

"It was a moment in time."



*Catching Sight of
Thelma & Louise*

COMMUNITY VIEWING AND ACTION GUIDE



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about the documentary

For many moviegoers, the 1991 feature film *Thelma & Louise* proved life-changing. *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise* is a film about that film.

The documentary takes an in-depth look at the profound impact this box office sensation had on audiences and the culture at large. Through insightful commentary and personal accounts from people who were deeply affected by the movie's story and its messages, the documentary explores *Thelma & Louise's* revolutionary themes against a backdrop of the present day.

Thelma & Louise blasted through expectations about gender and power, outlaws and heroes, freedom and justice. The trigger for its story was a sexual assault, but the real story, the breakthrough power of the story, was the title characters' *response* to that assault.

Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise explores the original movie's characters and story elements through the eyes of women and men, feminists and film scholars, and the documentary filmmaker herself – along with two of the male actors from *Thelma & Louise* and the film's editor. Each participant recalls their initial reactions to the feature film, and how those views have changed over time. Through this chorus of voices, we discover how *Thelma & Louise* became a cultural milestone with the power to alter the way women and men see themselves, each other, and the world.

Thelma & Louise was a radical departure for Hollywood, and its strong female leads took on a mythic quality that gave the film lasting personal and societal resonance. Instead of becoming victims, the fictional Thelma and Louise take charge of their own destinies and refuse to let go of their power. They even visit vigilante justice on a crude truck driver who disrespects and harasses them. The sheer audacity of their actions – the drastic shift of power from men in positions of authority into the hands of these “ordinary” women – created a new film archetype: the outlaw female. Audiences went wild.

It's not surprising, then, that when *Thelma & Louise* hit theaters in 1991, it provoked an immediate and fierce debate. Written by Callie Khouri, directed by Ridley Scott, and starring Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon as friends whose weekend getaway turns deadly, the movie became a rallying cry for female empowerment for some, while others labeled it “male-bashing” and “toxic feminism.” The film's treatment of sexual violence and a justice system stacked against women continues to elicit strong reactions from viewers and social critics across the globe.

why this film?

Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise was born of Seattle-based documentary filmmaker Jennifer Townsend's profound reaction to seeing the original feature film in 1991. Townsend wanted to gauge the response of other film viewers around the U.S., so after its release, she created a national survey to investigate the effect *Thelma & Louise* had on audiences. Years later, Townsend pulled out the survey letters and audiotapes and began contacting people who had responded to her questionnaire. "The voices in the box were clamoring to be heard," she said.

The lawyer-turned-filmmaker flew across the U.S. to conduct on-camera interviews with nearly two dozen women and men who had taken part in her survey years earlier, as well as others with close ties to the movie. Her documentary interweaves their personal stories with key scenes from *Thelma & Louise*.

The result is a thought-provoking, intimate look at the impact of this watershed film, the pervasive issues of gender inequality and gender-based violence, and the truth of women's lives. The documentary shines a light on harassment, sexual assault – including rape culture – and a criminal justice system that often fails to protect the vulnerable.

Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise offers viewers a yardstick by which to measure society's progress on these issues since the feature film's release. *Thelma & Louise* left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape. But since then, the documentary asks, what has changed in terms of how society treats women? And what urgent work still lies ahead?

about this guide

This **Community Viewing and Action Guide** was designed as a resource for organizers of screenings outside the academic classroom. It offers discussion prompts and ideas for supplementing screenings with panel discussions, audience participation and invited speakers. It also features extensive background material for facilitators of public and private screenings of the film.

This guide is designed to deepen understanding and expand the conversation for viewers of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*. It contains **pre-viewing guidance**, as well as a section on **defining the terms** and a list of common **myths v. facts** about sexual violence. **Part One** contains guidelines for setting up and conducting a screening. **Part Two, Taking Action**, lists concrete actions individuals can take to help achieve gender parity, stem the tide of sexual violence, and



advance criminal and social justice for survivors. There are **resources** pages for sexual assault survivors and their allies, and **tips for creating a short video documentary**.

It is our hope that all viewers of the documentary will consider taking some sort of action – from a simple change in personal behavior to supporting organizations whose missions align with one’s own. It could mean creating an original media project that addresses issues raised in the documentary, or engaging in cultural, civic or political action to accelerate remedies and replace “rape culture” with a culture of respect and consent.

Please note: This guide addresses the pervasive issues of gender discrimination and sexual assault in the context of U.S. and other western societies as they relate to sexually-active young adults, adults, and seniors. And although sexual violence is a crime perpetrated by and against people of all gender identities, much of this guide addresses one of the documentary film’s primary themes: the prevalence of sexual crimes committed by men against women. We look at factors that underlie this trend, and whether aspects of this serious human rights crisis have improved since the 1991 release of *Thelma & Louise*.



before viewing

Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise uses personal storytelling to explore not only the far-reaching impact of the landmark feature film *Thelma & Louise*, but also the harsh realities of gender discrimination and sexual violence that persist in today’s society. The documentary explores the movie’s themes of freedom and justice for its female characters, alongside frank discussions about rape culture, misogyny, and the often-devastating effects of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. Engaging with these topics may be emotionally and intellectually challenging for some.

Prior to viewing *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*, facilitators are encouraged to indicate their intention to create a safe space where people can discuss the issues raised in the documentary openly, thoughtfully, and with empathy. They may wish to encourage attendees to practice self-care, allowing them to step outside if needed. We also encourage screening organizers to have contact information for local sexual assault support services on hand, and perhaps invite a local rape crisis agency to the screening to answer any questions that arise. The following national resources may be shared:



- **Crisis Text Line** provides live crisis counselors who will respond via text 24/7. Learn more at crisistextline.org. Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the U.S.
- For immediate free, confidential help 24/7, contact the **National Sexual Assault Hotline**: 1-800-656-4673, or by online chat: <https://hotline.rainn.org/online/>

Throughout the documentary, selected scenes from *Thelma & Louise* play on screen as aspects of the movie are discussed. These clips, together with interview commentary, clearly reveal the plot of the feature film – making viewing the documentary a self-contained experience. Therefore, it is not necessary to watch *Thelma & Louise* to grasp its impact and its themes, though screening organizers may wish to encourage attendees to watch the feature film for additional points of reference that may enhance the discussion.

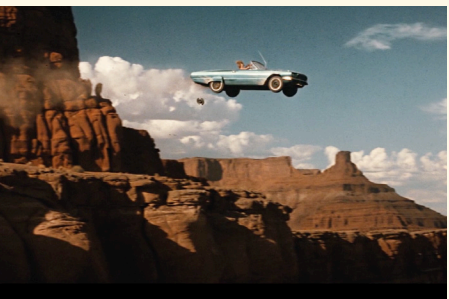


content advisory

Facilitators of community screenings may wish to state a brief content advisory.

Specifically, the documentary contains:

- A brief movie clip from *Thelma & Louise* that portrays an attempted acquaintance rape, verbal abuse, and the physical assault of a female character
- A brief movie clip in which a perpetrator is shot, and several quick scenes where people are held at gunpoint during a robbery
- Recollections from present-day women and men about their experiences with sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape, and recollections of similar incidents experienced by their friends and loved ones
- A brief clip of the final scene from *Thelma & Louise* that ends with the protagonists sailing off the edge of a cliff – a key element of the film’s storyline, often viewed in symbolic terms as an act of freedom in a world where justice for sexual assault victims does not exist
- A brief comment regarding policing techniques and whether race is a determining factor in the apprehension of suspects



defining the terms

Sexual assault is any kind of unwanted sexual activity that a person does not consent to. Sexual assault can happen through physical force or threats of force or if the attacker gave the victim drugs or alcohol as part of the assault. Sexual assault includes rape and sexual coercion. While adequate studies have not yet been done, it is estimated that rates of sexual assault are higher for marginalized populations such as LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color, people with differing abilities and non-citizens. (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services)

Consent is not explicitly defined in roughly half of the states in the U.S., and there is no clear consensus as to what counts as consent. Consent statutes have been adopted into other state penal codes, including California's, and by at least ten European nations. In general terms, consent is the clear, informed, and voluntary agreement between all participants to engage in sexual activity. Silence cannot be interpreted as consent. Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions are mutually understood. Consent cannot be given by someone who is incapacitated. (See *Consent: Two Explanations*)

Rape has no uniform legal definition in the United States, as definitions vary widely from state to state. Some states have adopted comprehensive statutes prohibiting 'non-spousal rape,' 'spousal rape,' and other types of rape. Others no longer use the term rape, instead using terms like sexual assault, criminal sexual conduct, sexual abuse, and sexual battery.

The FBI has officially adopted the following definition of rape for use in categorizing crimes:

"Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim."

This definition includes instances in which the victim is unable to give consent because of temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity, and states that a victim can be incapacitated and thus unable to consent because of ingestion of drugs or alcohol. A victim may also be legally incapable of consent because of age. The ability of the victim to give consent must be determined in accordance with individual state statutes. (U.S. Dept. of Justice)

Acquaintance rape is a sex crime committed by someone who knows the victim, and this includes **date rape** and **marital rape**. It occurs when a person known to the victim has sexual contact with the victim without their consent. This could be a friend, classmate, spouse, relative, or coworker. Acquaintance rape includes forced, manipulated or coerced sexual contact. (Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault)

Date rape drugs are used to sexually assault a person. The drugs often have no color, smell, or taste and are easily added to drinks without the victim's knowledge. They usually cause a person to become helpless, barely able to move, and unable to protect themselves, and can result in an inability to remember the assault. Date rape drugs can even cause death. (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services)

Sexual harassment is most often defined as unwelcomed sexual advances in the workplace or learning environment, like a school or university. According to Equal Rights.org, to meet the legal definition of "harassment," the conduct in question must either be *severe or pervasive*. It does not have to be both.

Sexual harassment encompasses requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance and is so severe or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Unwelcome behavior is a critical element. A victim may consent or agree to certain conduct and actively participate in it even though it is offensive and objectionable. Therefore, sexual conduct is unwelcome whenever *the person subjected to it* considers it unwanted. It is important to communicate (verbally, in writing, or by actions) to the harasser that the conduct makes the person uncomfortable and wants it to stop. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

Sexual harassment outside the school or workplace is unwanted behavior of a sexual nature directed toward an individual that is generally considered to be annoying, threatening, or tormenting, such as catcalls, whistles, touching on public transportation, and the like. How this behavior is characterized by law, and whether it is prohibited, depends on the jurisdiction in which it occurs.

Rape kit or Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) or Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK), while sometimes thought to be a post-assault forensic exam, actually refers to the kit itself—a container that includes a checklist, materials, and instructions, along with containers to package any specimens collected during the exam. The contents of the kit vary by state and jurisdiction. In most cases, DNA evidence needs to be collected within 72 hours in order to be analyzed by a crime lab—but a sexual assault forensic exam can reveal other forms of evidence beyond this time frame that can be useful if you decide to report. Place your belongings, including the clothes you were wearing, in a **paper bag** to safely preserve evidence. (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, RAINN)

Restorative Justice is an innovative justice mechanism that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that allow all willing stakeholders to meet, although other approaches are used. It can seek redress for victims, recompense by offenders and reintegration of both within the community. (The Center for Justice & Reconciliation)

PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD. (National Institute of Mental Health)

Interpersonal Violence (also called Domestic Violence) occurs between people in an intimate relationship, and can take many forms, including emotional, sexual and physical abuse and threats of abuse. Men are sometimes abused by partners, but domestic violence is most often directed toward women. It can happen in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. An abuser uses intimidating, hurtful words and behaviors to control his or her partner. (The Mayo Clinic)

Dating Violence is defined as the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional aggression within a dating relationship, including stalking. It can occur in person or electronically and might occur between a current or former dating partner. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Sex-based discrimination occurs when employment decisions are based on an employee's gender or when an employee is treated differently because of his or her sex. The law forbids discrimination when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

Gender bias refers to beliefs and attitudes that involve stereotypes or preconceived ideas about the roles, abilities, and characteristics of males and females that may contain significant distortions and inaccuracies. (American Psychological Association)

consent – two explanations

Central to rape and sexual assault law is the concept of consent: *did the alleged victim consent to have sexual contact in this situation, or not?* Consent laws vary by country, state and situation.

Sexual assault crimes in the U.S. are defined in the Penal Codes in the laws of each state. California's, as one example, can be found here: <https://codes.findlaw.com/ca/penal-code/pen-sect-261.html>.

Due to epidemic levels of sexual violence at all levels of society, organizations and universities are now providing their own explanations of what constitutes consent as the demand for a safer, consent-based society grows. Two examples:

1) Adapted from published guidelines by Whitworth University, Spokane, Washington:

- a) Consent is clear, knowing and voluntary. It is active, not passive. Silence alone cannot be interpreted as consent.
- b) Consent to sexual activity can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create mutually understandable, clear permission regarding the willingness of both parties to engage in, and to agree on the conditions of, sexual activity.
- c) Consent to any one form of sexual activity does not automatically imply consent to any other forms of sexual activity.
- d) Previous relationships or prior consent cannot imply consent to future sexual acts.
- e) Consent can be withdrawn. This means that even if a person agreed to engage in sexual acts, that person has the right to change their mind, regardless of how much sexual interaction may have already taken place.
- f) In order to give effective consent, one must be of legal age.
- g) Consent cannot be given if the person is incapacitated, a state in which a person cannot make reasonable decisions because they lack the capacity to give knowing consent (e.g., to understand the “who, what, when, why or how” of the sexual interaction). *Consumption of alcohol or drugs alone is insufficient* to establish

incapacitation. The question of incapacitation is determined on a case-by-case basis. It will include an analysis of whether the responding party knew, or should have known, that the complaining party was incapacitated, or if the responding party played a role in creating the circumstance of incapacitation. Incapacity can also result from mental disability, sleep, involuntary physical restraint, or from ingesting date rape drugs if the responding party knew, or should have known, of the incapacitating condition, or was themselves the cause of it. Use of alcohol or other drugs will never function as a defense for sexually inappropriate behavior.

2) RAINN.org, the largest victim assistance network in the U.S. explains consent this way:

Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. There are many ways to give consent. Consent doesn't have to be verbal, but verbally agreeing to different sexual activities can help both you and your partner respect each other's boundaries.

How does consent work in real life?

When you're engaging in sexual activity, **consent is about communication**. And it should happen every time. Giving consent for one activity, one time, does not mean giving consent for increased or recurring sexual contact. For example, agreeing to kiss someone doesn't give that person permission to remove your clothes. Having sex with someone in the past doesn't give that person permission to have sex with you again in the future.

Consent does NOT look like this:

Refusing to acknowledge "no"

- Assuming that wearing certain clothes, flirting, or kissing is an invitation for anything more
- Someone being under the legal age of consent, as defined by the state
- Someone being incapacitated because of drugs or alcohol
- Pressuring someone into sexual activity by using fear or intimidation
- Assuming you have permission to engage in a sexual act because you've done it in the past

The sexual orientation and/or gender identity of individuals is not relevant to sexual assault allegations.

sexual violence: myths v. facts

Many scholars have asserted, based on a wealth of data, that the widespread acceptance of “rape myths” works to undermine the fair and neutral application of the law in cases of sexual violence. Therefore, many argue that in addition to reforming sexual assault laws and the criminal justice process, attention needs to be paid to educating the public about rape myths – many of which are widely accepted as true – in order to allow current laws to function as intended.

myth #1 Sexual violence is an act only directed towards women and girls.

FACT: Studies estimate **one in three women** and **one in seven men** will experience some form of contact sexual violence. **One in five women** and **one in 71 men will be raped** in their lifetime. (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)

- Women ages 18-24 who are college students are **three times more likely** than women in general to experience sexual violence. Females of the same age *not* enrolled in college are **four times more likely**. **One in 9 girls** and **1 in 53 boys** under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult. (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)
- A report across 27 universities found that **19 percent** of TGQN students (those who identified as transgender, gender-queer, nonconforming, questioning, or something not listed on the survey) were victims of sexual assault or misconduct that year, compared with **17 percent of female students** and **4.4 percent of male students**. (Association of American Universities)

myth #2 Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers.

FACT: In most cases (**75-80%**), the survivor **knew the perpetrator** prior to the attack, whether as a classmate, friend, acquaintance, or sexual partner. (Students Active for Ending Rape)

myth #3 Victims invite rape by the way they dress.

FACT: People are sexually assaulted while wearing **every type of clothing**. Activists are tackling this myth:

- Dixie State University in Utah displayed a powerful traveling exhibit called “*What Were You Wearing?*” featuring re-created outfits that represent the clothing people were wearing when

they were sexually assaulted. See the story on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDwhg2RDIWM>

- A similar exhibit featuring items of clothing and quotes from survivors called “*Is it My Fault?*” went on display at the Centre Communautaire Maritime in Brussels. Organizers sought to promote awareness by displaying recreations of outfits worn during assaults, including pajamas, tracksuits, even a child’s *My Little Pony* shirt – clothing, the organizers stressed, as innocent as the victims themselves. (BBC, UK Independent)

myth #4 Attractiveness is a factor in rape.

FACT: Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control. They stem from a person’s determination to exercise power over another. Multiple studies, including those by the FBI, suggest that sexual assault is most often a crime against young people, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, and that **vulnerability is a factor**, rather than attractiveness. (FBI)

myth #5 Older people are not at risk for rape or sexual assault.

FACT: While the majority (54%) of sexual assault victims are ages 18 – 34, a significant percentage (**28%**) of victims are ages 35 – 64, and **3% of victims are over the age of 65.** (RAINN)

myth #6 Using alcohol and drugs has nothing to do with rape.

FACT: **43% of sexual assaults involve alcohol or drugs**, according to Alcohol.org. Drugabuse.gov cites the figure at “about half.”

myth #7 Rape kits are taken from all victims and processed as evidence.

FACT: Thousands of untested rape kits remain the norm in communities across the U.S. The overwhelming backlog of DNA evidence is currently one of the greatest obstacles to prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence. “The rape kit backlog is one of the clearest and the most shocking demonstrations of how we regard these crimes in our society,” actor Marissa Hargitay says on EndTheBacklog.com, an organization she founded. “Testing rape kits sends a fundamental and crucial message to victims of sexual violence: You matter. What happened to you matters. Your case matters.”

myth #8 Most alleged victims of sexual violence report the crime.

FACT: The reporting rate in the general population in the U.S. is thought to be around **15%.** **Fewer than five percent** of completed and attempted rapes of college students are reported to campus administrators or law enforcement, according to one study. (National Institute of Justice)

myth #9 Victims who remain in an abusive relationship are responsible for any subsequent sexual violence within that relationship.

FACT: In the U.S., generally speaking, rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse are defined as crimes in which there is **sexual contact without consent**. RAINN provides a tool for a customized, state-by-state analysis of legal definitions and laws related to sexual violence: <https://apps.rainn.org/policy/>.

- Regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, **sexual contact without consent is against the law** in Australia, Canada, and some European nations. (Dept. of Health, Western Australia; INSPQ, The Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec)
- In the UK, the law is clear: having any kind of **sex without getting consent is illegal** and is rape or sexual assault. If someone asks *repeatedly* for consent and is refused, this can count as sexual harassment.
- Sweden passed a new law in 2018 saying that **sex without consent is rape**, even when there are **no threats or force involved**. The new law says a person must give clear consent – verbal or physical. (BBC)

myth #10 Most college-aged rapists just commit such acts once or twice.

FACT: Repeat rapists commit **nine out of ten** college rapes. (U.S. Dept. of Justice)

myth #11 Ordering drinks for another person with the purpose of getting them drunk enough to engage in sex is a not crime.

FACT: Sexual assault, or nonconsensual sexual contact, occurs when a sexual act is intentional and (a) is committed by physical force, threat or intimidation; (b) ignores the objections of another person; or (c) takes advantage of another person's incapacitation, state of intimidation, helplessness, or other inability to consent.

Consumption of alcohol or drugs **alone** is *insufficient* to establish incapacitation. The question of incapacitation is determined on a case-by-case basis. It takes into account whether the responding party knew, or should have known, that the complaining party was incapacitated, or if the responding party played a role in creating the circumstance of incapacitation. (U.S. Dept. of Education Title IX guidelines)

myth #12 Colorless, odorless, tasteless substances are the number one date rape drugs.

FACT: Alcohol is the number one date rape drug. The vast majority of **incapacitated sexual assault victims (89 percent)** reported drinking alcohol and being drunk (**82 percent**) before their victimization. (National Institute of Justice)

Alcohol contributes to sexual assault through multiple pathways, often exacerbating existing **risk factors**. Beliefs about alcohol's effects on sexual and aggressive behavior, stereotypes about drinking women, and alcohol's effects on cognitive and motor skills contribute to alcohol-involved sexual assault. (National Institute of Health)

myth #13 The legal system will protect the rape victim and move their case to trial.

FACT: Currently, there are **extremely low conviction rates** for rape. Despite the many survivor-activist movements raising awareness, conviction rates remained **unchanged** in many countries as of 2019.

- In the U.S., the vast majority of perpetrators will **not** go to jail or prison. Research indicates that out of every 1000 rapes, 230 are reported to police and 46 reports lead to arrest. Of these, nine cases get referred to prosecutors, five cases will lead to a felony conviction, and 4.6 rapists will be incarcerated. In other words, **995 of the 1000 perpetrators will walk free.**

part one:

community screening guide

This section is intended for use by community groups who wish to hold a public or organizational screening of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*. Screenings are a great way to spark productive conversations about issues raised in the documentary and help audience members process their feelings around them. Ultimately, they are a way to encourage individual and collective action towards creating a safer, more respectful, more equitable society.

General Screening Guidelines

First steps

- 1. SECURE A LOCATION AND PROJECTIONIST:** If your group's screening will take place in an established theater, meet with the projectionist well ahead of the event to find out what media formats they accept for projection. Run a test as early as possible. If you are planning to screen the documentary in a community hall or similar setting, make sure the venue is prepared to project a film (likely from a video projector connected to a laptop computer), and that audio speakers that will insure good sound are in place for the event. Be sure an experienced audio-visual technician will project the film, and run a test of video and audio several days before.
- 2. FIND A FACILITATOR:** When planning your screening of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*, choose a facilitator or moderator you think can help the audience express their reactions to the documentary and move them in the direction of taking action on its themes. The facilitator role includes welcoming the audience, introducing any special guests in attendance, and inviting the audience to stay after the film for a post-screening conversation, which the facilitator will moderate.
- 3. PREVIEW THE DOCUMENTARY:** The moderator should screen the documentary ahead of time so they can consider their own



responses to its themes and thus become a more informed and objective facilitator of the conversation. Moderators can also work with the screening's organizers ahead of time to add any discussion points that may be relevant to their specific audience. Becoming current on survivor social media movements could also prove helpful in moderating questions from the public.

4. **READ THE ENTIRE GUIDE:** Event organizers and the facilitator would benefit from reading this entire Community Viewing and Action Guide. This will spark insights and contribute to an informed picture about the issues of gender discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, and the criminal justice process discussed in the documentary.
5. **INVITE A RANGE OF COMMUNITY GROUPS:** Connect with groups in your community who are working on issues raised in *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise* (gender equity, preventing sexual violence and harassment, legal remedies for assault victims, and promoting healing for survivors) to magnify your reach and provide a range of viewpoints and ideas.
6. **PROVIDE RESOURCES:** The subject of sexual assault can evoke an emotional response in some viewers, including arousing symptoms of PTSD, and jogging difficult memories in survivors. Screening organizers may wish to provide a short list of resources including contact info for local psychological services and rape crisis centers in their community, and if possible, have a qualified counselor or representative from a local trauma hotline in attendance. They might also list national hotlines and information on how to locate a trauma therapist in the area on a one-sheet or program distributed at the event. See the Resources pages in this guide for detailed listings of U.S.-based national support organizations and hotlines.

Planning the screening

1. **TIMING:** While not necessary, it can be useful to hold your screening in coordination with an established event, such as Women's Equality Day (August 26th in the U.S.), April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, "Take Back the Night" in October, SWAN Day in March or April, or an International Women's Day gathering on or around March 8th. Give yourself plenty of lead time to create and share social media event pages. Send out a press release to local community calendar listings and radio and television outlets three weeks ahead of the event to gain publicity. Design a poster you can post and distribute in your community.

2. **GUEST SPEAKERS:** While not essential, organizers may wish to invite a guest speaker or a panel of speakers to enhance the post-film discussion. With an eye towards inclusion, consider reaching out to people from diverse gender identities and ethnic and racial backgrounds, and across a range of ages. Speakers should be active in some way on the issue of gender equity – perhaps an academic expert or a person actively working to end sexual violence, or someone who provides legal or mental health support services to survivors. Other possible guests include: assault survivors engaged in work around the topic, survivor advocates, Title IX experts or coordinators, elected officials or police officials who champion equal treatment under the law, feminist organization leaders, writers and artists addressing issues around women's empowerment and sexual assault, and men working to end gender-based violence.
3. **PREPPING THE SPEAKERS:** A short email with bullet points of topics you would like your speakers to address will help them prepare and focus their remarks. Give them a close idea of your expectations in terms of how long each person will speak. Be clear about whether an honorarium and/or reimbursement for travel expenses will be offered. Send them a timed agenda for the event.
4. **A TIMED AGENDA:** Work out the event's program ahead of time, and assign someone to be the timekeeper during it. You may wish to provide a program or one-sheet to attendees that lists the speakers, depending on how extensive your event will be. If your screening takes place at a public event space, there may be a time limitation in terms of when the space must be vacated, and, too, the audience will be more comfortable knowing the length and sequence of events. The community screening version of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise* runs fifty-four minutes, so allot 1 to 1 1/2 *additional* hours for speakers and public discussion. Total event time: 2 to 2 1/2 hours.
5. **FUNDRAISING:** There are many ways to raise funds for your organization (or another organization working to support women and sexual abuse survivors): a portion of ticket proceeds, a donations box, a direct appeal to the audience at the event telling them exactly how their money will be spent, and/or a silent auction of donated items or services set up on tables at the entrance to the screening room. Send thank you letters or emails to those who contribute and follow up with receipts for tax purposes if the organization benefitting is a registered charity.

Screening day



WELCOME: The moderator introduces themselves and welcomes the audience to this community screening of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*. They advise attendees that they will have an opportunity to voice their views and speak from experience about the themes brought up in the documentary. Encourage everyone's participation: women, men, people across all age groups, gender identifications and backgrounds. Express the organizers' goals: to create a safe space here today to examine the truth of women's lives; to invite a thoughtful examination of a culture that fosters sexual assault but provides flawed or no justice for its survivors; and to share ideas about what practical steps we, as a community and as individuals, can take to reverse this.

After the film

An opening exercise

The moderator can begin with posing a set of questions to the audience and panel. They can preface this section with a guideline: "Raise your hand if you like, but if you'd rather not, just think of your answer as we move into discussion."

1. By a show of hands: who in this room knows someone personally who has experienced a sexual assault?
2. Of those who raised their hands, were any of these assaults reported to authorities? Show of hands if yes.
3. Of those crimes reported, how many went to trial? Show of hands.
4. Of those that went to trial, how many resulted in a conviction? Show of hands.
5. Of those convicted, how many resulted in jail or prison time served for the attacker? Show of hands. I think we can all see the problem: the prevalence of sexual assault in our culture, and the overwhelming lack of an adequate system of justice for these crimes.
6. What about sexual harassment? Please raise your hand if sexual harassment has touched your life or the life of someone you know.
7. Did the perpetrator face any repercussions for this? If so, please raise your hand.

So whose problem is this? (all of ours) Who's responsible for ending it? (all of us)

We are going to take a look now at what progress has been made since the feature film *Thelma & Louise* broke the taboo about this widespread issue. And we're going to explore the fundamental questions:

How can we accelerate the pace of change? What must we as a society do? What can each of us as an individual do?

The host **introduces the guest speaker or panel** of speakers, and explains that the conversation will be opened up to audience members' questions and comments after we hear from these speakers. Each invited guest makes a brief opening comment about their work in connection to the themes addressed in the documentary. Perhaps each answers the question: Why does this issue matter to me?

The moderator may choose to begin the discussion by citing some key statistics from the Statistics pages in this guide, followed by a series of questions addressed to the panel. They might include:

- a) What are the most pressing needs in terms of reducing the crisis levels of sexual violence in society? Where do we begin?
- b) What do you see as the most detrimental effects of sexual crimes on survivors and on society?
- c) What positive actions are being taken to address these concerns?
- d) What barriers exist to enacting change, and how can we overcome them?
- e) Whose responsibility is it to create a culture of respect? How do we engage others? What can we teach our children about respect and bodily boundaries? What else can we do?
- f) In a broad sense, what is the antidote to rape culture? How do we foster that alternative?

AUDIENCE Q&A: Follow the panel discussion or speaker with a 15-20 minute period of audience Q&A. The moderator should address the audience, signaling that it is their turn to comment, share, or address a question to a special guest. They may want to ask the audience to communicate skillfully by following these general guidelines:

- Please use “I” statements and speak for yourself, rather than represent a whole group.
- Seek to understand and respect one another’s perspectives and beliefs.
- Listen with resilience, “hanging in” when something is hard to hear.
- Please refrain from interrupting others.

Questions posed to the audience might include:

1. Did you relate to the documentary, and how did it make you feel? Did a particular story or person resonate with you?
2. How did the feature film *Thelma & Louise* impact your way of thinking about women and sexual assault?
3. How do you think we can channel our understanding of the problem into productive action?
4. How can we engage even more people in this movement?

CLOSING EXERCISE: Before thanking the audience for attending, invite each audience member to think about ideas for actions that they as individuals can take to address the issues raised in the documentary. A more comprehensive list of possible actions follows in the Taking Action section of this guide, which could be designed as a handout. At the event, the facilitator may wish to suggest some of the following:

- Host a house party screening of the documentary to benefit an organization working on behalf of survivors
- Write a letter to elected officials or the media expressing your concerns
- Stage a rally or a join a march
- Volunteer at a rape crisis center or hotline
- Raise money for artists and nonprofits working with the issue of gender violence by setting up a crowd sourcing campaign
- Investigate a career in criminal law, psychology or social work
- Find out the status of rape kits in your community and pressure authorities to process them by starting a petition and advocating with prosecutors and politicians
- Help elect women and their allies to public office – candidates who will boldly advance protections from sexual violence
- Run for public office yourself (get support at voterunlead.org)
- Students: get active on campuses and/or in your workplaces
- Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers: instill respect and gender equality into the young people in your life; have the consent and "bodily integrity" talk
- Work to shine a light on elder sexual abuse in institutional settings

- Create an art project (theater, dance, visual art, music, or spoken or written word) that expresses your truth about sexual violence
- Make your own short documentary about the impact of sexual assault in your life or the lives of others (see Tips for Documentary Making in this guide)

As a final closing exercise, ask each audience member **to turn to a person near them** and tell them **one thing – however small – they pledge to do** to help create a safer and more equitable society free of gender-based violence and harassment.

Refer attendees to catchingsightof.com for more information about the documentary, and follow the film on Facebook (Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise) and Twitter (@farbeyondfilm).

Leave the audience with a closing thought:

The time has come for individual and collective action, and long-term commitment, to creating a culture of respect and justice. Thank you for joining us in this vital effort.

part two:

taking action

What actions can we take to reverse the epidemic of sexual assault in our communities? How can everyone get behind the fight to end this serious human rights abuse? How can we ensure a just legal process for all involved, and support the complex needs of survivors?



April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month observed in jurisdictions around the U.S. and in indigenous nations. It's a great time to plan an action. But there are opportunities to act year round and ways to contribute that range from career choices to individual goals. Even a small change in personal habits is a great start, and there is an increasing call for men to take a more active role in solving this crisis and creating a culture of consent and respect.

Some ideas:

1. Write a *personal pledge* that reflects the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors you hope to embody to help end sexual violence. Include the choices you intend to make in your relationships and your community. Tell friends or family members about it.
2. Take part (or encourage men in your life to take part) in the White Ribbon Campaign, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, or other men's action to end sexual assault (see Resource pages).
3. Train and volunteer at a hotline, rape crisis center, or women's resource center.
4. Get active on your campus or in your community to raise awareness of the injustices suffered by sexual assault survivors. Set up a resource fair, or table on your campus or in your community. Stage a candlelight march or hold a speak-out against sexual violence.

5. Write to your elected officials about strengthening rape laws, processing rape kits, and adequately funding prevention, education and victim assistance programs. Start a petition, collect signatures and deliver them to your representatives. Engage the support of an organization with lobbying experience.
6. Advocate for a technology-based reporting system for sexual assault (such as Project Callisto) on your campus or place of business. Spread the word about its benefits, and get a group or groups to meet with the appropriate decision makers to pitch them the idea.
7. Write a letter, a blog or a first-person essay on this subject and publish it.
8. Create a visual art exhibit, a one-act play, a performance piece, or a poster campaign to raise awareness about sexual violence and the urgent need for change. Find a venue for your work and add your voice to the conversation.
9. Hold a fundraiser to benefit organizations whose missions of advocacy and support align with your values, such as Endthebacklog.org.
10. Start a conversation or “consciousness-raising circle” among friends and acquaintances about consent and sexual assault, allowing each person to voice their views and experiences in an atmosphere of respect and learning. Invite people from different age groups and a diversity of gender identifications to join the conversation.
11. Run for public office on a platform that includes ending sexual violence and providing justice for survivors, including a more humane legal process and harsher punishments for those found guilty of sexual assault.
12. Host your own screening or house party centered around *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*, calling it a *Thelma & Louise Documentary Watch Party*. Ask people to share their own experiences in small groups, and brainstorm group and individual actions to keep the issue of sexual violence in the public eye.
13. Organize or take part in a *Take Back the Night* event in your community or campus. More than 800 *Take Back the Night* actions have been held across the globe since the first ones in San Francisco and New York City in 1978. On the last Thursday in October and April each year, TBTN holds a worldwide action with events that support ending sexual violence in all forms, raising awareness, and supporting survivors. *The Take Back the Night*

Foundation also helps communities hold *Bike for the Night* events, *Yoga for Healing* events, *5K Glow Runs*, international conferences, and regional training conferences. It offers support and fundraising help and provides access to victims' rights attorneys.

14. Stage a Vday.org performance of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. Donate a portion of funds raised to a local rape crisis center or shelter.
15. Invite an education-trained specialist from your area rape crisis center or counseling center to take part in a panel, workshop, or classroom visit coinciding with one of the international days of action. Invite survivors, legal experts, law enforcement officers, and/or allies. A silent auction of donated items could be held to benefit an advocacy organization.
16. Hold a film festival featuring this documentary and other films that address sexual assault (i.e., *I am Evidence*, *The Hunting Ground*, *It Happened Here*, *The Invisible War*) during March for Women's History Month, on March 8th for International Women's Day, or during Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April. See <https://www.nsvrc.org/saam> for information on the campaign and on the Sexual Assault Awareness Day of Action.
17. Start a monthly "Movie Club" in which you attend a film in current release, and then gather to discuss its implications for gender justice.
18. Create and share a short video about sexual violence and rape culture, relaying your message of why this serious human rights abuse must be eliminated from society.
19. Investigate a career in victim's rights law, counseling, or social work.
20. Parents and relatives: Instill respect and gender equality into boys and girls at an early age.
21. Train people in how to identify and intervene in potentially harmful situations. See Bystander Intervention Tips at www.itsonus.org.
22. Advocate for a requirement that high school and college-age students participate in sexual assault prevention programs.
23. Advocate for stronger enforcement of alcohol restrictions on campus.
24. Work to extend campus sexual assault policies to off-campus sororities, fraternities, and social organizations.

resources

For survivors of sexual assault

RAINN (the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States, offering help for victims of sexual assault from trained support specialists. Safe, free, confidential, and 24/7.

The National Sexual Assault Hotline provides support, information, advice and a local referral based on your phone or zip code.

1-800-656-HOPE (4673) – by phone

<https://hotline.rainn.org/online/> – by online chat

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center provides leadership in preventing and responding to sexual violence.

<https://www.nsvrc.org>

Jane Doe, Inc. The Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence lists comprehensive resources and detailed information for survivors and allies.

<http://www.janedoe.org/>

The Joyful Heart Foundation has published a guide called *6 Steps to Support a Survivor*.

<http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org>

AEquitas works to improve access to and the quality of justice in gender-based violence through an informed, practical, and innovative approach. They publish a wide range of resources and training materials and offer advice and resources across disciplines 24/7 at no cost.

<https://aequitasresource.org/resources/>

The Victim's Rights Law Center is the first nonprofit law center in the United States solely dedicated to serving the legal needs of rape and sexual assault victims. Through free legal services, staff attorneys and volunteer attorneys help restore victims' lives.

<https://www.victimrights.org>

The National Alliance of Victims' Rights Attorneys and Advocates offers on demand trainings in aspects of sexual assault cases for members in the legal profession. Fee-based.

<http://navra.org/online-trainings>

Time's Up has set up a \$21 million legal-defense fund for women who suffer from harassment and assault at work in any industry.

<https://www.timesupnow.com>

Project Callisto develops technology to combat sexual assault and professional sexual coercion. Callisto's mission is to advance justice both on college campuses and in professional industries. Its products provide a way for those who've experienced sexual assault or professional sexual coercion to securely create an encrypted entry of their incident into its matching system. See Jessica Ladd's TED Talk, "*The Reporting System That Sexual Assault Survivors Want.*"

<https://www.projectcallisto.org/>

For LGBTQ+ Survivors of Sexual Assault

The Human Rights Campaign provides information and resources for LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual assault, including hotlines and the publication, *A Transgender Survivor's Guide*.

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community>

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence aims to create communities free of sexual violence and provide culturally affirming, trauma-informed advocacy, prevention, and intervention services centered on the voices of survivors. It offers LGBTQ survivor resources both locally and nationally.

<https://endsexualviolencect.org/lgbtq/>

For Male Survivors of Sexual Assault

1in6 offers a wide range of information and services for men with histories of unwanted or abusive sexual experiences, and for anyone

who cares about them. Online helpline, support groups, trainings and webinars.

<https://1in6.org/>

Male Survivor has been a leader in the fight to improve resources for male survivors of all forms of sexual abuse in the U.S. and around the globe. It provides training across a wide range of disciplines to help ensure that all survivors of sexual violence have access to compassionate, and effective support.

<https://www.malesurvivor.org/index.php>

Additional Resources

SAKI - National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative provides a wealth of resources on SAK-related issues, including inventory, testing, and tracking of kits; training to address issues associated with unsubmitted SAKs; and guidance on multidisciplinary coordination, investigation, prosecution, and victim advocacy around unsubmitted SAKs. Download Adobe Connect for free to access these extensive educational webinars:

<https://sakitta.org/webinars/>

SAFER Started by Columbia University students, Students Active for Ending Rape (SAFER) is the only organization that fights sexual violence and rape culture by empowering student-led campaigns to reform college sexual assault policies.

<https://safercampus.org>

End Rape on Campus (EROC) works to end campus sexual violence through direct support to survivors and their communities, prevention through education, and policy reform at the campus, local, state, and federal levels.

<http://endrapeoncampus.org>

Prevent IPV offers tools for social change based in its vision that to end intimate partner violence, the problem must be addressed and confronted at the societal, community, relationship, and individual levels. Provides a list of organizations working to end intimate partner violence here:

<https://preventipv.org/vision/key-organizations>

Impact/Justice provides information about restorative justice as a path to accountability in cases of sexual assault and other crimes.

<https://impactjustice.org/a-different-path-for-confronting-sexual-assault/>

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has published a comprehensive look at ways to prevent sexual violence:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-factsheet.pdf>

The **World Health Organization** provides research on the worldwide prevalence and health impacts of sexual violence. These publications are key:

<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en>

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf

<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

The United Nations has declared November 25th the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

<http://www.unwomen.org>

The Americans for Civil Liberties Union provides an explainer on Title IX Sexual Assault Policy:

<https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/title-ix-and-sexual-assault>

On Men's Role in Combatting a Culture of Sexual Violence

White Ribbon: Prevent Men's Violence Against Women is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women and girls, promote gender equity, healthy relationships, and a new vision of masculinity. Launched in Toronto in 1991 after the mass murder of 14 women by a shooter who professed to be "fighting feminism," the White Ribbon Campaign has spread to over 60 countries worldwide. It asks men and boys to pledge to never *commit, condone or remain silent* about violence against women and girls, and raise awareness in schools and workplaces.

<http://www.whiteribbon.org>

Men Can Stop Rape, an international men's anti-violence organization, mobilizes men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men's violence against women. MCSR provides agencies, schools, and organizations with direct services for youth, public service messaging, and leadership training.

<https://www.mencanstoprape.org/Resources/>



Stand Magazine, The magazine for men who give a damn. Edited by Dwayne Hayes, STAND magazine takes a stand for a balanced and whole-hearted masculinity that embraces the expression of emotion as strength, promotes a healthy body, mind & spirit, appreciates style & good humor, and seeks to shape a world of peace for all.

<http://www.stand-magazine.com/>

Guante is a poet and educator who creates and publishes his own original zines. His poetry is an invitation to consider the epidemic of sexual assault and issues around consent in today's society. His provocative videos can be found on YouTube. His publication, *How Do We Build a Culture of Consent?* lays out a call to action for men, as well as women.

<https://www.guante.info/2018/10/how-do-we-build-culture-of-consent-new.html>

A Call to Men educates men on embracing a healthy, respectful manhood in an effort to prevent violence against women, sexual assault and harassment, bullying and other social ills. It partners with schools, universities, corporations, government, social service agencies, military installations and others.

<http://www.acalltomen.org>

It's On Us offers tools and tips for advocates, including an easy way to make a personalized *It's On Us* public service announcement. Provides Bystander Intervention Tips and a pledge to help create a culture of consent and survivor support.

<https://www.itsonus.org>

He for She invites men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women and commit to take action towards a gender equal world. With millions having signed its pledge, the organization is now a global movement. #HeForShe

<https://www.heforshe.org/en>

Jackson Katz, Ph.D. is an educator, author, and social theorist internationally renowned for his pioneering scholarship and activism on issues of gender, race and violence. He is co-founder of **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)**, one of the longest running and most widely influential gender violence prevention programs in North America.

<http://www.jacksonkatz.com>

Women's Influence in Hollywood

Womenandhollywood.com is a site that educates, advocates, and agitates for gender diversity and inclusion in Hollywood and the global film industry.

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media conducts extensive research and provides groundbreaking findings on gender and race representations in media. The Institute studies depictions of women and girls in cinema, television, advertising, and consumer mascots, in the U.S. and in other nations.

<https://seejane.org>

Women's News

Women in the World is a global news site dedicated to news by, about and for women.

<https://womenintheworld.com/>

Some grassroots social media campaigns powered by survivor-activists

#MeToo

#TimesUp

#MeTooLGBTQ

#HollaBack!

#BalanceTonPorc

#NiUnaMenos

#MetooIndia

#ibelieveher

#HearMeToo

#TakeTheLead

#ReimagineManhood

#Istandwithher

#iambrave

tips for documentary making

Recruit a team of two to three people to accomplish the production, including someone with shooting or audio recording skills, and someone with editing skills. Consider these fundamentals: What questions will your documentary probe? Who are the content experts who will address them? What is your POV? What style and mood will you use?

The specific subject and approach are up to you. Start with identifying what your mini-doc is *about* in one sentence. The exact story will be revealed in the making. Here are some ideas:



- a) Document a personal story of a sexual assault and its aftermath – either yours, or a friend or family member’s. Exercise sensitivity, respect and good judgment.
- b) Create your mini-doc around one aspect of sexual violence, such as its prevalence among people of every age group and gender identity, or its low reporting and conviction rates.
- c) Profile a trained sexual assault service provider at a counseling office or rape crisis center, and have them serve as the voice of survivors.
- d) Gather voices from men in your community about the role of men in taking steps to reverse this public health epidemic, and explore how toxic masculinity affects them.

Be sure to:

- Write up your interview questions carefully ahead of time to elicit complete, *stand-alone* answers, which you will later edit together to form your storyline. Supplement interview sound bites with text on screen to convey your narrative and facts. Record interviews on a digital audio recorder if you are making a podcast, or record digital video using a smartphone, digital video camera, or DSLR camera. Download your files immediately after shooting and make two backups.

- Record on-camera interviews in a quiet place with an interesting backdrop that has some depth of field behind the subject, not a white wall or window. If possible, use a video camera *and* an external microphone that you clip on or place near the subject, since audio is as important as picture and poor audio quality will render your interviews unusable. Watch tutorials on YouTube on shooting, lighting and editing techniques, including when and how to use a slate to sync up audio and video that may have been recorded on separate recording devices.
- Shoot b-roll scenes with and without your interviewees, on campus or in the community, and remember that each shot should be held for five to ten seconds. Think of your shots as long stills. Don't "edit in the camera" by not holding shots long enough, and don't swish-pan. Shoot a variety of close-ups, medium shots, and establishing wide shots.
- If your documentary interviewees prefer to conceal their identity, shoot only their hands as they speak, or carefully light the interview to show them deep in shadow. Audio filters are available to disguise their voices if need be.
- Remember to have anyone who speaks on camera sign an on-camera release form and print on it how they would like their name to be stated in their name super on video.
- Select free music (available online from Moby and others) and create graphics in the editing program for any text screens you need to help tell the story. Show your rough cut to others and get their feedback.

acknowledgments

The director of *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise* and the author of this guide wish to thank the legions of survivors, support providers, health professionals, legal advocates, educators, journalists, filmmakers, activists and allies across the globe who are working to reverse the tide of sexual violence in their societies and obtain justice for its victims. The community of people committed to realizing these goals is vast, and their work has informed and enriched this guide immeasurably.

Our aim with this Viewing and Action Guide is to ignite an urgent conversation that encourages people across all ages and backgrounds to work towards less predatory, safer, consent-based societies. Change is possible. It's happening. But complex challenges remain.

Thank you for joining us in this effort.

Jennifer Townsend, Director/Producer, *Catching Sight of Thelma & Louise*

Louise Vance, Documentary filmmaker, Editorial Consultant, Author of this Guide

Academic Reviewers:

Professor Andrew McAlister, Department of Communication
Film Studies, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies
The University of Tampa, Tampa, FL

Diane L. Rosenfeld, Lecturer on Law
Gender Violence, Law and Social Justice
Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA

Special thanks to:

Professor Megan Seeley, Chair, Dept. of Sociology
Women's and Gender Studies, Social Justice Studies
Sierra College, Sacramento, CA

Guide design by Darryl Vance | darrylvance.com

Educational and Community distribution by Bullfrog Films, Inc.
Contact: info@bullfrogfilms.com

Documentary website: www.CatchingSightOf.com

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