

# THE ROLE OF SOPHIE NEVEU IN THE DA VINCI CODE: “A STUDY OF LIBERAL FEMINISM”

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## ABSTRACT

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This study analyzes the character of Sophie Neveu in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), directed by Ron Howard, through the theoretical lens of liberal feminism as articulated by John Stuart Mill. The primary objective is to examine how Sophie embodies the principles of gender equality, rationality, educational rights, freedom of choice, and resistance to discrimination. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a film-text analysis method, this research focuses on the character's dialogues, narrative functions, and behavioral actions within the film. The findings reveal that Sophie Neveu is portrayed as an intelligent and autonomous woman with strong analytical and logical reasoning abilities. On several occasions, she demonstrates intellectual superiority over male characters, particularly Robert Langdon, and plays a crucial role in the progression of the plot through her code-breaking skills and independent decision-making. However, despite her competence, the film also depicts persistent gender-based discrimination imposed by authority figures and male counterparts. Overall, the study concludes that *The Da Vinci Code*, through the characterization of Sophie Neveu, implicitly upholds the core values of liberal feminism, affirming that women possess equal intellectual and moral capacities and deserve equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of life.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Films have long transcended their original purpose as entertainment to become powerful mediums of communication, education, and social reflection. They have evolved into dynamic cultural artifacts that convey complex ideas, challenge social norms, and mirror the collective consciousness of society. As a form of visual literature, film enables the exploration of intricate human experiences and has the ability to synthesize art, ideology, and emotion. It is within this dual function of aesthetic expression and socio-political commentary that film becomes a site of intellectual and cultural engagement.

Throughout history, cinema has played an essential role in shaping how audiences perceive issues such as politics, religion, class, and gender. The representation of gender, in particular, serves as a lens through which one can understand the cultural values and ideological biases of a given time. Women's portrayal in film has undergone a gradual transformation from being passive figures or supporting characters to active agents of change and intellectual contributors. Films that feature women in complex roles provide an opportunity to question patriarchal structures and envision alternative narratives of empowerment.

One of the most compelling examples of such transformation is evident in *\*The Da Vinci Code\** (2006), directed by Ron Howard and based on Dan Brown's acclaimed novel. The film

intertwines historical mystery, religious symbolism, and intellectual discovery, offering an intricate plot that revolves around hidden knowledge and the pursuit of truth. At the heart of this narrative lies Sophie Neveu, a female cryptologist whose intelligence, independence, and critical reasoning redefine traditional gender roles within a male-dominated intellectual sphere. Her presence in the narrative transcends the stereotype of women as emotional or secondary figures and instead positions her as a rational, decisive, and intellectually formidable individual.

The character of Sophie Neveu embodies the essence of liberal feminism as articulated by John Stuart Mill in his work *\*The Subjection of Women\** (1869). Mill's liberal feminism is grounded in the belief that gender inequality is a social construction rather than a natural condition. He posited that women possess the same intellectual and moral capacities as men, but are hindered by institutionalized oppression, lack of education, and limited access to professional opportunities. According to Mill, the progress of society depends on the emancipation of women and their full participation in all aspects of life educational, political, and social. His argument was revolutionary for the nineteenth century, but remains relevant in contemporary discussions of gender equality, particularly within media and cultural studies.

In the context of *\*The Da Vinci Code\**, Sophie Neveu serves as a cinematic embodiment of Mill's feminist ideals. She is depicted as an autonomous thinker, capable of solving complex problems, making ethical decisions, and challenging traditional authority figures. Her role as a cryptologist in the Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire (DCPJ) underscores her expertise and professionalism qualities that affirm her intellectual parity with male counterparts such as Robert Langdon. Sophie's analytical approach to unraveling symbols and codes is not presented as exceptional or anomalous; rather, it is treated as a natural extension of her education and skill. This portrayal aligns with liberal feminism's advocacy for women's right to equal education and participation in professional domains.

The representation of Sophie Neveu also speaks to broader questions of how women navigate systems of power. The institutions depicted in the film the Church, law enforcement, and academia are traditionally patriarchal structures where female authority is often contested or marginalized. Sophie's interactions with male figures such as Captain Fache and Sir Leigh Teabing illustrate the persistence of gender bias and microaggressions. Despite being underestimated or objectified, Sophie asserts her agency through intellectual competence and emotional intelligence. Her responses exemplify the liberal feminist strategy of confronting inequality through rationality and self-determination rather than rebellion or confrontation.

Moreover, Sophie's character carries profound symbolic significance. As the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that she is a descendant of Jesus Christ a revelation that redefines the sacred feminine within a patriarchal religious framework. Traditionally, Christianity has marginalized women's spiritual roles, confining them to supportive or subservient positions. However, in *\*The Da Vinci Code\**, Sophie becomes a vessel of sacred lineage and divine intellect, effectively restoring the balance between the masculine and feminine within religious symbolism. This aligns with liberal feminism's emphasis on equality and recognition acknowledging women not as exceptions but as integral participants in both spiritual and intellectual realms.

The feminist discourse surrounding Sophie Neveu's characterization is further enriched when contextualized within the evolution of women's representation in cinema. In early film history, female characters were frequently portrayed through the male gaze as passive subjects of desire or emotional dependency. The emergence of feminist film theory, particularly through scholars like Laura Mulvey (1975), critiqued this visual hierarchy by exposing how cinematic techniques

reinforced patriarchal ideologies. However, contemporary films such as *\*The Da Vinci Code\** illustrate a shift toward more equitable representation, where female protagonists possess intellectual and narrative agency. Sophie Neveu exemplifies this transformation: her intellect, not her beauty, drives the plot forward.

In line with John Stuart Mill's advocacy for education as the cornerstone of liberation, Sophie's intellectual development underscores the importance of learning in achieving gender equality. Her background as a cryptologist indicates not only access to formal education but also mastery of abstract reasoning a skill often associated with male characters in popular media. This challenges long-standing cultural assumptions that align logic with masculinity and emotion with femininity. Through Sophie, the film argues that intellect and emotion coexist harmoniously, each reinforcing the other in the pursuit of truth. Her balance of analytical thought and empathy renders her not only intelligent but also profoundly human a quality that resonates deeply with liberal feminist principles.

Additionally, Sophie's decision-making autonomy distinguishes her from conventional female portrayals. She exercises moral independence throughout the film, choosing her actions based on reason rather than external validation. One of the most significant moments is her decision not to publicly claim her divine heritage at the film's conclusion. This act reflects her agency and self-awareness; she recognizes the potential social and spiritual consequences of revelation and opts for quiet strength over spectacle. Such restraint aligns with Mill's notion of liberty, wherein individuals must be free to shape their own lives, provided they do not harm others. Sophie's choice symbolizes the essence of liberal feminism the belief that empowerment lies not in domination or rebellion, but in the freedom to choose one's own path.

Furthermore, the interplay between gender and knowledge in **The Da Vinci Code** reflects a broader feminist critique of epistemology. Feminist scholars such as Sandra Harding and Alison Jaggar have argued that traditional systems of knowledge often privilege male perspectives while excluding or devaluing women's experiences. Sophie's expertise in cryptography and her intuitive grasp of symbolism disrupt this pattern, demonstrating that women's ways of knowing rooted in both intellect and emotion are equally valid and valuable. Her intellectual partnership with Langdon represents a model of egalitarian collaboration that transcends hierarchical gender relations.

The study of Sophie Neveu's character thus holds significance beyond literary or cinematic analysis. It contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality by illustrating how liberal feminist ideals can be embodied in mainstream narratives. Through Sophie, audiences are invited to reflect on the social structures that continue to limit women's potential, as well as the transformative power of education, rationality, and self-determination. The film becomes not just a mystery thriller but also a philosophical exploration of equality and justice.

In summary, this expanded background situates *\*The Da Vinci Code\** within the framework of liberal feminist theory and highlights the importance of Sophie Neveu as a cultural and intellectual symbol. Her character challenges traditional gender hierarchies, reclaims the feminine within religious discourse, and exemplifies the possibilities of equality through reason and education. As such, this study underscores the continued relevance of John Stuart Mill's ideas in contemporary feminist thought and affirms the power of film as a medium for social transformation and gender awareness.

## II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using textual analysis. The primary source is the film *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), with supporting literature from feminist theory and film criticism. The analysis focuses on scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that illustrate liberal feminist principles such as equality, autonomy, and rationality. The framework of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) serves as the theoretical foundation.

The research procedure includes several steps:

### 1. Topic Selection

The researcher initially reviewed multiple films containing themes related to gender and feminism. After careful consideration, *The Da Vinci Code* was selected due to its complex portrayal of female identity and empowerment within a patriarchal religious context.

### 2. Data Collection

To obtain the data required for this research, the author used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were obtained directly from the film *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) by watching it repeatedly in order to gain an in-depth understanding of its storyline, character development, and narrative structure. During the viewing process, important scenes and dialogues involving the central character, Sophie Neveu, were carefully identified, documented, and transcribed for further analysis in Chapter Four.

The secondary data were obtained from scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and theoretical works related to liberal feminism. Additional supporting materials were accessed through reputable online databases to enrich the theoretical framework and provide a stronger foundation for interpreting the primary data.

### 1. Analysis

Using a qualitative textual analysis, the researcher examined the film to identify key moments where Sophie Neveu's actions, thoughts, and relationships reflect the principles of liberal feminism.

The researcher paid particular attention to:

- Sophie's problem-solving skills and intellectual capacity;
- Her rejection of traditional authority and religious patriarchy;
- Her moral and emotional independence;
- Her symbolic and literal identity as a descendant of Mary Magdalene.

### 2. Interpretation

The findings were interpreted using John Stuart Mill's liberal feminist framework, allowing the researcher to draw conclusions about the broader implications of Sophie's character for feminist representation in mainstream media.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Equals Rights

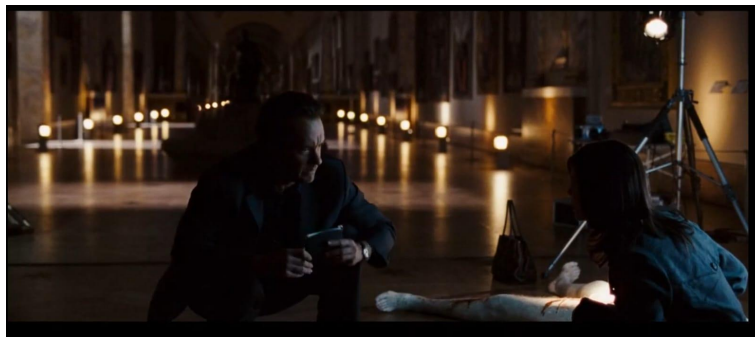
Liberal feminism emphasizes that women and men should have equal rights and opportunities in education, work, and social life (Tong, 2009). In this film, Sophie demonstrates these values through her intelligence, professionalism, and independence. Her role is not relegated to being a mere sidekick to Robert Langdon; instead, she establishes herself as an intellectual equal from the very beginning. In the iconic scene at the Louvre, Sophie is the first to decipher the anagram left by Jacques Saunière, outperforming Langdon in a moment that underlines her analytical skills and

sharp intuition. This action not only drives the plot forward but also repositions her as an active participant in the investigation, rather than a passive character typically found in male-dominated narratives.

This representation aligns with the core ideas of liberal feminist thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, who, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), argued that the apparent inferiority of women is not a reflection of their capabilities, but rather a result of systemic barriers to education and opportunity. Sophie Neveu, depicted as a highly trained cryptologist working with the DCPJ (Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire), serves as a narrative embodiment of Mill's ideal. Her success in the field traditionally male dominated not only challenges gender stereotypes but also illustrates the outcome when women are granted the same opportunities for growth, education, and professional development.

Moreover, Sophie's interactions with Langdon are marked by mutual respect and intellectual collaboration. She questions, critiques, and even leads at various points in the investigation, showcasing her autonomy and decision-making power. This dynamic reflects the liberal feminist vision of gender equality not just in rights, but also in interpersonal relationships. Her character demonstrates that given equal footing, women can contribute equally, and in many cases, offer perspectives and skills that are indispensable. In sum, Sophie Neveu's portrayal is a strong affirmation of liberal feminist values highlighting not only the necessity of equal access and opportunity, but also the powerful outcomes that arise when such equality is realized

- Set in the Louvre museum, Paris. After the murder of Jacques Saunière (Sophie's grandfather), Robert Langdon and Sophie find a strange message written in blood on the museum floor "13-3-2-21-1-1-8-5" the series of numbers means O, Draconian Devill. Langdon initially thought it was a random word that had a symbolic meaning but Sophie realized that it was an anagram. (00:15:25)



*("In the silence of the Louvre, secrets begin to unfold as Sophie and Langdon examine Saunière's cryptic clues.")*

In this case, we can clearly see how quickly Sophie Neveu was able to break the code left by her grandfather, even faster than the main male character, Robert Langdon. This moment is not just a demonstration of her problem-solving skills, but also a symbolic assertion of her intellectual capabilities, which are on par with, if not surpassing, those of her male counterpart. Sophie's success in deciphering the code highlights her intelligence, sharp intuition, and critical thinking traits that are often underrepresented in female characters within traditionally male-centered mystery or thriller genres.

This portrayal serves as a clear embodiment of the principles of gender equality, particularly within the framework of liberal feminism, which emphasizes that women should have the same opportunities as men in all aspects of life, including education, professional roles, and intellectual recognition. Sophie is not portrayed as a secondary or dependent character; instead, she is a driving force in the narrative, using her knowledge as a trained cryptologist to take the lead in several key moments of the investigation.

Furthermore, her ability to outperform Langdon in deciphering the anagram reinforces the feminist message that when women are provided equal access to education and intellectual opportunities, they can achieve the same if not greater levels of success as men. It aligns with the argument of John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which emphasizes that the perceived inequality between men and women stems not from a lack of ability, but from historically limited access to education and freedom of choice.

Through Sophie's character, *The Da Vinci Code* challenges the stereotypical portrayal of women in male-dominated narratives and offers a progressive view that women, when given the same opportunities, can excel intellectually and professionally. Her role is a testament to the idea that gender should not determine one's capacity for success, leadership, or recognition, and thus reinforces the broader theme of gender equality promoted throughout the film. Some related narratives such as:

- Swiss bank scene: Sophie decides to go to the Zurich bank, and opens the safe with the fleur de lis key and takes the cryptex, this action is a crucial step that the male protagonist is unaware of. (00:60:45)



*"Sophie and Langdon enter the Swiss bank, seeking the key to Saunière's secret."*

Sophie's independent decision-making at the Swiss bank also reinforces this narrative. She does not wait for Langdon's instructions, but instead takes control of the situation based on her intuition and intelligence.

This moment also underscores the importance of intergenerational female wisdom. Sophie's ability to navigate the bank's system stems not from external instruction but from her personal history and bond with her grandfather. This positions her knowledge as both emotionally grounded and intellectually valid a dual quality often dismissed in male-dominated narratives. Her use of intuition is not irrational, but informed and precise, showing how feminist epistemology values emotional intelligence and embodied knowledge as equally powerful forms of reasoning.

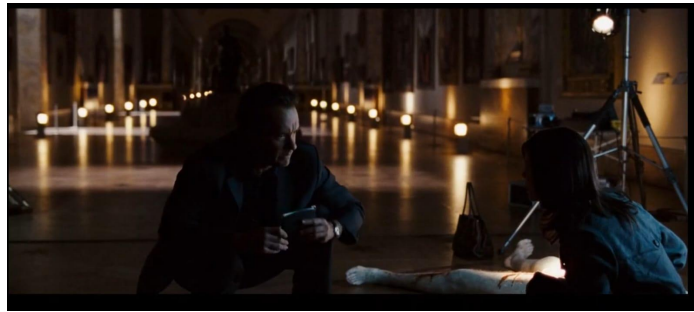
### **Women as Rational Beings**

Liberal feminism, rooted in the principles of equality, reason, and individual rights, challenges the long-standing gender binary that defines men as rational and women as emotional or intuitive. Thinkers like Alison Jaggar (1992) have exposed how the association of rationality with masculinity has been used to exclude women from philosophical, political, and scientific domains. In *The Da*

*Vinci Code*, Sophie Neveu directly subverts this patriarchal construction through her consistent demonstration of logic, critical thinking, and intellectual independence.

Liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) argued that women's apparent lack of rationality was not innate but rather a consequence of systematic denial of education and intellectual opportunities. In the film, Sophie's rational mind is portrayed as the result of being nurtured by her grandfather, who exposed her to symbols, codes, and puzzles from an early age. This aligns with the liberal feminist claim that given equal educational resources, women can attain equal (or superior) intellectual standing. As shown in the film:

- Langdon: "This phrase is meaningless... unless... you assume these letters are out of order, too."
- Sophie: "An anagram." (00:15:20 – 00:16:00)



*("Sophie shows her intellect, embodying Mill's view of women as rational beings.")*

What makes Sophie's character even more nuanced is that her rationality is not devoid of feeling it is balanced with emotional depth. Her pain over her grandfather's death, her search for identity, and her emotional maturity do not detract from her intelligence; rather, they enrich it. This defies the binary split (common in patriarchal narratives) where rationality and emotion are mutually exclusive and gendered.

In feminist epistemology, scholars like Sandra Harding and Jaggar argue that emotion and reason are not opposites, but rather complementary forces that, when combined, produce more holistic and humane ways of knowing. Sophie embodies this integrated model of knowledge. Several dialogues and scripts also show that Sophie makes decisions faster than Langdon:

- Sophie: "A cryptex. They are used to keep secrets... That's 12 million possibilities."
- Langdon: "I've never met a girl who knew that much about a cryptex."
- Sophie: "Saunière made one for me once." (01:10:00 – 01:12:00)



*("Sophie deciphers Da Vinci's cryptex desing, proving her analytical skill and rational authority.")*

Here, Sophie not only recognizes the sophisticated device used, but she also provides a detailed technical explanation to Langdon about its mechanism. She identifies the cryptex as a secure container invented by Leonardo da Vinci, emphasizing its unique design that prevents unauthorized access. Sophie elaborates on how the device uses a combination of rotating lettered dials that must be aligned precisely to spell out a specific code word. If forced open, the internal vial of vinegar would break, dissolving the encoded papyrus scroll inside, thus destroying the message. Her ability to articulate this complex mechanism demonstrates her intelligence, analytical thinking, and extensive knowledge, placing her on equal footing with Langdon in solving the mystery. Other dialogues such as:

- Teabing: "Now... the word in French for 'Holy Grail'."
- Sophie: "The Holy Grail."
- Teabing: "As two words. Can you translate...?"
- Sophie: "Sang real. It means 'royal blood.'" (01:05:30 – 01:07:00)



*("Sophie listens critically in Teabing's study, showing her role as an active thinker in the investigation.")*

Sophie translates and interprets terms faster and more accurately. From the dialogues above, it can be seen that the female character Sophie is no less than several male characters in making decisions. Her dialogues about the cryptex and "Sang Real" show not only the speed of thought, but also mastery of the intellectual and historical fields. This strengthens the position of women as equal rational subjects in decision making.

### **Education and Women**

Women are often considered backward due to lack of education. However, this is refuted by Sophie's attitude in the film *The Da Vinci Code*. In the film, Sophie is not depicted as a character who is intellectually backward, but rather as a character with a higher educational background, especially in the field of cryptography. This shows the representation of women who break the assumption that women are not worthy or capable in the academic or scientific world. Some of the dialogues that make Sophie look very intelligent and highly intellectual include:

- Teabing: "Now... the word in French for 'Holy Grail'."
- Sophie: "The Holy Grail."
- Teabing: "As two words. Can you translate...?"
- Sophie: "Sang real. It means 'royal blood.'" (01:05:30 – 01:07:00)

In the dialogue above, it can be seen that Sophie has a high intellect to be able to compete with other male characters in terms of translating and metainterpreting. Mill believed that eliminating educational inequality would free women from dependence on men (Mill, 1869). Sophie is proof

that women are able to be independent and play an important role in the structure of modern knowledge. In addition, Sophie is also fairly firm so that the main male character often hears directions from her, for example, other dialogues such as:

- Robert Langdon: "This phrase is meaningless. Unless... you assume these letters are out of order, too."
- Sophie Neveu: "An anagram."
- Langdon: "Anagrams are right. 'O, Draconian devil. Oh, lame saint' becomes 'Leonardo Da Vinci! The Mona Lisa.'"
- Sophie Neveu: "Professor... the Mona Lisa is right over here."



*("Sophie helps decode Da Vinci's Mona Lisa clue.")*

Some of the dialogues above can explain that Sophie as a female character is not weak and lacks education, it can be seen that Sophie has more knowledge and is responsive in dealing with something. Sophie's attitude that often guides Langdon also shows an equal intellectual relationship, even in some situations she takes over the direction of the investigation. This can explain that gender roles cannot be limited to either men or women.

In another scene, Langdon compliments Sophie on her intelligence in explaining thoroughly how the Da Vinci Code works. Here is the evidence of the dialogue:

- Robert: A cryptex.
- Sophie: They are used to keep secrets.
- Robert: It's da Vinci's design.
- Sophie: You write the information on a papyrus scroll, which is then rolled around a thin glass vial of vinegar. If you force it open, the vial breaks, vinegar dissolves papyrus... and your secret is lost forever. The only way to access the information is to spell out the password with these five dials, each with 26 letters. That's 12 million possibilities.
- Robert: I've never met a girl who knew that much about a cryptex. Saunière made one for me once.

- Sophie: My grandfather gave me a wagon. (01:28:32 – 01:46:20).



*(“This line shows Sophie Neveu as educated and intelligent, challenging stereotypes about women’s academic ability.”)*

In this scene, Sophie Neveu not only knows what a cryptex is but is also able to explain its mechanism in detail, including the chemical security function (the vinegar vial that dissolves the papyrus), as well as the probabilistic complexity of the password system (12 million possible combinations). This knowledge indicates a high level of technical mastery and logic, which is often associated in patriarchal culture as a "male domain."

Langdon’s response *“I’ve never met a girl who knew that much about a cryptex”* is an implicit compliment that also reflects social bias. Although well-intentioned, the use of the word "girl" highlights the social assumption that women usually do not possess such knowledge, which makes Sophie’s expertise appear extraordinary within a gender-biased culture.

However, what makes this dialogue even more powerful is Sophie’s simple yet sharp reply: *“My grandfather gave me a wagon.”* This statement shows that since childhood, Sophie has had equal access to education and symbolic thinking, even through means that might be considered “unconventional” (a toy imbued with symbolic meaning or intellectual challenge). This proves that intellectual empowerment for women can begin at an early age, and when given the opportunity, women are capable of mastering any field, including cryptography and symbolic history as portrayed in the film.

### **Women's Right to Vote**

Just like men, women also have rights. The right to choose what is good, the right to do whatever they want and various kinds of rights that cannot be limited. One of the central values in liberal feminism is the freedom of individuals to choose their own path in life. Sophie, as a descendant of Jesus in the film’s story, is not forced to take on a particular religious or historical role. She decides not to immediately claim her heritage, but to think reflectively about the consequences of that identity. In the film, it can be seen that Sophie has the right to choose what is right and what is wrong as in the following dialogue and narration:

Located: On the plane after opening the cryptex and discussing its origins

- Robert Langdon: "Well... here's the question: A living descendant of Jesus Christ... would she destroy faith? Or would she renew it?"
- Sophie Neveu: "Thank you... For bringing me here. For letting him choose you, Sir Robert." (01:35:00)



*("Sophie represents women's voice and agency, symbolizing the fight for equality ")*

Langdon's approach exemplifies respect for Sophie's autonomy. Rather than dictating or guiding her decision, he explicitly acknowledges her right to choose, embodying the liberal ideal of individual liberty as described by John Stuart Mill (1859). Mill's concept of freedom stresses that individuals must be allowed to make choices that shape their own lives, so long as they do not harm others. In this context, Sophie's decision is not only personal but has larger cultural and spiritual implications, yet Langdon refrains from influencing her, reinforcing her sovereignty over her own destiny.

From a gender perspective, this exchange challenges patriarchal norms that often marginalize women's voices in matters of power, history, and religion. Historically, women have frequently been depicted as passive bearers of tradition or as objects shaped by male authority. However, Sophie's role here disrupts that narrative. She is portrayed as an empowered agent who exercises her right to question, decide, and redefine the meaning of faith and legacy. This reflects feminist ideals of agency and autonomy, showing that women are capable of influencing and reshaping societal narratives rather than being confined within them.

Moreover, Sophie's gratitude for Langdon "letting him choose you" subtly acknowledges the importance of respect and trust in interpersonal relationships, especially across gender lines. It implies a mutual recognition of agency both hers and Langdon's as they navigate this complex journey together. The scene, therefore, highlights not only individual freedom but also the ethical dimension of respecting others' choices, which is foundational to liberal democratic values. The dialogue also invites viewers to reflect on the broader implications of choice in historical and cultural contexts. Sophie's decision symbolizes a break from deterministic views of identity and destiny, suggesting that heritage and tradition are not fixed but open to reinterpretation and renewal. This is particularly significant in the context of religious and historical narratives that have often excluded women's perspectives. By centering Sophie's choice, the film advocates for a more inclusive understanding of history and spirituality that acknowledges diverse voices.

### **Discrimination and Injustice**

We often see that women are often discriminated against, whether it is their personality or their intellect. Often women do not get justice that makes them feel alienated. In the Da Vinci Code film, we can see that Sophie is often discriminated against and judged unilaterally, Sophie, although competent, remains a victim of institutional prejudice and gender stereotypes. Fache belittles her involvement simply because she is a woman, and Teabing gives compliments that imply sexuality, not competence. Here are the dialogues and scripts that can state this:

- Fache judges Sophie not on her professionalism, but on her gender and appearance, which shows the systemic prejudice and bias in the institution (the police), which reduces her intellectual role. (00:10–15, at the beginning of the investigation at the Louvre.)

Sandra Bartky's concept of microaggressions (1990) is highly relevant here. These are subtle, often unconscious, behaviors and remarks that convey demeaning messages to marginalized groups—in this case, women. Fache's dismissive attitude toward Sophie may not be overtly hostile, but it functions to undermine her authority and intellectual contribution. For example, instead of recognizing Sophie as a valuable collaborator, Fache's behavior could include patronizing comments, ignoring her input, or questioning her presence on the team—all of which cumulatively discourage her participation and reinforce gender hierarchies.

This scene also exemplifies what feminist scholars term the "invisible barrier" in male-dominated institutions, where women's presence is tolerated but their authority is constantly questioned or diminished. Such bias functions to maintain the status quo, preserving male dominance in professional and investigative roles. Sophie's struggle against this prejudiced perception underscores the challenges women face in asserting their expertise in fields historically monopolized by men.

Furthermore, Fache's attitude can be seen as part of a broader cultural script that associates intellectual and authoritative roles with masculinity, relegating women to peripheral or supportive positions. This undermines not only individual women but also perpetuates systemic inequality by limiting diversity of thought and leadership within critical institutions like the police force. The initial interaction between Fache and Sophie also sets up a dynamic of conflict and tension that highlights the persistence of gender discrimination even in contemporary settings. It implicitly critiques institutional cultures that fail to recognize or value women's professional contributions, thereby signaling the need for greater awareness and structural change.

In sum, Fache's judgment of Sophie is emblematic of the subtle yet pervasive ways gender bias operates through assumptions, stereotypes, and everyday interactions that collectively marginalize women's intellectual roles. This scene serves as a reminder that overcoming discrimination requires not only changing policies but also challenging ingrained attitudes and micro-level behaviors that sustain inequality. Some other evidence such as:

- Teabing: "Can you keep secrets? Can you know a thing and never say it again? And codes? I imagine they lie down for you like lovers." (00:30–40)

Although this flattery feels positive, Teabing subtly "generalizes" Sophie's abilities by describing her as "sensual" and different from "rational" men. This indicates gender stereotypes when she performs intellectual tasks. It can be seen that men often look down on women, whether from their attitude, how they dress, their appearance, not to mention their intelligence. This makes men feel superior to women. Some other dialogues related to discrimination are as follows: When Sophie enters the crime scene of Jacques Saunière's murder, several police officers question why Sophie is involved.

- Police: "Why is a cryptologist involved in a murder case?"
- Sophie: "Because the victim left a code."
- Fache (police): "This is not a crossword puzzle, mademoiselle." (00:22:00)

This brief exchange especially Fache's dismissive remark "*This is not a crossword puzzle, mademoiselle*" encapsulates a multilayered form of gender-based professional marginalization. At its surface, the line trivializes Sophie's profession, equating cryptology a complex and technical

discipline with a mere hobby or mental diversion. This reflects not just a misunderstanding of the field, but a broader systemic devaluation of female expertise, particularly when that expertise lies in intellectual or abstract domains traditionally dominated by men.

When the police officer questions, “*Why is a cryptologist involved in a murder case?*”, it signals more than procedural confusion; it reveals an ingrained belief that Sophie’s presence both as a woman and as a specialist in a cerebral, non-physical field is inappropriate in the “serious” world of law enforcement. This kind of gatekeeping behavior exemplifies what Joan Acker (1990) described as gendered organizational logic the idea that institutions are built on hidden rules and assumptions that favor men and masculinity as the default, especially in high-stakes environments like policing or crime-solving.

Fache’s comment also functions as a microaggression, consistent with Sandra Bartky’s (1990) theory. While not explicitly aggressive, the tone and language of dismissal subtly imply that Sophie’s role is decorative or incidental rather than essential. This reflects broader social patterns where women must justify their presence in professional spaces more than men, especially when their contribution challenges masculine authority or disrupts expected gender roles.

Moreover, the repeated need for Sophie to defend her relevance in the investigation despite the fact that the victim specifically left a code, directly connected to her expertise shows how patriarchal structures can erase or minimize women’s legitimacy, even when the evidence supports their authority. This is an example of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), where someone is wrongfully discredited as a knower due to prejudice in this case, against Sophie as a young female cryptologist.

#### IV. ONCONCLUSI

Sophie Neveu’s character in *The Da Vinci Code* is a prominent example of liberal feminism in popular cinema. As a female cryptologist working for the French police, Sophie challenges traditional gender roles through her intelligence, independence, and agency. Despite facing both subtle and overt forms of discrimination and marginalization, Sophie continues to assert her competence, autonomy, and decision-making power throughout the narrative. Her rationality and problem-solving abilities are central to the development of the plot, placing her on an equal footing with her male counterpart, Robert Langdon.

Sophie’s character rejects patriarchal control, not only in institutional structures such as law enforcement, but also in religious and historical narratives that have long silenced or erased women. Her ultimate journey of self-discovery, learning about her ancestral lineage, and reclaiming her identity, epitomizes the feminist quest for recognition, equality, and the dismantling of oppressive traditions.

Seen through the lens of liberal feminism, Sophie Neveu’s role highlights the importance of equal rights, educational and professional opportunities, and personal freedom for women. The film subtly yet powerfully promotes the idea that women are not only capable of contributing to complex intellectual and moral dilemmas, but also deserve to have their voices heard and their identities respected in both the public and private spheres.

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