

# Exploring the Embodiment of Feminist Growth in Movies: Taking *Thelma and Louise* as an Example

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**Abstract.** The film, as a form of cultural expression, usually also assumes the responsibility of reflecting and exploring social issues and presenting them to the masses in a more popular way, and these social issues also include gender issues class issues, and so on. Feminism has been a hot topic in recent years, and it has led to many different issues such as women's independence and the dichotomy between men and women, but the public's understanding of feminism is too shallow and one-sided. Taking the film *Thelma and Louise* as an example, this study aims to explore the theme of women breaking the boundaries of gender and class to present feminist growth in this film, by analyzing the characters' personalities, their ways of thinking about things, and their final choices. This study likewise presents how the two female protagonists transform from victims to strong and independent women. According to the final results of the study *Thelma and Louise* successfully present a feminist coming-of-age story that is significant to society as well as the awakening of feminism.

**Keywords:** Feminism; conflict perceptions; social-environmental factors.

## 1. Introduction

The film *Thelma and Louise* is a film directed by Ridley Scott and released in 1991. This study focuses on the growth of feminism and is of great significance to the promotion of feminism for future generations. The study focuses on the plot of the film, which follows the two main characters, *Thelma and Louise*, through a series of conflicting events that transform their personalities from victims to representatives of feminism. The film also analyses the key plot points, setting and filming techniques, how scenes are handled, etc. Through these methods, the research objectives are presented in a more in-depth manner. The film emphasizes the theme of feminism and self-awareness of growth, and through the experiences of the two protagonists, it presents the difficulties of women's growth as they are affected by the social environment. It also has a guiding significance for the future generations of awakening feminism [1].

## 2. Background

The film arose in the 1980s, when the American film market was mostly male-dominated, and the main characters of the films were mostly male, and the road movies were also monopolized by men. The screenwriter and protagonist of *Thelma and Louise* were both women, although the director of *Thelma and Louise* was Ridley Scott. Scott's previous filming of adventure drama films very well portrayed the two female protagonists in the process of growing up the spirit of adventure to reflect the growth of feminism [1]. The 1990s were an important period in the history of the United States. The United States in the world's particularity, so that it has experienced the bloody war "Gulf War", "The Kosovo War" and thrilling "economic crisis" and other big storms, and its unique the unique social and cultural mechanism of the film has also enabled it to further experience the "microcirculation" of feminism. During this period, a large number of women's films were released, which is a reflection of the evolution and derivation of feminist consciousness in society [2].

At a time when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in April 1991, the Cold War was over, and the Western world was basking in the glory of the victors, the release of *Thelma and Louise* garnered a great deal of attention. The film tells the story of Louise and Thelma, who just want to go out for a

weekend getaway, but to defend their women's rights, they kill a man, and out of the helplessness of the low status of women at that time, and the distrust of the police, the two choose to run away. After being chased by the police and persuaded to turn themselves in, Thelma makes the final decision to join Louise in her quest for freedom, a freedom that belongs to women, even at the cost of her life. The blue car cuts a beautiful arc on the edge of the cliff, poignant and magnificent. The film explored the issues of women's rights, freedom, crime, and self-identity, and became one of the representative works of feminist cinema at the time and won six Oscar nominations as well as the Oscar for original screenplay and many other awards. It also broke the shackles of the male-only road movie and developed the diversity of the film industry.

With the release of *Thelma and Louise* in 1991, feminist culture began to penetrate deeply into cinema, and women began to want to get rid of the subordinate status of the characters in films, breaking the traditional public perception of the stereotypical symbolism of women. It also had a huge impact on the social reality at that time, when women were still on the fringe of society, many women like Thelma did not have much social experience, they entered marriage early and were bound to the family all their lives, they might not have a job, they lacked social interaction and were not recognized, their hearts were barren and their social value was not recognized. *Thelma and Louise* allow these girls to be more courageous and awaken their active or passive hidden female consciousness. Like a strange retrograde step, *Thelma and Louise* once again recreate on screen an echo of the 60s, a rebellion of women, a firework of protestors who refuse to compromise and who care about their lives [3].

### 3. Film Content Analysis

#### 3.1. Plot Analysis

Thelma is a full-time wife who married at the age of 14 after a relationship and joined her family, her husband is a car sales manager who earns money for the family and Louis is a waiter in a restaurant. The two meets for a road trip, but Thelma knows her husband will not approve, so she and Luis go on the road first, and Thelma takes a pistol with her, which is an ambush. The first stop for the two protagonists is a bar, where Thelma finds it refreshing and does not reject the man's advances, while Luis is quite wary. The man takes Thelma to the car park and tries to take her by force. Thelma resists and Luis kills the man, and the two of them go on the run. Thelma her husband cannot get comforted and scolded, even Thelma leaves the house for a day and a night her husband does not find out because he was out with friends all night long and did not return to eat and drink and have fun; the husband knows Thelma is not at home and is not concerned about why he suddenly and eagerly called but blamed Thelma, because, in his heart, Thelma than the role of the wife is more like a babysitter, a hard-working and unrewarding babysitter, without the nanny his life would be a lot more than a wife. Without this nanny, his life would be full of trivial troubles. Thelma faced with such a situation no longer chose to surrender for her husband's comfort but firmly chose to flee with Luis to Mexico to live a new life [4].

Louise's boyfriend arrives and brings a large sum of money to wish Louise well, but once again, Thelma trusts a strange male to be scammed and swindled out of all the money for their escape, and they are left with no other option but to commit a robbery. Thelma's character changes dramatically this time, and the two main characters are on the road to crime. Thelma also learns what happened to Louise in the past. The police sympathize with them and want them to turn themselves in as soon as possible, but they still choose the path of freedom. They take revenge on the tanker driver who sexually harassed them along the way, a tanker driver who is not even named in the film but is a very important character, who verbally harasses them many times and even makes disgusting gestures, and who is portrayed as nasty and disrespectful to women. At first *Thelma and Louise* ignore them and don't want to cause too much trouble, which fuels the tanker driver's vile thoughts. So, after a series of harassment the two choose to make the tanker driver suffer by leading him to a rest area and blowing up the petrol he was carrying, the driver is about to face a huge payout. At the same time,

the film's camera switches to a panoramic shot from high to low and down, the burning fire is visually stunning, magnificent, and dangerous in the middle of nowhere beside a sandy highway, while attracting the attention of the police leading to the women being chased to their doom [5]. There is also a police officer who, unlike the other male characters in the film, stays on Thelma and Louise's side. He is angry that the case is not progressing well enough to mitigate the guilt of the two, grieves for watching the two heroines' step into the abyss of crime, and even ends up standing between the sisters and the other police officers. This support, though powerless, is moving and sublimates the theme of the film. The way to highlight the theme of the film is not by belittling and comparing women's opposites, but by highlighting the highlights of women, each side has its strengths and weaknesses that are more worthy of deeper consideration.

In the continuous pursuit under the thought of humiliation in the past and caught after the situation the two firmly choose to go forward even if the abyss is in front of them. The camera has a close-up of a photo of the two of them together, at the beginning of the journey Luis and Thelma look expectant and happy, with a beautiful photo of the beginning of the end of the photo burned half the photo with the wind to the canyon disappeared. The film ends with the car going off the cliff, and director Ridley Scott's slow-motion sequence. Director Ridley Scott handles this shot in slow motion, prolonging the time of the car rushing off the cliff, delaying the tragic atmosphere rendered before, and allowing the viewer's emotions to explode at this moment into the plot of the immersive visual mood of the two heroines, and stopping in the blue sky when the car has already driven off the cliff and is about to fall. The blue car weaves through the traffic; speeds along the yellow sandy highway; has seen the stars and the evening sun but stays forever in this moment. Also set to dashing American country music breaks up this mood of bracing compassion and adds a kind of big-girl fearlessness [6]. It also avoids filming the gruesome death of the car plunging into the endless canyon leaving a certain amount of white space for the viewer's imagination. The treatment of this paragraph shows that women as vulnerable groups never give in to the spirit, have the courage that ordinary people can hardly have to pursue their freedom, dignity, and rights to escape from the circle of male power, and bravely and calmly go to their deaths to sublimate the theme of the film - the awakening of feminism. If they choose to be captured by the police at the end, their previous efforts and awakening would seem absurd [7].

In the process of fleeing the two to a section of deserted highway a police officer started to stop, and experienced a lot of criminal processes *Thelma and Louise* were highly nervous thought it was an arrest by the police and pretended to comply with the actual to look for an opportunity to escape. They work together perfectly to tie up the cop but leave him with air holes so that he doesn't affect everyone because of what happened before. Thelma takes away the cop's sunglasses, and Thelma's character becomes more three-dimensional and fleshed out in a way that's very different from her previous, risqué but beautiful persona.

In the second half of the film, the image of the two has been greatly transformed, at the beginning of the film *Thelma and Louise* look in the mirror to put up lipstick and carefully select the right clothes to clean up their own exquisite and proper, even after robbing the shop Thelma is in the mood to make up to maintain the image; but in the end almost at the end of the road when they change the exquisite but inconvenient clothing, wearing dry denim, wash their faces and just hurriedly take it to become less concerned about the appearance of the escape process of money and freedom above all Louise to sell their diamonds and other jewelry for this. Wash their faces in a hurry and become less concerned with their appearance, and in the process of escaping, money and freedom come before anything else, and Louise sells her diamond ring and other jewelry for this purpose. Here is also a change in the character's mindset, focusing more on realising the demands of the self at the moment and neglecting the delicate appearance required by the male coagulation.

### 3.2. Similarities and Differences in Protagonists

The two heroines in the film are very different in their personalities, their ways of doing things, and their relationships with men and women. Firstly, the main female character, Thelma, is an

untouched woman who is relatively ignorant and does not have much self-consciousness. Although she falls in love early and gets married, she doesn't have much self-seeking, and she takes care of her own family every day and doesn't even dare to put forward her own ideas to her husband. In preparation for the trip, Thelma packs her baggage in a messy way, obviously seldom goes out and can't cope with it, and packs her clothes in the style of a good lady such as lace; on the contrary, Louise, her home is packed in a neat and tidy way, ready for the owner to leave home. Her quick and tidy packing and methodical approach reflect her character as a woman with a strong sense of purpose. This also contributes to her ability to quickly calm down and think of a way out after a sudden change. Her big red lips are her standard accessory, and her feminine jewelry is not overpowering, but rather complementary.

Secondly, the relationship between men and women is also very different, Thelma's husband is the head of the family is the husband works to support the family, which leads to Thelma having no family status and is not valued and not respected. In the film, all the dialogue between the two is in the fight, Daryl is always a strong command tone, irritable and impatient, with a typical tone of male superiority; while his wife Thelma dares not say anything, even if she is scolded, even if the heart of the unpleasant can only be careful to serve her husband and take care of her husband's moods, the two of them in the family status is completely unequal. Instead of playing the role of a wife, Thelma plays the role of a nanny and a maid in this relationship. Thelma's husband does not realize that she has been out all night without returning to her husband's home because he has been out all night eating and drinking, and when he learns of Thelma's situation, he only blames her but does not comfort her, which leads to Thelma's lack of love and her tendency to be gullible to men's words. The other main character, Louise, shows a very different feeling when it comes to her relationship with men and women. In the film, Louise and her boyfriend are very much in love, and when they realize that Louise may be in danger, they rush straight to Louise's side to bring her money and comfort and give her support. Louise doesn't want to involve her boyfriend and chooses to keep it a secret, both looking out for the other. This is a stark contrast to Thelma [8].

At the same time, the two protagonists have similarities, both are victims of a patriarchal society, they rebel against the traditional gender roles through their behavior, and in the process gradually realize their self-knowledge and a clear understanding of their values and aspirations are no longer bound by society [9]. The decision to pursue freedom and happiness autonomously marks their feminist growth [10].

#### 4. Conclusion

The result of this study is that the film *Thelma and Louise* presents the growth of feminism and has a great influence on the development of the film industry and the extension of feminism in the real world. The result of this study is that through the popular medium of film, the demands can be better conveyed to the viewers, and the dress and appearance can also be used as a reflection of the character traits and personal pursuits of the characters. This study provides a lot of valuable references for future research in this direction, which mainly influences the direction of mainstream film production, and future research should focus more on the materialization of feminism and not just stop at the theoretical direction for in-depth research.

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