

## Delving into the minds of psychopaths

It's a rare person who goes out of their way to spend time with psychopaths, and a rarer one still who repeatedly calls a prison to do so...[Arielle Baskin-Sommers](#) from Yale University finally persuaded a maximum-security prison in Connecticut to let her work with their inmates, and to study those with psychopathic tendencies.

Psychopaths, by definition, have problems understanding the emotions of other people, which partly explains why they are so selfish, why they so callously disregard the welfare of others, and why they commit violent crimes at up to three times the rate of other people.

But curiously, they seem to have no difficulty in understanding what other people think, want, or believe—the skill variously known as perspective-taking, mentalizing, or theory of mind...

Most of us mentalize *automatically*. From infancy, other minds involuntarily seep into our own. The same thing, apparently, happens less strongly in psychopaths. [By studying the Connecticut inmates](#), Baskin-Sommers and her colleagues, Lindsey Drayton and Laurie Santos, showed that these people can *deliberately* take another person's perspective, but on average, they don't automatically do so to the extent that most other people do.

The U.S. prison system doesn't assess psychopathy at intake, so Baskin-Sommers administered a [standard test](#) herself to 106 male inmates from the Connecticut prison. Of them, 22 proved to be psychopaths, 28 were not, and the rest fell in a gray zone. Baskin-Sommers did all the interviews in a makeshift psychology lab within the prison itself—a simple room with a desk, computer station, and no barriers.

**Read full, original post:** [How Psychopaths See the World](#)