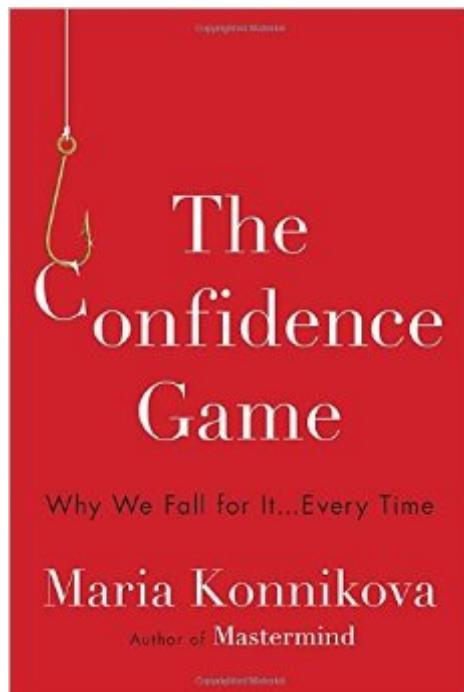


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# The Confidence Game: Why We Fall For It . . . Every Time



## Synopsis

"It's a startling and disconcerting read that should make you think twice every time a friend of a friend offers you the opportunity of a lifetime." Erik Larson, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Dead Wake* and bestselling author of *Devil in the White City* Think you can't get conned? Think again. The New York Times bestselling author of *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* explains how to spot the con before they spot you. An excellent study of Con Artists, stories & the human need to believe • "Neil Gaiman, via Twitter A compelling investigation into the minds, motives, and methods of con artists and the people who fall for their cons over and over again. While cheats and swindlers may be a dime a dozen, true conmen the Bernie Madoffs, the Jim Bakkers, the Lance Armstrongs are elegant, outsized personalities, artists of persuasion and exploiters of trust. How do they do it? Why are they successful? And what keeps us falling for it, over and over again? These are the questions that journalist and psychologist Maria Konnikova tackles in her mesmerizing new book. From multimillion-dollar Ponzi schemes to small-time frauds, Konnikova pulls together a selection of fascinating stories to demonstrate what all cons share in common, drawing on scientific, dramatic, and psychological perspectives. Insightful and gripping, the book brings readers into the world of the con, examining the relationship between artist and victim. The Confidence Game asks not only why we believe con artists, but also examines the very act of believing and how our sense of truth can be manipulated by those around us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Recently, my father, his cousin and my spouse all fell (or nearly fell) for fraudulent scams. Two of them got the phone calls about the grandchild being in Mexico and needing cash. My spouse got the call about his computer needing to be repaired to the tune of \$200. So, I've been thinking a lot about this issue lately: How are we so easily scammed? Maria Konnikova's book is dense with psychological facts and theories surrounding this question. She opens her book with a case study concerning a surgeon for the Navy in the 1950s. Turns out the man was no surgeon at all -- and yet he performed operations! He was a serial scammer who assumed identities in many professions, including the clergy. From there, she opens up her inquiries as to how scammers become what they become, and how we, the marks, are taken in. The bottom line, for her, is that humanity has a deep need to believe, and once a con man (or woman) gives us something to believe in, something that we think will make our lives meaningful, we're sunk. "Ultimately, what a confidence artist sells is hope," she writes. "Hope that you'll be happier, healthier, richer, loved, accepted, better looking, younger, smarter, a deeper, more fulfilled human being." The case studies in the book follow a similar pattern: a skilled person carefully chooses and primes his or her target and then moves in for the kill. For the most part, the scammers work over a period of time, roping people in gradually. I could easily relate to these people: I was once scammed by a co-worker who rear-ended my car and promised to pay out of pocket. He was a charming person who over time had built friendships within the company. But he didn't repay and when I finally insisted, he gave me a check that bounced.

Author Maria Konnikova has a Ph.D. in Psychology from Columbia, along with considerable experience researching topics in and writing about psychology. This, her second book, is about conmen - elegant, outsized personalities, artists of persuasion and exploiters of trust, not just your dime a dozen cheats and swindlers. Their 'bible' is Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People." A confidence game starts with basic human psychology. The con identifies what the victim wants and how to play on that desire to achieve what the con-artist wants. Size someone up well, and you can sell them anything; it helps to have someone in the throes of some sort of life turmoil - the conman preys on what people wish were true, reaffirming their views of themselves and giving their lives meaning. Doing so requires the creation of empathy and rapport - laying an emotional foundation before any scheme is proposed. The con is an exercise in soft skills - trust, sympathy, persuasion. He doesn't steal - we give. We believe because we want to, and we offer whatever they want - money, reputation, trust, fame, support, and don't realize what is happening until it is too late. No one is immune to the art of the con - it is not who you are, but where you

happen to be at the moment in your life (eg. undergoing misfortune). By the time things begin to look dicey, the victims tend to be so invested, emotionally and often physically, that they do most of the persuasion themselves. The con-artist may not even need to convince his victims to stay quite - they usually are more likely than not to do so themselves.

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