



Can Felicity Huffman's and Lori Loughlin's careers ever recover from college bribery scam?

Andrea Mandell and Carly Mallenbaum | USA TODAY

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Millionaires, college athletic coaches and ACT proctors are all entwined in the college admissions bribery scandal heard 'round the world.

But it's two TV stars who have become the face of the bombshell story, after it was revealed Tuesday that Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman allegedly paid thousands of dollars to fake test scores and disguise their children as athletes in order to gain access to prestigious schools.

And that's the downside of fame, experts say. "Although there were (more than 30) parents involved, they're the two that are going to be the face of it again and again and again. And that's the price you pay for being in Hollywood," says crisis management expert Howard Bragman, CEO of La Brea Media.

But will their careers survive the storm? First, a look back at their alleged crimes.

How we got here

Federal prosecutors allege Huffman spent \$15,000 on a cheating scheme to aid her daughter's SAT test-taking, according to the investigation. Ultimately "Huffman's daughter scored 1420 on the SAT, an improvement of approximately 400 points over her PSAT" she'd taken a year earlier, according to the affidavit.

'Expel this cheater': Lori Loughlin's daughter Olivia is being trolled over bribery case

And Loughlin, who was charged alongside her husband, fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli, allegedly paid bribes totaling \$500,000 "in exchange for having their two daughters designated as recruits to the University of Southern California crew team,

despite the fact they did not participate in crew, thereby facilitating their admission to USC."





Lori Loughlin and Olivia Jade Giannulli.
Steve Granitz, WireImage

As a chorus of indignation grows, are their careers over?

Actually, most image experts say no. But first, both actresses have some explaining to do.

It's just that they probably can't say much.

"Their criminal lawyers are saying, 'Shut up, don't say anything, don't talk to anybody,' " says Bragman. "And that's the best advice, although I'm sure they want to talk and they want to say, 'We thought we were doing what's best for our kids and we made a mistake.' "

In court, their lawyers could take a variety of stands. "If I was their attorney, my argument would be, 'How are these people really different than people who have made donations directly to the school?' It's more of a cultural issue," says criminal defense lawyer Lara Yeretsian, who has represented celebrity defendants including Michael Jackson and Scott Peterson.

But if they are innocent, "then they need to vigorously dispute the charges and focus on their history of being credible and trusted citizens," says Eric Schiffer, chairman of Reputation Management Consultants. "If they are guilty, they must remain careful and quiet because the last thing they want to do is deceive the public, as it will destroy any chance of rebuilding their brand and trust after the case is adjudicated."



Felicity Huffman and William H. Macy in September 2018 in Los Angeles.

Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

But what about their upcoming projects?

Both women have a busy 2019 planned. Huffman has two Netflix projects slated for spring releases: the mom-centric film "Otherhood" (streaming April 26), opposite Angela Bassett and Patricia Arquette; and Ava DuVernay's Central Park Five series "When They See Us" (May 31), in which Huffman plays former New York city prosecutor Linda Fairstein.



A scene from Netflix's "Fuller House" with Lori Loughlin and John Stamos.
Michael Yarish, Netflix

Loughlin, too, is on a roll. Her Netflix series "Fuller House" has been renewed for a fifth and final season, though it has not begun filming yet.

Loughlin's IMDb page also shows four upcoming "Garage Sale Mysteries" TV movies for Hallmark Movies & Mysteries. The family-friendly network did not respond to a request for comment.

Netflix had no comment about Huffman's or Loughlin's participation in their projects.

Experts predict the stars will not be taken off previously shot shows and movies, though they likely won't be doing many interviews to support them.

This is a "humiliation," says Bragman, but "we've seen a lot worse things in Hollywood than this."

So what do they do now?

There's a lot of haterade flowing at the moment, as paying major money to sneak your kid through a "side door" at a prestigious university is not a good look.

The scandal "reinforces every bad thing that the average Joe thinks about Hollywood: that they're privileged, they don't have to play by the rules, that they get to move to the front of the line," says Bragman.

"But let's be clear: This was more about wealthy people than celebrities. This wasn't Hollywood malfeasance. This was about rich people malfeasance. And there's a difference."

And though Schiffer says "it will take a long time" to heal the wounds with the public, this is no murder trial. Or a R. Kelly scandal.

"This is a relatively small crisis from a brand and PR perspective," says Ronn Torossian, a crisis management expert who's worked for companies like McDonald's and stars like Sean Combs. "This is something that can go away."

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