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Social Information Processing Deficits, Intimate Partner Violence, and Coercive Control in Dating Couples

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This study investigated how social information processing (SIP) deficits are related to intimate partner violence (IPV) and coercive control in heterosexual dating couples. I assessed four steps of Crick & Dodge's (1994) six-step SIP model, namely: attitudes and attributions; goal setting; coping response generation; and coping response selection. I used Dutton and Goodman's (2006) theorized model of coercive control, which included assessing demands, surveillance, threats, and victims' responses to demands. I hypothesized that (1) SIP deficits would be interrelated; (2) participants responding in timed conditions would show more SIP deficits; (3) and individuals with more SIP deficits would report perpetrating more IPV and coercive control. Furthermore, exploratory questions investigated gender effects, partner effects, and Actor X Partner effects. Couples ($N = 109$) participated in a lab study where they completed online measures of demographics, SIP deficits, IPV perpetration and victimization, coercive control victimization and perpetration, and social desirability. I found that most SIP deficits were predictive of each other (e.g., individuals who made more negative attributions of their partner selected more aggressive goals, and generated and selected less competent solutions for conflict situations with their partner). For hypothesis 2, I found that there were no differences in SIP deficits between those responding with unlimited time and those who responded with a time pressure. Finally, though there were no significant gender differences, partner effects, or actor by partner effects, SIP deficits were significant predictors of IPV perpetration, and coercive control perpetration and victimization. Thus, participants who interpreted and responded to conflict situations less competently perpetrated violence and control at higher rates, and were more likely to be victims of coercive control.