

Accidental Outlaws

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The hit early 90's film *Thelma and Louise* was an exciting and controversial movie about women, men, and freedom. These women become the target on a police man hunt for a number of crimes they committed during what was supposed to be a girls weekend getaway in the hopes of finding freedom and themselves. *Thelma and Louise* seem to quickly make split decisions that land them in a world of trouble. These split decisions made by *Thelma and Louise* and also a few other characters are carried on throughout the whole film and every one raises the question on whether or not it was moral or ethical.

Everything started by a harmless stop at a local restaurant/bar in a town they were driving through a town that was on the way to their girls weekend cabin in the mountains. The bar is where *Thelma* met *Harlan*, a smooth talking handsome fella that seemed to be a harmless flirt that bought the ladies drinks. *Thelma and Louise* quickly found out that *Harlan* was a bad egg, and was the start on their road to becoming outlaws. During the scene where *Harlan* attempts to rape *Thelma* outside of the bar *Louise* raises a gun at *Harlan* to put a stop to it all. We know at that point any friend/family member would pull a gun on someone in that specific case or in any case in which you feel that you or your friend/family member feels in danger of threatened.

We don't 100% know why *Louise* actually shot and killed *Harlan* but it is a possibility that the events that happened to *Louise* in Texas are a major contributing factor to her decision to shoot and kill him being what he had done or tried to do. You can tell that *Louise* had some sort of emotional connection to the situation by the way she cried and showed little to no remorse over the fact she had killed a man. Whereas for innocent "young spirited" *Thelma*, she was in total shock. For one, the event that were just tried on her are enough to make anyone

shocked/frightened but to add a murder to it seemed to be quite alarming and highly discomfoting for her. After Louise shot Harlan it raised the question about whether it was ethically right or even justified. Louise corrects Thelma when she suggests that they say it was self-defense by saying “it wasn’t self-defense Thelma we got away”.

After Louise says that, you start to realize that they killed a man and ran away which makes it so the ethical reasoning for the crime becomes almost imposable to identify. After this crime you start to see how they refuse to cooperate with the law or really any part of law enforcement. They were without a doubt scared at first but as the movie progresses you start to see what some might call “having guts” the real transformation from accidental outlaws to full-fledged active criminals.

Hal and Max are to two main sides of police/ law enforcement we see throughout the whole film. Hal and Max are noticeably different in the way they try to get the ladies to cooperate, Hal uses a more emotional approaching kind of like he knows them and the whole story (he seems to be on their side) whereas for Max, he chooses force as a tactic to kind of scare them into cooperating. When Louise talks to Hal on the phone she says “You know, certain words and phrases just keep floating through my mind, things like incarceration, cavity search, life imprisonment, death by electrocution, that sort of thing. So, come out alive? I don't know, Let us think about that” (Polk & Scott, 1991). That quote showed Hal and you can tell by the emotions you see on his face, that this was not going to end the way anyone plans.

Murder and refusing to cooperate with the law is not the only things going on, the roles of both men and women in this movie are extremely important. All the men that Thelma and Louise cross seem to all be a problem for them before the trip, during the trip, or just haunt them

throughout their daily life. For example, we don't know 100% what exactly happened to Louise in Texas but it is a pretty safe call for us to say she was raped. Anyone who has ever had any form of trauma like that in their life usually has trust and emotional problems regarding people, especially men. This can maybe explain how Louise is not quick to trust any of the people/ men they meet on the trip and her "tough girl" attitude towards life. More specifically I think it is a lot of the reason she had to "get away" from Jimmy. On the other hand, Thelma though being just sexually assaulted by a male less than 24 hours prior, trust J.D. and willingly lets another man into her life she barely knows despite what had happened what seems like moments previously. Thelma's husband is portrayed as a "bad husband" but it's all she has even known so she really would know what to do if she left. There is some suspicion that Daryl is cheating on her but nothing was ever proven or brought up about the suspicion. Even though there was a suspicion that Daryl was cheating does it make it ethically right for Thelma to commit adultery with J.D.?

Adultery and murder are two of the few most dramatic ethical parts in the film. Thelma's morals were on a slippery slope from the beginning at the bar when she was dancing and flirting with Harlan the whole night, but most people will argue that if you are not happy in your marriage then get out of it. Thelma was a child though, Daryl was all she had and all she had ever known so chances are she didn't really deem herself "unhappy" or in a "bad" marriage. Because she had gotten married so young she may just think that marriage is like this and ever women deals with what she deals with on a day to day biases. In a way she was punished for her immoral acts of adultery with J.D. by being robbed by him after she left him in the room alone with the thousands of dollars they had after their night together. She even knew he was a criminal and didn't take the necessary precautions like most people would in her shoes. Which is

another key example how willing she is to hand you her trust and how childish and irresponsible she can be.

The domino effect starts to be noticeable at this point in the film because of all the crimes being committed that seem to cause another crime to happen. J.D. stole their money and this was a major part in the film because we see Louise (the leader over Thelma) give up. She shows a weakness and Thelma becomes the mother role between the two of them almost instantly. Thelma quickly calls the shots and makes the plan, which leads them to their next crime; the robbery. The robbery is sort of a funny clip because Thelma is in no way scary any she learned from J.D. who said “robbery doesn’t have to be an unpleasant experience” (Polk & Scott, 1991). The justification for this crime was that they really needed the money. But does that make it right?

The girls are in no way finished yet, the scene where Louise gets pulled over is a powerful and emotion packed scene. Again, we see that Louise doesn’t know what to do and Thelma takes charge over her and the cop. In my personal opinion I think this was probably the most complex crimes they committed because of the criminal to person contact in this one where they seem to actually threaten a man who says “I have a wife and children” which makes you instantly sympathize for him. The scene is where you see them realize this is their life now, they are in way too deep to give up now. For lack of a better phrase they know and think that they have “nothing else to lose”. The trouble they are in seems to be a game for them at this point, they get back at the truck driver that made provocative gestures and talked to them like animals by destroying his truck Thelma and Louise seem to do this just because; Why not? They without a doubt went against the law during the police chases. The amount of property and law enforcement vehicles they ruined would be enough to put anyone in jail for a long time but they

already knew that's where they were going if they got caught and these women were under to circumstances to let that happen just yet.

The ending scene was highly emotional and played a huge role in the freedom ethics throughout the whole film. When they are sitting on the canon in silence knowing there are hundreds of guns pointed at them and law enforcement officials that are given the right to shot and kill, the view doesn't have any idea what is going to happen. Thelma openly says to Louise, "I don't wanna get caught yet, let's just keep going" (Polk & Scott, 1991) not only is this the last time you see Thelma play to "mother" role in the film but I think this is where you see what the women were really searching for which was freedom. Was this ethical? Maybe not, but in their eyes I think it was they were in search of freedom, death is a form of freedom to some people and I think in this case it was going to be their only opinion because they both knew they were not getting caught. They had been running all throughout the film. Hal tries to stop all the law enforcement by asking Max "is this really necessary for these girls" (Polk & Scott, 1991). It is hard to say who did the right thing according to justice, but you can assume this is how highly dangerous criminals are treated and even if it started by accident the law will take the proper measures in needs. They were not just running from the law but their lives, the whole reason they went on this little girls weekend was to get away and just be alone.

Overall Thelma and Louise seem to practice the Marxism code of ethics which really just states that there are no ethics. They practice more of an "anti-ethical tendency" (Brenkret, 1983) though out the whole film is highly noticeable because it's not a matter of if the acts were ethical but rather if the women really had an anti-ethical mean about them after the murder. The women were looking for freedom so they went on a weekend getaway and what they really found was freedom by death. They were with each other which seemed to be all they cared about at the end.

The justice ethic through the film were not only played and tied into Thelma and Louise but also the detectives Hal and Max because of the different views of the law and how these girls should be treated, punished, and pursued. These women found what they were looking for, it just not in the way the audience expected.

## References

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