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## Fake It Until You Make It!: The Crimes and Trial of Anna Sorokin (Delvey)

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# Chapter 4

## Fake It Until You Make It!

### The Crimes and Trial of Anna Sorokin (Delvey)

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The chapter will provide an overview of the life, crimes, and trial of Anna Sorokin better known as Anna Delvey. Anna had invented a false persona and life so that people would think she was a rich German heiress instead of her real identity of a woman from a working-class Russian family. Anna used her false identity to defraud banks, hotels, and friends for about \$275,000. Anna's life became internationally known with her story being published in major news and media articles including podcasts, 60 Minutes, HBO, a \$300,000 book deal to her former friend Rachel Williams, and a \$320,000 Netflix deal for Anna. Anna was arrested and convicted in 2019 and was sentenced to four to 12 years in New York State. After her release from prison, she was arrested again by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and held for overstaying her visa.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Anna Sorokin born on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1991, was a Russian woman from a working-class family. She created a false persona of a person who was extremely wealthy and changed her name to Anna Delvey. Anna with her new name and persona pretended to be a German heiress so she would be able to gain access to the social elite in New York City and elsewhere. Eventually, Anna and the false narrative she gave about

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### ***Fake It Until You Make It!***

her life finally caught up with her, and she was arrested, convicted, and being held for overstaying her visa where she could be deported back to Germany. Anna was given various names including the Soho Scammer, Soho Grifter, and Fake Heiress. The media attention that was given to Anna during and after her trial made her internationally famous and her criminal scams became known as the “summer of scam” whose name was inspired by the “Summer of Sam” who was a serial killer in New York from during the 1970s (Bailey, 1999).

The criminal trial of Anna blew up on social media, which helped her story and name(s) be well-known through a line of T-shirts, various media outlets including books, podcasts, the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *CNBC*, *The Guardian*, *HBO*, and an entire Netflix series. The criminal trial against Anna was brought upon after the arrest that was part of a sting operation planned by officer McCaffrey of the New York Police Department (NYPD) on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 in collaboration with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). On April 25, 2019, Anna was found guilty of grand larceny, second-degree larceny, theft of services, and received four to 12 years imprisonment, a \$24,000 fine, and \$199,000 restitution (Gibson, 2022).

## **CON ARTISTS**

This is not the first con artist to become nationally and internationally infamous. The media and especially pop culture has helped create an obsession with conmen and conwomen for decades, in fiction and nonfictional stories. These stories include *The Sting* (1973) a film about professional conmen, and more recently the award-winning *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) starring Leonardo DiCaprio, and *Oceans Eleven* (2001) with a star-studded cast including Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Julia Roberts, and Matt Damon which was a remake of a movie from the 1960s. These con artists often have lots of charisma and charm like Anna, and these movies based on the lives of con artists really helped highlight and even exaggerate these characteristics. Even Williams a former friend turned witness against Anna stated that Anna is “Clever, She can Be Funny... Amusing”. As the American dream focuses on people becoming successful from nothing, these con artists do that in a unique way and use their personality and lies to get wealthy, and used the “fake it until you make it” slogan in criminal ways.

A con artist is a person who attempts to defraud an individual, business, or group of individuals by tricking them and gaining their trust (Dugatkin, 1992). The con artists use confidence tricks so they can exploit their victims by accessing their compassion, greed, confidence, vanity, naivete, and or credulity among other tactics. The ‘con’ is short for confidence in the name con, con man, con woman,

con artist, etc. A con is also known by other names including a swindle, a scam, a grift, a hustle, among others names.

The purpose of these confidence tricks is to defraud a person by making the victim voluntarily exchange something without the victim knowing the true intent. The confidence trick first appears to be of mutual benefit to both parties but in actuality, it is not mutually beneficial but benefits the con artist at the expense of the victim(s). There are different types of cons including a short con and a long con, Anna was involved in the long or big con, which takes usually days, weeks, months or years to successfully complete, and is meant to take advantage of large sums of money or assets from the victim(s) (Konnikova, 2017).

There have been six main steps to a con according to Edward Smith (1923) from *Confessions of a Confidence Man*. The first step that Edward describes is the foundational work which includes preparing for the con such as studying the information needed, which for Anna included studying fashion and art and learning about people, trust funds, and business. The next step is the approach where the victim(s) are first approached by the perpetrator, this is when Anna had made contact with the victims and started to gain their trust by creating a false image of a wealthy German heiress. The third step is typically the build-up, where the victim is made to believe that they can benefit from the opportunity, this targets the victim's greed and impairs their judgment, Anna did this by making the victims believe their investment would bring them more money and status. The fourth step is then the pay-off/convincer which the con artist gives the victim a small reward or payoff to show that this is an effective opportunity, Anna would pay for various items including dinner, clothes, a personal trainer, and more to show her wealth and make the victims feel taken care of. The next step is the hurrah, which includes the creation of a crisis that coerces the victims to take immediate action, such as making the victims believe that they must take action immediately or the window of opportunity will be gone. The last step is the in and in which where a conspirator puts their resources into the scheme to show legitimacy and encourage the victim to follow, Anna attempted to do this by getting false documents and false wire transfers to show that others had invested in her and that she had the assets to cover the expenses in her trust fund.

The treatment of these white-collar criminals is much different in the media than other criminals (Holmes, 2017). The harm they do to people is a serious issue that often gets overlooked as they often ruin people financially but serve less time than people who steal much less value. The victims are not just hurt financially but they are also ashamed, betrayed, and embarrassed by someone that they trusted. The media often portrays con artists like Anna as Robin Hood figures (Shostack, 1990) as criminals like Anna stole from the rich. Another reason con artists are often given a positive perspective is that they are usually non-violent and do not look threatening.

The common representation of the victims of these con artists is oftentimes gullible, entitled, and naïve. Victims often are made to blame themselves for falling for the con (Titus & Gover 2001). This can seriously affect a victim's mental health and even make some victims suicidal. This negative mental health impact was described by Williams as she stated it was “destabilizing to have been so wrong about someone I trusted”. Williams stated that she began writing about her perspective of Anna's crimes to learn from them and to be able to leave it all behind her.

Williams had been critical of her portrayal in the Netflix show as she had not been involved with the production of the series. The series portrayed her as “A natural-born follower whose blind worship of Anna almost destroys her job, her credit, and her life. But while her relationship with Anna is her greatest regret, the woman she becomes because of Anna maybe Anna's greatest creation.” Anna and Williams continued to feud after the trial as Anna called Williams a hypocrite and a “Karen”.

## **THE REAL LIFE OF ANNA SOROKIN**

Anna was born in Domodedovo, Russia, a town about 23 miles south of Moscow. She was from a working middle-class family with her father Vadim Sorokin being a truck driver and her mother owning a small store. While Anna was 16 she and her family moved to Germany. Vadim had gotten an executive position at a transport company but after the business ended he opened his own company that was based on energy-efficient HVACs. During her time in Germany Anna Attended a local German Catholic school called Bischöfliche Liebfrauenschule Eschweiler (Episcopal School of Our Lady Eschweiler) in the town of Eschweiler. During her time at her new German school, Anna had struggled to make friends and had difficulties learning to speak German. While in Germany she had become highly interested in fashion and started following Vogue Magazine, fashion stars, and fashion blogs.

Following her graduation, Anna moved to the United Kingdom (UK) in 2011 and was admitted to Central Saint Martin's art school but dropped out in the first year and decided to get practical on-the-job experience. Anna then moved back to Germany and started to intern with a company in Berlin where she learned public relations. Anna then moved to France and in 2013 had started a new position with the fashion magazine *Purple* in Paris where she was an intern. During her time in Paris, she started to go by Anna Delvey for the first time.

Anna's life as a con woman started in 2013 as she created a false identity as a rich German heiress and changed her last name from Sorokin a Russian surname to Delvey in an attempt to hide her Russian background. After visiting New York City for Fashion Week Anna decided to transfer to the New York City office of *Purple* but soon after the move she had quit her position. Soon after leaving *Purple*

Anna had started to create a proposal for an art foundation called the ‘Anna Delvey Foundation’ and started to recruit wealthy donors for this exclusive member club. She made people believe that she had a \$67 million trust fund that her father made for her. This helped give her legitimacy to gain acceptance into the high society of New York City, high-end hotels, and nightclubs with the rich and famous.

Anna had created an 80-page proposal that listed world-renowned artists like Urs Fischer, Cindy Sherman, Agnes Martin, Ed Ruscha, Anish Kapoor, and Helmut Newton to help legitimize her vision for her foundation. She had wanted to lease the Church Missions House a 45,000 sq ft building located in the middle of Manhattan, New York which was sold for around \$50 million in July of 2014. Anna had even attempted to scam Billy McFarland a convicted felon who defrauded investors for over \$27 million, who was known as the “ultimate conman” because he had orchestrated the Fyre Festival scandal that also became a story used for a popular Netflix documentary.

Shortly after moving to the United States of America, Anna began to connect with the social elite of New York City for her plans for the Anna Delvey Foundation. Anna had discussions with the son of the famous architect Santiago Calatrava, and investors like Roo Rogers. Anna was known to brag about her wealth and designer clothing but many of her acquaintances became suspicious of her as she would ask them if she could sleep at their place, and at times she would even sleep in a car as she had nowhere to go. The parties that Anna organized included mostly people she did not know very well.

During her events and her stays in hotels, Anna was known to be especially rude to the servers and other people in the service industry. On various occasions, Anna had claimed that she had forgotten her credit cards or that they were not working which then she coerced her acquaintances to pay the bill for dinner, drinks, and more. One of Anna’s victims was the art collector Michael Haung. After meeting at a party Anna and Haung made plans to go to Venice for an art viewing. Huang had paid for Anna’s flights and hotel stays believing that Anna would pay him back for the cost. As Huang tried to get reimbursed for paying for the flight and hotels Anna would claim that she had supposedly forgotten to pay.

In 2016 Anna had a public relations company contracted to plan her birthday party, but the credit card that was used for the dinner was declined. This made Haung who was attending the dinner suspicious of Anna as this was another instance that she could not pay. Later in 2016 Anna continued to stay in upscale hotels and had gotten a reputation for being rude to the hotel staff and also giving large \$100 bills to other hotel staff to flaunt her assumed wealth.

During Anna’s stay at the High Line Hotel, she met Williams who worked at Vanity Fair during a night out at a club. Williams soon became one of Anna’s best friends in New York. Williams would travel and dine out with Anna regularly,

which put Williams in debt. Williams became interested in Anna as she claimed that Anna “walked into my life in Gucci sandals and Céline glasses... and showed me a glamorous, frictionless world of hotel living and Le Coucou dinners and infra-red saunas and Moroccan vacations. And then she made my \$62,000 disappear.” Williams had stated that she had never questioned who Anna was and trusted that she was a German heiress and a real friend.

During Anna’s stays in hotels, she would create false documents to make people believe she was worth around 60 million Euros. Anna would claim that her main was stuck in a trust and she was having a difficult time accessing the money because it was in Swiss accounts. Anna had built connections with attorney Gibson Dunn, who had close ties with financial institutions and investment groups. Anna used Dunn to apply for a loan of \$22 million to the City National Bank. City National Bank eventually declined Anna’s loans because of her inability to provide proper documentation to her trust, as her falsified documents and stories were not enough. After she was declined from City National, she then attempted to go through Fortress for a loan, and they had started the process to consider Anna’s application if she was able to pay \$100,000 in legal expenses, which she failed to do so. Due to Anna’s inability to pay for the Church Missions House, it was leased to another party.

In 2017 Anna was successful in getting City National to place a temporary overdraft for \$100,000. Anna created false email addresses of business managers for her documents which created suspicions at City National. As Fortress investigated Anna’s documents they started to see more discrepancies including that her passport claimed she was born in Russia, but she claimed to be German. Fortress had attempted to verify Anna’s wealth by setting up a meeting with the Swiss banks, but Anna had soon withdrawn her application for the loan. After the withdrawal of the loan application, Anna had \$55,000 left from the overdraft and started to spend the money on luxury items, and luxury activities.

Anna in April 2017 checked into a new luxury hotel in SoHo, Manhattan called 11 Howard. Anna was known for using cash and giving \$100 bills for tips to the staff. Anna would often use the staff that she tipped to ask for favors in the hotel and even became friends with the employees. Anna would spend lavishly in the hotel, especially at the restaurant, where she would just bill the costs to her room. Anna had racked up around \$30,000 before the hotel management had become worried that she did not have a credit card in the system. Anna had no way of paying the bill because she had used her money from the loan overdraft on her expensive lifestyle and would not even be able to pay for the bill when she took her friends out to dinner, where she would go out to dinner parties with people like Macaulay Culkin, Martin Shkreli, and even hired the celebrity personal trainer Kacy Duke.

Anna had gotten \$70,000 from Citibank through fraudulent checks to pay for her hotel bill. Then in May Anna had forged a wire transfer and booked a business

jet to Omaha to go to a meeting in hopes to meet Warren Buffet. Anna continued to use false documents and her false persona to meet wealthy business owners and celebrities. Anna had made CEO Robert Wiesenthal worried and even contacted the police as she failed to pay. The management of 11 Howard had also become suspicious of Anna as she still was unable to provide a credit card, and they blocked her from staying in the hotel and put her belongings in a locked storage area. Anna had then tried to get a \$1 million ransom from the hotel managers through emails as she purchased the domain names of the managers. Anna eventually was able to move her belongings to another hotel, including the Bowery Hotel where she used a fake wire transfer.

Anna had promised her friend Williams, her personal trainer Duke, and a videographer a trip to Morocco where she claimed to cover the expenses of the trip. Anna had booked a 5-star luxury hotel, which was a \$7,000 a night cost. She claimed the trip was to film a documentary that would be based on her foundation. Early in the trip, the hotel staff had not been able to charge the credit cards that Anna provided and requested a new form of payment. Anna had argued with the staff and even got an employee fired. Anna had no way to pay and convinced her friend Williams to use her card for the bill of \$62,000 which was more than the annual salary Williams. Williams had used both her personal and work credit cards as she was promised by Anna that she would be paid back. Williams was also convinced to pay for other luxuries of the trip including the flights. After the trip, Anna avoided paying Williams, and she eventually paid Williams \$5,000. This led Williams to have to borrow money just to pay her rent and living expenses. Williams had to go through American Express fraud services to get \$52,000 removed from her charges. Williams continued to learn that she was not the only person that Anna had failed to pay back and learned that Anna was involved in various acts of fraud and deception. Anna had even defrauded a private jet company during her crime spree.

As Anna returned to New York City she moved to another luxury hotel and now stayed at the Beekman. Anna stayed in the hotel for weeks and failed to pay for the \$11,518 bill until she was removed from the premises. Anna then moved to the W New York Union Square hotel and was removed after two days as she failed to pay her bill. On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Anna had nowhere to stay and became homeless and went to find her fitness trainer. Anna had found Duke out on a date and tried to convince her to allow Anna into her home, but Duke refused. Anna soon had the police called on her at the Le Parker Meridien hotel restaurant because of her inability to pay for dinner. In August of 2017, Anna had run out of money and was being investigated for bank fraud and had deposited fraudulent checks at Signature Banks and was able to withdraw \$8,200 before the checks had bounced and were returned.



## **Arrest**

Anna was eventually arrested on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, during a sting operation. The sting was organized by the NYPD, Manhattan District Attorney, and the LAPD. Williams, Anna's former friend had been working with law enforcement to locate Anna at the Passages Malibu rehab center. Law enforcement had told Williams to set up a lunch meeting with Anna. As Anna was leaving the rehab center she was arrested. After the arrest, she was indicted through the Manhattan District Court for two counts of attempted grand larceny in the first degree, three counts of grand larceny in the second degree, one count of grand larceny in the third degree, and one count of theft of services.

## **Trial**

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Anna had been offered a plea deal by the New York City Criminal court. The plea deal for a three to nine-year sentence was rejected instead of a trial. The trial started on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Judge Diane Kiesel was appointed to the trial. During the trial, Anna requested a wardrobe stylist, and Anastasia Walker was hired as her personal stylist to provide luxury outfits for her trial appearances. Anna's outfits included Michael Kors, Saint Laurent, Vitoria Beckham, and other name-brand items. Anna had even refused to enter court because she did not want to wear her clothing. After all, it was not "pressed". Anna delayed the court appearance by over an hour because she refused to wear the clothes until she was forced by the judge to appear. Reporters stated that Judge Kiesel had become irritated with Anna and her attitude in court as she stated "This is a trial... She's a defendant. I'm sorry, her clothing is not up to her standards. Are you asking me to stop this trial because of her wardrobe?"

Anna's lawyer, Todd Spodek, had defended her through the trial creating a narrative that Anna had intended to repay all her debts through publicity via Instagram. Spodek claimed that she was she wanted to change clothes because the ones that she had from Rikers Island were dirty and she was needing to delay her trial appearance for "an aggregate of things, not just her clothes. She's feeling nauseous. She's been up since 4 am. She's not being treated well by other inmates and some officers ...". Her lawyer had compared her tactics to that of Frank Sinatra and that it was part of the millennial culture, "Any millennial will tell you," Spodek said, "it is not uncommon to have delusions of grandeur."

Spodek did not attempt to deny that Anna had done what she was being accused of but focused on the intent of what she did. Spodek had attempted to argue in the trial that Anna was trying to "fake it until she could make it" and was "easily seduced by glamour and glitz" and that "There's a little bit of Anna in everyone... Everyone

lies a little.” Spodek had argued that Anna had not broken the law but just exploited the unequal capitalistic system, and that telling lies was not illegal. He even stated that “Anna had every intention of doing things the right way, but she couldn’t open those doors without doing something a little bit grey to open the door.” And that she had to lie or no one would listen to her if she was being honest. Anna had stated that she “never had a fraudulent intent”.

During her detention at Rikers Island during the criminal trial, Anna had been given 13 disciplinary infractions for violating policies from issues like fighting and disobeying orders from staff which resulted in Anna being held in solitary confinement throughout Christmas. At the end of the trial on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the jury deliberated for two days and found Anna guilty of eight of the 10 charges. Anna was guilty of grand larceny in the second degree, attempted grand larceny, and theft of services but was not guilty of one attempt of grand larceny in the first degree (The loan application to City National), and larceny in the second degree (theft of \$62,000 from Williams).

Anna was sentenced on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and was given a 4-to-12-year sentence, ordered to repay her victims \$190,000 including \$100,000 to City National, and \$70,000 to Citibank. Anna also had to pay around \$75,000 in legal fees for the trial. The restitution, fines, and fees were paid through her Netflix deal, after all, that Anna owed, she had a remaining \$22,000 of her \$320,000 deal. Anna had not had to pay for various other fees related to her trial and crimes including \$160,000 legal fees to Perkins Cole for the attempted lease of Church Missions House, the \$20,000 in fees to Lowenstein Sandler, or the \$65,000 in fees to Gibson Dunn.

Anna did state that she was sorry for what she had done “I just want to say that I’m really ashamed and I’m sorry for what I did,” and did acknowledge how she hurt the victims, “I completely understand that a lot of people suffered when I thought I was not doing anything wrong.” This contrasted with what she had told the *New York Times* “I’d be lying to you and to everyone else and to myself if I said I was sorry for anything.” The judge of the case had issued a statement about the problematic celebrity status given to Anna as she stated, “This sentence should be a message to the defendant and any of her fans out there”.

Following the trial, Anna was placed in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women for a short period and was eventually moved to the Albion Correctional Facility. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Anna had been released and put on parole. Once released Anna had moved into the NoMad hotel and even hired a film crew to film her life on parole. Anna had started to film her life and stated that “I just got out of prison, like two days ago. So it’s me like getting all this stuff from Sephora, me opening a bank account as soon as I get permission from my parole officer.”

Anna had spent about six weeks on parole before she was arrested again. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Anna was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) for a violation of her visa and was put into a New Jersey jail. While in ICE custody Anna had been contesting her deportation. In January of 2022 while in custody Anna had gotten COVID-19 and was put into quarantine. The immigration judge had denied her release as the judge stated that she would continue to commit fraud. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, Anna joined a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union against ICE, as she claims she was refused a COVID-19 booster shot.

## **THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION**

The article *Maybe She Had So Much Money She Just Lost Track of It*, published in May of 2018 in the *New York* magazine by Jessica Pressler had been the start of the media frenzy about Anna's life and crimes. Pressler had also been known for other articles that became internationally known including an article that inspired the 2019 film *Hustlers* which starred Cardi B and Jennifer Lopez. *Hustlers* was another film about female criminals who stole money from wealthy men who attended a strip club, the men were drugged and conned by the women. Despite the crimes that were committed by the women in *Hustlers* the story was portrayed as 'Stripper Robin Hood' by various media outlets.

Pressler had been Anna's main journalist that brought the story to light and gave insight from Anna's perspective. Pressler was pregnant when she started visiting Anna in Rikers Island and would attend the trial hearings, she had even purchased designer accessories and clothes for Anna's trial outfits and was in contact with Anna's lawyer. Various media outlets portrayed the courtroom as a runway show for Anna, which helped increase her Instagram followers, and improve her image. The *New York Magazine* (Pressler, 2018) article allowed Anna to share her story before her conviction which is always a concern for the courts as it can lead to biased jurors (Meringolo, 2010). The article had become very popular and even claimed to "break the internet".

Soon after the *New York* article, Netflix paid Anna \$320,000 to have exclusive rights to her story. The contract included that Anna has no participation in shows or documentaries while the next series goes through production as well as no posts on her social media accounts about her experience with the Netflix show without permission for three years after the premiere of the show, and no participation in talk shows. The contract also limits Anna's ability to write a book within the first year of the release of the show. The contract does not stop others from telling the Anna Delvey story but it does limit Anna from assisting with the production of any material about her life.

The nine-part series *Inventing Anna* became number one on Netflix when it was released on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The week of February 14-20<sup>th</sup> the series had

a reported 3.3 billion minutes watched and were Nielsen's number one streaming ranking. The series was produced by Shonda Rhimes (producer of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*) and was inspired by Pressler's article (Presser was an executive producer for the Netflix series). Anna was played by Julia Garner. The series starts with a disclaimer stating that "This whole story is completely true. Except for all the parts that are totally made up." The series makes it difficult to know how accurate the series is to the real story of Anna. The series had followed the journalist Vivian (based on Pressler) who was played by Anna Chlumsky, as she details Anna's life story.

The Netflix series takes tells Anna's story from the perspective of those who knew her, especially her friends. The show portrays Anna's ability to create a vision and convince others to believe in her vision, and her ability to convince high-level investors and businessmen, and women to follow along with her manipulation and lies. The series shows flashbacks to Anna's childhood where she was treated poorly for being working and class and Russian during her upbringing in Germany. The Netflix series was a dramatization that exaggerated and added fictional aspects of the story for entertainment value as various news articles had tried to distinguish what was real from the series.

Before the Netflix premiere, Anna's story was told in a variety of ways. Anna's story had been premiered on the CNBC series *American Greed* in February of 2020 a documentary series that focuses on white-collar crimes. The episode was called "Fake Heiress Cons High Society" and focused on how she made it through the New York City social scene as a fake German Heiress and her trial. The series concluded that she decided to go to trial and deny the plea offers to ensure that she would be on the front page of the news and become internationally known.

HBO Max explored Anna's story on an episode of *Generation Hustle* released in 2021 called *Anna Delvey Takes Manhattan*. The episode shows the transformation of Anna from an awkward young woman to a confident German heiress. The show shows how she convinces her friend Williams to pay for an expensive vacation with the false promise of paying her back which prompts the fall of Anna as the NYPD starts their investigation into her crimes.

ABC had interviewed Anna while she was detained by ICE and the interview was released on *20/20*. During Anna's interview shows her starting to seek fame again on social media right after her release. The episode also allows Anna to sit down and speak about her life for the first time on a television episode and Anna attempted to explain that she was not the person that the media portrays her as. Anna stated that "I'm not this dumb, greedy person".

Anna was also interviewed for an episode of *60 Minutes Australia* which aired on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, called *Faking It*. The episode host calls her a "con", and a skilled charlatan. Anna in the episode claims she did not con anyone and claimed that she did

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not know what was going on and was just doing whatever she wanted to do. Despite the harm, she caused she is a “role model to some people” according to her lawyer.

The popular *BBC Radio 4* podcast released a documentary about Anna’s story on December 16<sup>th</sup> of 2019. The documentary was a series with six episodes named the Fake Heiress. The series starts with Anna Sorokin as an intern with a fashion magazine and how she creates her fake identity as a wealthy heiress named Anna Delvey.

In the television series *Katy Keene* the character Pepper Smith was loosely based on Anna. Pepper was moving in and out of expensive hotels and was a socialite like Anna who got into trouble because she was not able to pay for the hotel bills and had been pretending to be reached. Pepper would not be honest with her friends and convinced an investor to fund an artistic idea of “Andy Warhol’s Factory”.

A stage play was released in July of 2021 called *Anna X* which was inspired by Anna and was played at Harold Pinter Theater. Anna has been in the process of producing a book about her experience incarcerated and a podcast. Anna has also signed a contract for a reality television show through Bunim/Murray Productions, who have produced *The Real World*, *Road Rules*, and *Bad Girls Club*.

Anna has a popular social media presence. She has connected with various celebrities including Julia Fox, who stated that they are collaborating on future projects together. Anna continues to try and profit off her identity including that she would reveal the identity of her former boyfriend for a \$10,000 fee. As of March 21, 2022, Anna had over 977,000 Instagram followers, where she posted a former Tweet of hers that stated that she will “Only agreeing to go back to Europe when they give Black people reparations”, on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, during Black history month.

Anna’s associates had also benefited from the publicity of the case, especially Williams who authored the book *My Friend Anna: the True Story of the Fake Heiress of New York City*, which was published through Gallery Publishing Group and paid Williams \$300,000. The book detailed how Anna had defrauded and deceived Williams. According to Williams her experience with Anna had negatively impacted her mentally and financially because she had fallen into debt after she used her credit card for a trip that she assumed Anna was paying for.

Williams ended up receiving \$35,000 from *HBO* for rights to her story for a television series. Williams had worked as an editor and producer at *Vanity Fair* as she became friends with Anna but was laid off in 2019. She had written in various outlets about her experiences with Anna including in a *Vanity Fair* article titled *As An Added Bonus, She Paid For Everything My Bright-Lights Misadventure With A Magician of Manhattan*, a Time Magazine article *Here’s How I Helped Bring the Fake Heiress to Justice*, and an Air Mail’s article *Re-Inventing Anna*, where she criticized the Netflix portrayal of her stating that it was a fictional story that rewarded Anna’s crimes. Williams also gave her perspective on television as she was

interviewed on an episode of the ABC network program, *20/20, The Sinfluencer of Soho*, which was released on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

## **Cost and Restitution**

Despite Anna getting paid \$320,000 for her story, most of the earnings went to pay for fees and restitution for her crimes. The New York Attorney General had sued Anna under the Son of Sam law that greatly limits people from profiting off their crime-related publicity. The lawsuit and “Son of Sam” law forced Anna to use most of the money for fees, fines, and restitution. The Son of Sam law was created because of the 1970s serial killer who was known as the “Son of Sam” David Berkowitz. There were serious concerns about Berkowitz profiting off selling the rights to his story to publishers so New York state passed legislation to prevent Berkowitz and other criminals from profiting off of their crimes, and other states also mimicked these laws. The publishers had attempted to fight against the Son of Sam law and argued it was against the first amendments freedom of speech clause. In one case in the 1980s Simon and Schuster had brought the law to the Supreme Court as they had been working on a book with a convicted criminal Henry Hill. The Supreme Court had found the law to be unconstitutional as it violated the right to free speech and the law was struck down. This allowed Hill to make around \$480,000 from the novel *Wiseguy* which was the main inspiration for the *Goodfellas*. The revised Son of Sam Law was then reintroduced in 2001 and requires that the publishing company notifies the Office of Victims Services (OVS) when a convicted felon is paid in excess of \$10,000 (Gold, 2014).

The OVS can freeze bank accounts and allow the victim(s) to file lawsuits against the convicted felon. This is what happened with Anna’s case, as the banks who were victims of Anna had been notified and acted to recover money that they lost, including City National Bank which filed a lawsuit and got \$100,000, as well as CitiBank which received \$70,000. The third bank Signature Bank had not filed any legal actions under the Son of Sam law and Williams was not eligible for the lawsuit because Anna was found not guilty in the case against Williams. This was the first utilization of the Son of Sam law for a person profiting off a television show. Netflix had been engaged since the pre-trial stage of the criminal case, as employees were present during the trial along with the press. Netflix had initiated the payments and followed all the policies related to OVS and the Son of Sam laws. Netflix had continued to agree to all of the New York court orders related to the case and made payments to the accounts that were distributed to the victims.

## **Why the Fascination with Anna Delvey?**

The media coverage of young female criminal defendants has been given extraordinary attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the media wanting to know every detail of Anna's life. This fascination was like what was given to the murder suspect Amanda Knox who was also given international attention during her murder trial (Simkin, 2013) and after her conviction and was given a multimillion-dollar book deal and Netflix movie. Both women were in their 20s, middle class, and of European descent. When young white women are victims of crimes, they have been given disproportionately higher amounts of attention than women of color. For Anna being an offender, she was also given disproportionate attention which she was able to use to her benefit and profit from her crimes even after being convicted.

Streaming services like Netflix have capitalized on crime and con artists (Bluestone, 2021). Just before *Inventing Anna* was released another viral documentary was released called the *Tinder Swindler* which quickly became an international phenomenon. The movie was about a con artist who lied and manipulated women he met on Tinder. These shows help show viewers how easy it is to be tricked and conned by people you think you trust and that appear to be wealthy and successful.

Many news articles were critical of rewarding Anna for her criminal lifestyle, but the more the news published stories about her the more famous she was becoming. When she was released from prison, she started posting on social media just hours after she was released asking for \$720 million in a Twitter post "Someone from Fortress Investment Group - I need \$720m by the end of next week. DM me." Her Instagram bio states that she is a "Professional Defendant". Despite Anna being found guilty, she has continued to claim that her business plans for her foundation were legitimate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Anna Delvey story continues to show Western media's fascination with scammers, con artists, fame, and crime (Levi, 2006). Many young people go to great lengths for fame, and sometimes those include illegal activities. The rewarding outcome of fame for Anna allowed her to get the attention and notoriety she was seeking as well as a 6-figure payday from Netflix. It is important for media outlets to provide an accurate representation of crimes and events like Anna's story, but this can create an image that crime pays. When asked during an interview if crime pays Anna said "In a way, it did."

When crimes are able to make people tune in as it did with Anna and others who gained notoriety through their crimes and the media companies can help provide

you with a great attorney to help the perpetrator, it can be a lucrative process for some. Fame can create a potential for a criminal to create a platform to create future financial opportunities and media attention as Anna is attempting to do. This is where a critical perspective can show the harm and pain that was caused by the crimes that Anna had perpetuated, and the loss of opportunities, friends, connections, freedom, time, and money this cost her and others.

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