

# 3 Characteristics of Really Good Liars

We've all been had by the lies of a lying liar. Some of us are "had" on a regular basis, and wonder how certain people can be so comfortable with deception.

Psychologist Maria Konnikova's new book might give us some clues. In an interview in [The Atlantic](#), she discussed her new book *The Confidence Game*, which describes the evil genius of con artists and why they are so good at what they do.

Konnikova says that liars typically possess 3 character traits that make them wildly successful at preying on the emotionally vulnerable:

*1. Psychopathy: "It's kind of a lack of empathy. Your brain is actually different, you process emotional stimuli differently. To you, they don't mean that much."*

*2. Narcissism: "This overblown ego where you not only think you're just the best thing that's ever happened to anyone, but you also think you deserve a lot. You deserve basically everyone to bow down to you. And you have it coming to you, all these good things."*

*3. Machiavellianism: "The ability to manipulate people into doing what you want. Kind of like Machiavelli's Ideal Prince, you have your own ends and you use whatever means you want to get there. And you're very good at tricking those people and getting them to do what you want."*

Possessing these traits, the con artists described in Konnikova's book have managed to accomplish almost

unbelievable feats of manipulation, including one high school graduate who was able to convince a hospital to allow him to perform surgery.

Unfortunately, there's no surefire way to recognize these liars, warns Konnikova:

*"It's really difficult to do it because it's actually not evolutionarily adaptive. We are better placed if we trust people than if we don't trust anyone. I talk about infants and young children who need to trust that adults are going to take care of them. It makes us feel better when we accept people's little white lies at face value. It would be terrible if I knew that every time you said, 'Maria, you look so beautiful today!' you were really thinking, 'Oh, she looks tired, she didn't get enough sleep last night.'"*

So what's the best you can do to avoid being taken in? Konnikova's simple advice is to recognize you are bad at spotting liars, look for objective alternatives to verify a person's claims, and remember that if it seems too good to be true, then it's too good to be true.

*Image: Thirteen/20th Century Fox*