = .56, p < .00$). Female report of male partner hostility was significantly and highly negatively related to female report of relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.61, p < .00$) and positively related to instability ($\beta = .55, p < .00$).

There were fewer ($N= 452$) participants in the hostile group than the volatile group ($N= 946$). Therefore, in this model, if there were higher counts of participants in the hostile group, it may have been likely that a significant path would have been found between ICSA and hostility. This is important to note, as Gottman (1994) suggests that volatility may escalate and grow into hostility. He also suggests that emotional flooding, high emotions, and intense behaviors are also associated with hostility and volatility. Therefore, volatility is not a safe way to communicate, as it may change into hostility.

Mediating effects. One significant result was found in the analysis of CRS as a mediator between ICSA experience and reported relationship satisfaction and instability. The mediating effect of the male report of female volatility on the relationship between ICSA experience and male relationship instability ($\beta = .03, p = .04$) was significant. Therefore, when the male reported that his female partner was volatile, he also reported higher relational instability. There was no

direct effect between ICSA and male relationship instability. All other mediation paths were found to be non-significant. For males: (1) The mediation effect for each conflict style on female partner ICSA experience and *male* partner reported relationship *satisfaction* were: avoidant ($\beta = -.02, p = .44$), volatile ($\beta = -.01, p = .07$), and hostile ($\beta = -.06, p = .28$) with the sum of these indirect effects also insignificant ($\beta = -.09, p = .10$) and (2) The mediation effect for each conflict style on female partner ICSA experience and *male* partner reported relationship *instability* were: avoidant ($\beta = .01, p = .44$), volatile ($\beta = .03, p = .04$), and hostile ($\beta = .06, p = .28$) with the sum of these indirect effects also insignificant ($\beta = -.03, p = .10$). For females: (1) The mediation effect for each conflict style on female partner ICSA experience and *female* reported relationship *satisfaction* were: avoidant ($\beta = .05, p = .09$), volatile ($\beta = -.01, p = .07$), and hostile ($\beta = -.06, p = .28$) with the sum of these indirect effects also insignificant ($\beta = -.03, p = .61$) and (2) The mediation effect for each conflict style on female partner ICSA experience and *female* partner reported relationship *instability* were: avoidant ($\beta = -.02, p = .12$), volatile ($\beta = .01, p = .21$), and hostile ($\beta = .06, p = .28$) with the sum of these indirect effects also insignificant ($\beta = .04, p = .41$).

Variance. The full model accounted for 47.5% ($p < .001$) of the variance in male relationship satisfaction, and 41.2% ($p < .001$) of the variance in male relationship instability. The model also accounted for 51.5% ($p < .001$) of the variance in female relationship satisfaction, and 35.2% ($p < .001$) of female relationship instability.

Summary. In summary, the direct negative effects of ICSA experience on male and female relationship satisfaction and stability were found to be significant. Secondly, conflict resolution styles were directly negatively related to reported relationship satisfaction and stability for both males and females. Of all the conflict styles explored, hostility was the most strongly

related to relationship satisfaction and stability for males and females. However, there was only one minor mediation effects of CRS types on relationship satisfaction and instability. Male report of female partner volatility mediated the relationship between female ICSA experience and male reported relationship instability, meaning that if the male reported his ICSA partner to be volatile, he was more likely to report the relationship as less stable overall.

These analyses answered the third research question, does conflict resolution style (*as reported by the partner*) significantly mediate the relationship between ICSA experience and self-reported relationship satisfaction and stability? Results showed that with the exception of one mediation pathway (male report of female volatility affecting his relationship stability) CRS appears not to be a mediator between ICSA experience and relationship satisfaction and stability.

Discussion

Previous research has suggested that female ICSA survivors are likely to experience relational consequences of the trauma in adulthood (Briggs & Joyce, 1997; Mullen, et. al., 1994). Our study supports previous research that has found female ICSA experience to be a risk factor for relationship satisfaction in heterosexual couples (Walker et al, 2011; Friesen, et. al., 2010; Nelson & Wampler, 2000; Dilillo, 2001; Hunter, 1991), but it does not support the idea that ICSA directly impacts relationship instability for either gender. This research also supports previous findings that most couples, regardless of ICSA experience, report themselves and their partners to be validating (Holman, 2003).

Building on previous research, there were several important findings in this study. One finding was the partner and self-report of conflict style in couples where the female had ICSA experience as compared to couples without ICSA experience. ICSA couples were significantly different from comparison couples in only one self reported conflict resolution style: hostility. In

addition, women ICSA survivors self-reported not only significantly more use of hostility, but also more volatility than non-ICSA women reported. These results are contrary to previous research suggesting that ICSA survivors may be more likely to be significantly more avoidant and hostile than comparison groups (Davins-Pujols et.al., 2012; Finkelhor & Brown, 1985).

One explanation may be that female ICSA survivors may feel distrust toward their partners (Davis & Petretic Jackson, 2000). This most interesting finding may indicate that females who have experienced the powerless trauma of ICSA may be more likely to adopt hostile or volatile CRS instead of avoidance.

Another major finding of this study showed that CRS are directly negatively related to relationship satisfaction and stability. Hostility is more strongly negatively related to relationship satisfaction and stability for men and women than any other non-validating conflict resolution styles, a finding supported by previous research (Holman 2003).

To add to previous research, this study found that with one exception, conflict resolution styles were not major mediators between female ICSA experience and reported relationship satisfaction and instability. Male report of female partner volatility was negatively related to his reported relationship stability. The significance of female volatility as reported by the male partner may add to Holman and Busby's (2009) "one is enough" idea—explained as meaning that if only partner is hostile, both partners report lower relationship satisfaction. This same principle may be applicable to ICSA couples with regards to female volatility. If the male perceives his ICSA partner to be volatile, it alone may decrease his reported relationship stability than with any other reported conflict resolution style.

The findings in this study may indicate that conflict resolution style may not be primarily a result of ICSA experience, but perhaps a combination of other related ICSA experiences, (e.g.

family of origin conflict styles, adult relationship experiences, and trust and power issues in adulthood). This may also indicate that relationship satisfaction and instability are not as impacted by ICSA experience as they are CRS in adulthood. This may be due to other factors in the relationship altered by ICSA experience, such as the ability to trust or be trustworthy.

Future research could study other questions with regards to ICSA, CRS, and relationship satisfaction and instability, including (1) What is the therapeutic effectiveness of focusing on changing CRS within ICSA couples as compared to solely focusing on the ICSA trauma? (2) Would focusing on CRS in couple treatment instead of ICSA lower the number of sessions needed before the couple reported higher relationship satisfaction and instability, therefore increasing insurance cost-effectiveness? (3) In addition, how might a longitudinal study help clinicians better understand how the effects of CRS and ICSA change over time?

Limitations

This study adds depth and clarity to previous research on ICSA couples. This study has a large sample with a non-CSA comparison group. Secondly, for the first time, Gottman's four styles of CR are studied in comparison between ICSA survivor couples and non-CSA survivor couples. Lastly, this study included many levels of relationships (e.g. seriously dating, engaged, cohabiting, married, etc).

This research does have several limitations. The analysis of this study does not illustrate how conflict resolution style and relationship satisfaction and instability might change based on race. Future research may explore the cultural implications for potential mediating impacts of CRS for other racial/ethnic groups.

Another limitation of this study is that the participants in RELATE were self-recruited, implying that couples may have been proactively seeking out information and resources.

Therefore, it is unknown how conflict style frequencies might differ within the general population. This may also indicate that our participant samples may be deficient in accurate frequencies of those who use avoidant conflict styles in their relationships. Avoidant female ICSA survivors may not seek out relational assistance or choose to stay out of committed relationships with males. Therefore, these findings should be used tentatively in application to the general population. However, these findings may be less inhibited when applied to clinicians because these are likely similar to the couples that will present for couple's therapy.

A third limitation in this study was the exclusion of social economic status as a control variable. The control variable of education was used to reflect on associated general social economic status. However, there may still be a question as to whether the same results would occur in high income couples as compared to low income couples.

This research also mostly included happy couples with stable relationships. Future research could focus on clinical couples to test the model used in this study. It may be that CRS is a mediator in clinical couples already reporting low relationship satisfaction or stability.

Lastly, the participants used in this study were in the early years of their committed relationships (average between 4.5-4.9 years). It may be that the development of dysfunctional CRS may not have had sufficient time to develop in a short relationship span.

Clinical Implications

This study has several implications for clinicians. This research indicates that ICSA experience is negatively related to relationship satisfaction, while CRS are directly negatively related to both relationship satisfaction and instability. This research does not suggest a strong mediating effect of CRS on satisfaction or stability. However, it does support a strong direct relationship between CRS and satisfaction and stability. Therefore, when couples with ICSA

experience present for treatment, it may be just as helpful (in terms of raising relationship satisfaction and stability reports) to work with CRS instead of focusing narrowly on individual therapy for ICSA experience. Working through ICSA experience would be beneficial to individual treatment, but in terms of treating the couple, it may be more effective to enhance communication styles. For effective assessment and treatment of CRS, clinicians might consider having couples fill out a conflict style questionnaire for themselves and for their partner. It would be especially important to have the partner's perceptions because the results of this study indicate that partner perception of conflict style is more strongly linked to relationship satisfaction and stability.

Our research suggests that CRS has a much more proximal effect on relationship satisfaction, whereas ICSA experience has a more distal effect. Therefore, clinicians may consider treating the CRS as a first priority, and ICSA experience secondarily. Working on the proximal factor of conflict resolution style may help decrease some of the psychological symptoms of the CSA trauma. For example, Feinauer (1996) found that for married female ICSA survivors with depressive symptoms, a positive intimate relationship decreased their reported symptoms of depression, suggesting that a healthy marital relationship may help mitigate the normative interpersonal issues a ICSA survivor may experience.

The presence of volatility in a couple may be an important issue to address clinically. This research shows that female partner volatility strongly impacted male relationship stability when the female partner experienced ICSA. Gottman and Silver (1995) explain that because volatile couples value honesty and independence in their relationships, they are less likely to filter negative comments about their relationships and share these feelings openly. He continues to explain that although this leads to an open and passionate relationship, it may lead to hostility

if the couple lets their negative communication consume their relationship. This study shows that of all the conflict styles measured, hostility is most strongly related to lower relationship satisfaction and higher instability as reported by both genders. Therefore, it would be important to address volatility in a clinically present couple to prevent communication from transitioning into hostility.

Another reason it may be helpful to administer a questionnaire is that clinicians may assume that female ICSA survivors tend to be conflict avoidant. However, that assumption has not been empirically supported, and this research shows that female ICSA survivors tend not to be significantly more avoidant than the female non-ICSA population. On the contrary, in our study we found CSA survivors to have higher reported frequencies of hostility and volatility, which would greater influence couples treatment.

Conclusion

Previous research had not explored the impact of female ICSA experience on conflict resolution styles present in adult committed relationships. This study found that compared to non-ICSA women, ICSA survivors more frequently reported use of hostile conflict styles than their non-ICSA counterparts. Also, female ICSA survivors were not different from their non-ICSA counterparts in reports of using validation. This is a finding startling to many who may have assumed that women ICSA survivors would likely be more avoidant. This study reminds clinicians of the importance of working with both partners on effective conflict resolution skills, and for helping female ICSA survivors process their trauma. Treatment quality may suffer if only individual therapy for ICSA is done because CRS were found to be much more influential on relationship satisfaction and stability than ICSA experience.

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List of Tables

Table 1.

Demographic Information for ICOSA Couples (N=487 Couples)

| Variables | Females | | Males | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Age | M (S.D.) Range 30.24 (9.45) | 18-66 | M (S.D.) 32.36 (10.39) | Range 18-71 |
| | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % |
| Education | | | | |
| <High School | 4 | 0.8% | 5 | 1.0% |
| High School Graduate | 18 | 3.6% | 36 | 7.3% |
| Some College | 182 | 38.8% | 173 | 35.3% |
| Associate Degree | 34 | 7.0% | 41 | 8.4% |
| Bachelor Degree | 110 | 22.6% | 122 | 25.1% |
| Some Graduate | 50 | 10.3% | 28 | 5.7% |
| Graduate Degree | 82 | 16.8% | 83 | 17.0% |
| Total | 487 | 100% | 487 | 100% |
| Race | | | | |
| African American | 29 | 6.0% | 31 | 6.4% |
| Asian | 21 | 4.3% | 12 | 2.5% |
| Caucasian | 373 | 76.6% | 402 | 82.5% |
| Native American | 1 | 0.2% | 2 | 0.4% |
| Latino | 27 | 5.5% | 18 | 3.7% |
| Mixed | 26 | 5.3% | 16 | 3.3% |
| Other | 10 | 2.1% | 6 | 1.2% |
| Total | 487 | 100% | 487 | 100% |

Table 2.*Demographic Information for Non ICOSA couples (N=1827 Couples)*

| Variables | Females | | Males | |
|----------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | M (S.D.) | Range | M (S.D.) | Range |
| Age | 27.05 (8.04) | 18-79 | 29.03 (8.98) | 18-75 |
| | N | % | N | % |
| Education | | | | |
| <High School | 3 | 0.2% | 7 | 0.4% |
| High School Graduate | 36 | 2.0% | 61 | 3.3% |
| Some College | 692 | 37.9% | 685 | 37.5% |
| Associate Degree | 98 | 5.4% | 76 | 4.2% |
| Bachelor Degree | 482 | 26.4% | 521 | 28.5% |
| Some Graduate | 159 | 8.7% | 122 | 6.7% |
| Graduate Degree | 357 | 19.5% | 355 | 19.4% |
| Total | 1827 | 100% | 1827 | 100% |
| Race | | | | |
| African American | 48 | 2.6% | 49 | 2.7% |
| Asian | 72 | 3.9% | 49 | 2.7% |
| Caucasian | 1594 | 87.2% | 1608 | 88.0% |
| Native American | 4 | 0.2% | 2 | 0.1% |
| Latino | 35 | 1.9% | 40 | 2.2% |
| Mixed | 32 | 1.8% | 43 | 2.4% |
| Other | 42 | 2.3% | 36 | 2.0% |
| Total | 1827 | 100% | 1827 | 100% |

Table 3.*Chi Square Analysis of Male and Female Self-Perceptions of Types of Conflict Resolution Styles*

| Types of CRS | Non-ICSA | | ICSA | | Test Statistic | df | p |
|--------------|----------|------|------|------|----------------|----|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | | | |
| Female | | | | | | | |
| Avoidant | 153 | 8.4 | 32 | 6.6 | $\chi^2=17.42$ | 3 | <.001 |
| Validating | 973 | 53.3 | 218 | 44.8 | | | |
| Volatile | 517 | 28.3 | 170 | 34.9 | | | |
| Hostile | 184 | 10.1 | 67 | 13.8 | | | |
| Male | | | | | | | |
| Avoidant | 245 | 13.4 | 74 | 15.2 | $\chi^2=13.68$ | 3 | .003 |
| Validating | 1060 | 58 | 258 | 53.0 | | | |
| Volatile | 423 | 23.2 | 108 | 22.2 | | | |
| Hostile | 99 | 5.4 | 47 | 9.7 | | | |

Table 4.

Chi Square Analysis of Male and Female Reports of Partner's Types of Conflict Resolution Style by ICOSA Categories

| Types of CRS | Non-ICOSA | | ICOSA | | Test Statistic | df | p |
|--------------|-----------|------|-------|------|-----------------|----|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | | | |
| Female | | | | | | | |
| Avoidant | 359 | 19.6 | 106 | 21.8 | $\chi^2=10.873$ | 3 | .012 |
| Validating | 985 | 53.9 | 236 | 48.5 | | | |
| Volatile | 326 | 17.8 | 82 | 16.8 | | | |
| Hostile | 157 | 8.6 | 63 | 12.9 | | | |
| Male | | | | | | | |
| Avoidant | 291 | 15.9 | 73 | 15 | $\chi^2=15.67$ | 3 | <.001 |
| Validating | 954 | 52.2 | 226 | 46.4 | | | |
| Volatile | 421 | 23 | 117 | 24 | | | |
| Hostile | 161 | 8.8 | 71 | 14.6 | | | |

Table 5.*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables for ICSA and Non-ICSA Groups, and Combined Sample*

| Groups | Females | | | | | | Males | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|
| | R. Satisfaction | | | R. Instability ^b | | | R. Satisfaction | | | R. Instability ^b | | |
| | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| ICSA ^a | 487 | 3.92 | .78 | 487 | 1.90 | .79 | 487 | 3.96 | .72 | 487 | 1.86 | .75 |
| Non-ICSA | 1827 | 4.16 | .67 | 1827 | 1.66 | .68 | 1827 | 4.14 | .63 | 1827 | 1.65 | .66 |
| Combined | 2314 | 4.11 | .70 | 2314 | 1.71 | .71 | 2314 | 4.10 | .65 | 2314 | 1.70 | .68 |

^aNote: ICSA groups include couples where only the female partner was self-reported to have experienced childhood sexual abuse (ICSA). Non-ICSA groups are couples in which neither partner reported experienced ICSA. The combined group includes all participants in this study without differentiation of ICSA or non-ICSA experience.

^bNote: Higher scores indicate more instability in the relationship.

Table 6.*Mean, Standard Deviations, and Standardized Factor Loadings for the Independent Variables*

| | Females | | | Males | | |
|--|---------|------|-----------------|-------|------|-----------------|
| | M | SD | Factor Loadings | M | SD | Factor Loadings |
| <u>Relationship Satisfaction Scale^a</u> | | | | | | |
| 179. Physical intimacy | 4.09 | .98 | .56 | 4.06 | .99 | .59 |
| 180. Love | 4.56 | .76 | .81* | 4.54 | .72 | .81* |
| 181. Conflicts resolved | 3.71 | 1.08 | .69 | 3.75 | 1.02 | .71 |
| 182. Relationship quality | 4.32 | .89 | .79* | 4.28 | .82 | .74* |
| 183. Time together | 3.68 | 1.12 | .40* | 3.67 | 1.09 | .30* |
| 184. Quality of communication | 3.91 | 1.04 | .76 | 3.93 | .97 | .74 |
| 185. Overall relationship | 4.51 | .76 | .88* | 4.51 | .72 | .87* |
| <i>Total relationship satisfaction scale</i> | 4.11 | .70 | | 4.10 | .65 | |
| <u>Relationship Stability Scale^b</u> | | | | | | |
| 248. Thought the relationship was in trouble | 2.10 | .97 | .91 | 2.07 | .93 | .87 |
| 249. Discussed ending the relationship | 1.68 | .87 | .76* | 1.66 | .84 | .78* |
| 250. Broken up or separated | 1.36 | .71 | .47 | 1.35 | .68 | .47 |
| <i>Total Relationship Stability</i> | 1.72 | .71 | | 1.69 | .68 | |

^aNote: Mean scores are derived from responses on the RELATE dataset in a Likert scale. Responses include: 1=Very Dissatisfied, 2= Dissatisfied, 3-Neutral, 4= Satisfied, 5= Very Satisfied.

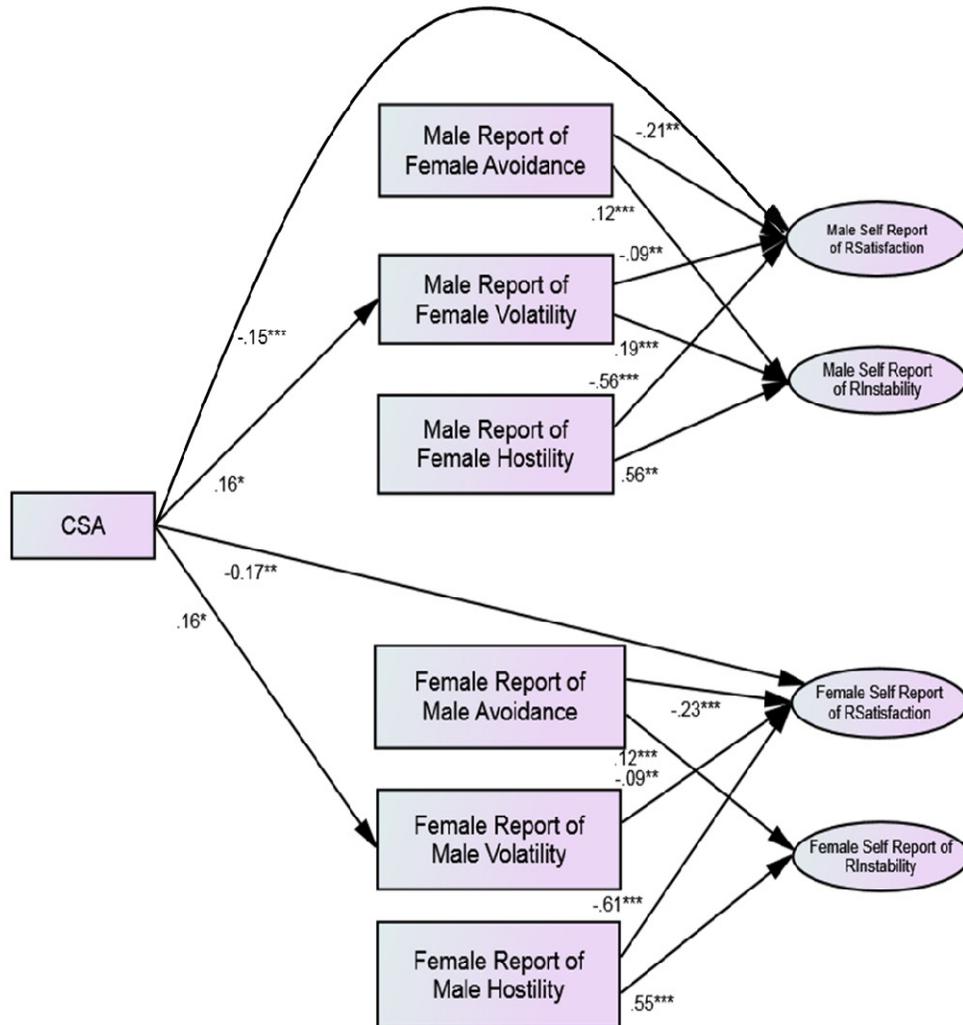
^bNote: Mean scores are derived from responses on the RELATE dataset in a Likert scale. Responses include: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4= Often, 5=Very Often

*Note: Invariant factor loadings as indicated by Wald Chi-square tests.

List of Figures

Figure 1.

SEM of the Mediating Effect of Conflict Resolution Style Between ICSA Experience and Relationship Satisfaction and Instability with Standardized Regression Coefficients



Note: Only significant paths are included in this model. Male report of female avoidance, male report of female volatility, and male report of female hostility are the male's report of the female partner's conflict resolution style. The female variables are the female partner's report of the male partner's conflict resolution style. The dependent variables, male self-report of RSatisfaction and Male self-report of RInstability, are the male's self-reports of satisfaction and instability in the relationship. The female dependent variables are the female's self-reports of satisfaction and instability in the relationship.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$