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## Feminism – difficult conversation

**Abstract:** Feminism is a conflict between the female identity and female differences. Yet, all feminist thoughts aim at protecting specific subjects – women. In its current, rather chaotic form it allows to discover, understand and learn something from women who live and work in different countries. Feminism is not monolithic. It comprises a large array of attitudes, interests and ideas. These in turn, are differently represented across countries. Women took and still take various paths in combating inequality, therefore perhaps it would be wise to refer to ‘feminisms’ instead of a singular form ‘feminism’. My goal is to present a concise summary of a particular set of meanings of this term, ones that are relatable in the broadest sense.

**Key words:** feminism, philosophy of feminism, different approaches to feminism

### Introduction

From its inception feminism drew its energy from its supra-national coverage as a social movement, an ideology, and as a theory. Overcoming national and continental borders. Influencing the life and mentality of people of diverse cultures, ethnic communities, and social levels. The text shows that the phenomenon encompass a wide range of attitudes, behaviours, and strategies. Therefore, how to unite women with dividing differences, and particular using this differences? This article is an attempt to show the internal dialog of feminism. It used the method of differing replies of feminists to recurring questions. Exhibiting the internal dynamics of the philosophy of feminism travelling on explored and unexplored paths; and history to emphasize equally the limits, diversity, and wealth of open horizons. It also shows an attempt to match the different types of feminism in cultural paradigms.

Women make up half of the world’s population. They were born free and intellectually independent. Hence, the question poses itself, why must they fight for

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something that is theirs, and the right to manifest it? J.S. Mills points out that a division into a two-cast society where one group seems to be born predetermined to rule over the other, this being due to gender or for that matter any other basis for division, is always a source of anti-social behaviour and abnormalities, which are greatly damaging for both those oppressed and those in power [1970, p. 98]. What is modern feminism? One can come across great difficulties when defining this term. Feminism is not monolithic. It comprises a large array of attitudes, interests and ideas [Hannam J., 2010, p. 17]. These in turn, are differently presented across countries. Women took and still take various paths in combating inequality, therefore perhaps it would be wise to refer to 'feminisms' instead of a singular form 'feminism'. My goal is to present a concise summary of a particular set of meanings to this term, ones that are relatable in the broadest sense. Feminism – (Lat. woman) is a term used to describe a collection of ideas which negate the concept of gender inequality. K. Offen uses a geological metaphor when referring to feminism. She compares feminism to a wave of discontent that washes over the old sedimented shore, which in her understanding symbolises patriarchy [2000, pp. 25-26]. It is also accurate to relate this term to organised activity aiming at fixing the flawed reality of everyday life. These are the socio-political movements striving to make women equal in all aspects. E. Krasowska claims that feminism is not only a doctrine able to largely shape people's beliefs and political, social, philosophical or aesthetic attitudes, but as she also states, it is, despite numerous attempts to marginalise it, a resilient and diverse educational movement working on revising the old and new paradigms [2005, p. 10]. What is more, feminism works on building new views of the world, tracking its own history and analysing its discourse. Just like any other theory which has stood the test of time, feminism has its past, present and future. The analysis of this phenomenon reveals that not all feminists think alike. Feminism – regarded as a type of philosophy, an emancipating social movement that has its origins in the French Revolution or a certain lifestyle – seems to escape simple categorisation. What accompanies feminism is the abundance of contradictory terms used to describe it. Consequently, we hear about feminism which is liberal, radical, moderate, Marxist, psychoanalytic, existential, postmodern, multicultural, ecological, cybernetic, corporate etc. Is it possible then to establish some common ground for all the aforementioned categories?

### **Waves of feminism**

The beginnings of feminist thought can probably be traced to Ancient times. Even Hipparchia, the representative of Cynics advocated for equality of the sexes. Mentioning the mythical island of Lesbos and its resident the poet Saffo is also accurate. What is also interesting, is the way Diotyma influenced Socrates' life. Moving forward in history, M. Sakowska mentions twenty four great women of

the Medieval period who contributed to the development of culture [2005]. In the Common Era the emergence of the idea of equality of the sexes is connected with the Enlightenment period. In her book devoted to the first wave of feminism O. Banks analyses the work of ninety eight female and eighteen male feminists [1986, pp. 106-127]. In *Vindication of the Rights of Women* [1792] M. Wollstonecraft states that if women were given the same possibilities of education as men, they would become wiser members of society and better mothers. In addition, they would not find it difficult to find employment [Hannam J., 2010, p. 33]. In England and France, intelligent and educated women began to create a new reality. The French Revolution in 1789 was a pivotal point, the beginning of change. It brought about an important question, namely what does it mean to actively build the new republic? Unfortunately, feminist activity caused suspicion and controversy. In 1793 women were banned from active participation in public life. They were not allowed to take part in any meetings or gatherings. They were also not given the right to any forms of manifestos. Napoleon perpetuated this approach. It is visible in his code of laws from 1807, which was implemented by the Italians, Belgians, Dutch and Germans. Men were given all the rights and liberties towards their spouses, their inheritance and the children. What existed in Great Britain was a law giving a husband ownership over his wife. Fortunately, women managed to unite and gain strength through the works of such male intellectuals as J.S. Mill, H. Fawcett, R. Pankhurst or Ch. Dilke. In his essay *The Subjection of Woman* J.S. Mill opposes and negates the rules by which the two sexes coexisted [1995, p. 285]. Postulates emerged for women to have access to education, voting and also for a change in the inheritance laws. Feminist activity differs from country to country. The abolitionist movement had a great influence on American feminism. Slavery was the vital binding issue for both these factions. As J. Hannam presents it women seemed to have found an analogy between their own legal, emotional and physical enslavement to their husbands and that of slaves [2010, p. 38]. Hence, referring to their own plight they referred to the metaphor of slavery. The fundamental associations working for women's enfranchisement were set up in the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1868 S. B. Anthony and E. C. Stanton published a magazine titled *Revolution*. Later, in 1869 they established the National Woman Suffrage Association. Both women inspired female activists in other countries. The National Society for Woman's Suffrage was an organisation formed in Great Britain. The eighties and nineties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw liberation movements in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the Scandinavian countries. In Germany the liberal groups gained popularity after the abdication of chancellor Bismarck in 1890. In Russia women also took advantage of the period of political instability. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the suffragist movement. The suffragists claimed that mankind could greatly benefit from active womanhood. They used motherhood and the future of the human race as

supporting arguments. M. Fawcett was a pioneering individual who stressed that the feminist initiative is the most important type of movement as it aims at liberating the largest group of individuals, half of humanity [Offen K., 2000, p. 2]. In Great Britain suffragettes<sup>1</sup> became quite an active group. They chose quite drastic methods of protest, such as hunger strikes, manifestations and vandalism. What is more, they refused to pay taxes. One of the head activists was E. Pankhurst. These women presented a new side of womanhood. Womanhood that is strong and determined. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the situation began to change. In 1862 in Sweden and 1869 in Great Britain wealthy, single women gained the right to vote in the local council elections. In the United States in 1869 in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho women could vote at a state level. New Zealand (1893) was the leader in giving females full voting rights. After this success the next step was to improve women's living conditions. Feminism was a bit different in the colonial countries. The only aim was to separate themselves from the West. Therefore, a woman should boycott all western values. A traditional family model was greatly desired. The ones opposing such trends were women from wealthy families who obtained education in the West. Women such as H. asz-Szarawi and S. Nabarawi. Yet, despite a certain degree of opposition the traditions passed down from generation to generation is still dominant.

When analysing the first wave of feminism, N. Krzyżanowska highlights the profound influence of the British, French and American activists. She also points out that the movement was quite diverse. She mentions three ideologies which all talk about the need for a change of women's place in society. These are: feminism for equal rights; connected with abolitionist activity, the evangelical movement putting a great emphasis on women's traits which could be in high demand in public life and also socialism [2012, pp. 81-82]. What is clearly visible here is a shift from using liberalism as inspiration and turning to socialism instead. The first wave of feminism was without a doubt the longest of the three waves discussed. Its aim was to achieve formal equality through obtaining political rights. The second-wave feminism focused more on feminist awareness. It combined activism with the theoretical approach. Controversial texts appeared, for instance: *Second sex* by S. de Beauvoir. This female philosopher claimed that we are not born women, but we become them. It happens, as she stresses, through cultural oppression [2003, p. 299]. Thanks to access to education young people have significantly broadened their horizons, hence, limiting their role to one of a wife and mother was becoming more and more difficult. A large number of them began working. However, the work conditions left a lot to be desired. Activists in a few countries demanded equal salaries, access to education and employment, free contraception, possibil-

<sup>1</sup> Suffragette – a pejorative term used for members of the WSPU who disturbed Winston Churchill's election campaign. The term was first used by the Daily Mail in 1906. The word quickly began to be used when talking about those engaged in active boycotting.

ity of abortion on demand and twenty four hour nursery care. They boycotted beauty competitions. They were against cultivating a certain idea of beauty. They perceived such events as aiming at objectifying women's bodies. Their second focus was fighting intolerance towards homosexuals and lesbians. They did is according to the motto *Private is political* [Hannam J., 2010, p. 153]. The second-wave movement was not limited to Europe and North America. What could have also been observed is for instance the activity of Japanese women. In the Scandinavian countries the activists' demands were quickly fulfilled, thus manifestations died down. Art was significant for the second-wave feminism as it liberated from any boundaries and limitations. Art was all about deforming, playing with meanings and concepts. It waged a war with the too scrupulously defined, "real, accurate" reality [Nead L., 1992]. The result of feminist activity was for the United Nations to declare the year 1975 the International Year of Women, and years 1976-1985 the decade of women. In Third World countries the activists aimed at fulfilling their goals as well. Often due to the lack of men, they had to provide for their families. They distanced themselves from the postulates of *white feminism* [Bator J., 2001 p. 11]. b. hooks criticised feminists stating that they represent only a limited group of people. You cannot perceive what white women say as universalism. Up until this day there is an ongoing discussion for instance on the subject of Muslim women wearing headscarves. A burqa symbolises the lack of freedom. In turn females who wear them say that white women's freedom is a sheer illusion as they are still used as sexual objects in the media, magazines, and advertisements. It seems impossible to reconcile these two different approaches. A battle of arguments and resentment had begun. Despite the apparent differences, however, what grew on both sides was the awareness of the female body. Physical abuse came up as a topic of discussion. All these activities have changed the world for the modern generations of women who now live in a better reality where they can think of self-development. The second wave combines both production and reproduction, about what is private and what is public. It concentrated also on the sources of women's oppression, applying not only Marxist theory but also psychoanalysis. This era of feminism sought to find out why a female is like a stranger in the modern male-dominated society.

The issues that could not be resolved in the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became the focus of the Third-wave feminism. It is still the same today. Modern feminism refuses to operate in binary categories: feminism versus real womanhood. As W. Welsch suggests, this time feminism is based on diversity rather than uniformity [1998, p. 260]. This can be associated with postmodernism. There is no fear in exploring. The new movement exposes a dialogue of contradictory factions. How to unite women in spite of these divides or perhaps even by their means?

### Faces of feminism

As a social and political project rather than just a philosophical aspect feminism is an example of something great and important [Rorty R., 1991, p. 6]. That is why, quickly presenting women a way to better their own social situation seems right. The philosophical approach raises a lot of doubts, as it is hard to talk about it in terms of being progressive. This is the internal dialogue between the feminism of great tales and difference feminism. The former mainly concentrates on the patriarchal role in society. Here, referring to oppression aims at discarding the differences between male and female. In the case of the latter type of feminism this repression is perceived rather as a possible source of positive and revolutionary diversity, which should be celebrated through different forms of creation [Bator J., 2001, p. 26].

The feminist intellectual movement was born in the Enlightenment period, yet the name itself was first used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was conceived as an internal form of criticism towards liberalism. In *The Subjection of Women* J.S. Mill presents an interesting argument, namely that no one is able to say that all men are smarter or stronger than all women. Hence, the fact that an ordinary woman cannot do the same things as a common man should not mean that women ought to be forbidden to make attempts to do the same things [1995, p. 30]. Intellectual progress is supposed to blur the biological limitations and gender differences. Consequently, this can lead to social, political and economical equality. Liberating women was a fundamental element of humanism of the Enlightenment period. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* M. Wollstonecraft says she wants to refer to her own sex as rational human beings rather than as women are used to being referred to as though they were inferior or children not capable of making their own decisions [1973, p. 40]. An idea of feminist emancipation was born according to which the main goal was to eliminate any form of rule of a man over man, be it in liberalism, democracy or socialism. A belief in an entity absolutely free from any limitations was placed under criticism. As T. Nagel suggests the ideas promoted through the philosophy of the Enlightenment era came from nowhere, neglecting the historical and cultural determinants. During a more in-depth analysis one can find that under this universalist demand for emancipation lie the interest of race, class and gender. The rootless ideology becomes in fact a notion linked with a specific time and place. That is why the Enlightenment thought has been and still is tried and undermined by the ideas of postmodernism. Equality and liberty in the case of the former mean adhering to male rules and regulations. One has to say farewell to the illusion of humanism. A human is synonymous with man.

The feminism of postmodernism states that there is no universal (male) truth. On the contrary, there are many and none of them is privileged through gender. The postmodern feminist gains inspiration from Derrida's deconstruction, Foucault's poststructuralism and post-Freudian; mainly Lacan version of psychoanaly-

sis [Bator J., 2001, p. 38]. The focus has been shifted from the oppressive reality of social life to the reality of text. The emancipatory dimension is simply interpreting tradition in a revolutionary way. This provides a possibility of looking at the language from a woman's perspective, as different and positive. We can find the feminist reinterpretations of language in the works of J. Kristeva, L. Irigaray, H. Cixous and J. Butler. The last of the aforementioned female philosophers challenges the gender distinction of women, their gender identity [Bator J., 2001, p. 217]. The thesis put forward by the author of *Gender Trouble* is that of gender performativity. J. Butler points out that gender is not a grammatical subject possessing a fixed set of attributes, but an act, a result (without an ontological status), expression, a dramatic construction of meaning or a display of an unstable nature. The centre of gravity is moved from a subject as a manifestation of its essence to a subject that is on the move, in transformation, during the development process. Instead of looking at features such as the reproductive ability the attention is paid to the reality of what is symbolic (just like in the case of Lacan). This is mainly the language, the most central tool in the construction of man and woman. This idea is especially articulated by J. Kristeva's speaking subject. The language is not an expression of a pre-existential subjectivity. On the contrary, the subjectivity of an individual is a language structure. According to J. Kristeva, womanhood is not in possession of the individual but that of the language, hence its meaning cannot be fixed [1984, pp. 25-26].

Too many works on the subject of deconstructive feminism finish with a suggestion that reality does not exist outside the linguistic territory. Is it perhaps time for a new order of terms? In the past feminists successfully used the word woman in their attempts to improve the situation of many other women. In the case of postmodern feminism there is no one rule on how to be a woman. A discussion is also taking place around the modern and postmodern grouping of important feminist works, for instance *The Second Sex* by S. de Beauvoir [2003]. E. Grosz and J. Butler classify this title differently. The basic question posed is Who is a woman? The answer received is that one becomes a woman and is not born one. Even if we acknowledge the material aspect of something that defines our existence here and now, we still must also recognise the abstractive nature of its sense and boundaries. Existentialism was originally recognised by Beauvoir as a method and ethic of thinking, which enabled her to show; the most important, in her point of view, idea that a woman is an objectified stranger across all cultures. Existence requires the presence of a body, which in turn belongs to the material world and is a viewpoint of the world. The biological features gain such significance as is given to them by people themselves. Biology provides society with facts, that people interpret in their own way so that these can work according to ones needs [Putnam Tong R., 2002, p. 237]. The author of *The Second Sex* admits that our body is to a small extent of

biological character. Mainly, it is a social entity, because it is thanks to society that we can comprehend its meaning [Środa M., 2012, p. 135]. As a philosopher S. de Beauvoir remains faithful to existentialism, yet as a feminist she feels the limitations existing in this philosophy. Different interpretations of this work remain extremely valuable, they provide a way of finding oneself in the feminist past, present and future [Putnam Tong R., 2002, p. 237].

Following the dispute between the feminism of great stories and difference feminism, J. Bator highlights that the followers of the first type concentrate mostly on the analysis of the level of sexism and the patriarchy. The postulates formulated by this type of feminists aimed at eliminating specific social barriers which made women's private and work life difficult. Difference feminism devoted their attention to phallogocentrism, which E. Grosz defines as a series of discursive procedures, a strategy placing a representative of each gender in the model of a human being which actually corresponds to what is male [Bator J., 2001, pp. 47-49]. The representatives of intellectual feminism extracted what had been hidden in the text. All feminist activity displays a clash between wanting to prove universal 'scientific' facts and a certain tendency to concentrate on what is metaphorical and subjective.

### **Trying to agree**

In the philosophical thought an objection appears both towards the post-structural and deconstructionalist ideas of negating humanism, as well as towards the naive postulates of completing it with the omitted notion of womanhood. N. Fraser believes that you should protect the best elements from each paradigm, which are useful in creating the basis of feminist philosophy. J. Bator assesses this attitude and labels it as carefully postmodern like. She claims that Fraser decides to protect critical feminism in relation to the tradition of Enlightenment but does not abandon its traditional appeal for emancipation [Fraser N., 1994, p. 167]. The history of male domination, open to local discussion, protects against falling into the trap of universal metanarrative. This view can be characterised as operational essentialism. According to N. Fraser, a practice of pragmatic and fallibilistic feminism combines the best of feminism without coming across the clash between the critical and postmodern. The way between essentialism and postmodernism combines theory and practice. Similar opinion is shared by A. Snitow, she recognises the paradox of the feminist way of thinking about a woman as a essentialist category and a cultural construct at the same time and how it causes creative tension. The answer to the question: feminism of equality or difference feminism, modernistic or postmodern feminism seems to be an open issue. This discussion is the bases of feminism [1990].

If anti-humanism became the main notion of the feminist theory, there would not be room for speaking of equal rights and dignity. Is it possible that feminism needed de-reconstruction and reconstruction? Perhaps a corporeal concept is the



solution to the various feminist theory dilemmas? The sociologist B.S. Turner labelled the modern society as somatic [1996, p. 2]. The authors of corporal theories expect that these will prove useful, **not only from the epistemological and ontological side but also from the perspective of an equally developing feminist political movement.** What is more, they see the usefulness in their ideas for solving the practical problems, such as pornography, abortion or illnesses like bulimia and anorexia [Hyży E., 2012, p. 19]. E. Grosz claims that reality consists of two separate, self-excluding categories (body and mind). The reluctance towards the body is not an effect of differentiating substance as much as an effect of the way in which the mind and body are perceived. This causes the need to apply a hierarchy. The mind becomes privileged in relation to the body. This devaluation of the body has political consequences for women, as they are defined more through their physicality than men [1994, p. 2]. In the 1995 essay *Space, Time and Perversion* E. Grosz defines the body as a specific, material living combination of tissue, muscles, organs and bone structure which receive shape and form through mental and social inscriptions. A characteristic feature of this body is its biological incompleteness. According to Grosz, it requires social training, and long-term management [1995, p. 104]. In addition, the body is an ambivalent area – both the cause of oppression and a promise for a new emancipatory transformation. The new female subject created here as philosophically independent – provides a source of moral validity for the political feminist movement and paves the way for new ethics. What she does not exclude is a further theoretical development and modification based on the appearing concept. One of these can be cyberfeminism. In her essay *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* J. Haraway [1991] gives way to this phenomenon. The hybridity of cyborgs – the combination between the organism and the machine makes it a useful metaphor, describing the relationship of men and technology. It undermines the common ideas about the body and how natural it is. Cyberspace is an important term. The main representative, F. Wilding defines cyberfeminism as a new wave of post-feminist thought and practice. Moving into cyberspace liberates the women as they are stepping into a new, unlimited area. One can treat the cyberfeminist approach as science fiction literature, which has many followers amongst the younger generation.

However, B. Brook reminds us that due to the fact that bodily theories might seem limited and outdated one can resort to defining and discovering different, new and fresh ideas. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that the body and the way it is perceived still remains the basic foundation of feminism [Brook B., 1999, p. 155].

### The place of feminism in the paradigms of culture

The place of feminism in the study of management is worth considering. This issue can undoubtedly be related to cultural aspects.

Based on cultural paradigms suggested by G. Burrell and G. Morgan: functionalist, interpretive, radical structuralism and radical humanism, one can make an attempt to capture such an amorphous phenomenon as culture. The criteria designating the paradigms are:

- social orientation (regulation v. change)
- objectives concerning the cognition (objective v. subjective) [Sulkowski Ł., 2012, p. 39].

M. Kostera points out that “all the attempts of systematisation teach us first of all the humility in our attempts of organising the world or even its part” [1996, p. 72]. Feminism is making such an attempt. The problems of culture in management are therefore an area where management trends which are alternative to the dominant one could arise and develop.

One of the faces of feminism (radical) is connected with critical trend (*Critical Management Studies*), which concentrates on the problems of the cultural sphere of an organisation. This paradigm is based on an assumption that there exists an objective social reality which requires reconstruction. It derives from philosophical sources which adopt the radical vision of an organisation and management development, which are considered to be the sources of domination and power. The inspiration is sought in the metaphor of panopticon by Bentham, the conception of the class struggle by Marks and symbolic violence by Bourdieu. A crucial point of reference is also the critical theory of communication by Habermas. The issues of study covers the mechanism of power, oppression, instrumentalism and domination. The pursuit of radical change of the position of marginalised groups is the element that links the paradigm of radical structuralism and the feminist trend. One of the most important methods leading to the emancipation of disfavoured groups is to be empowerment, which allows the realisation and putting power in the hands of the oppressed [Sulkowski Ł., 2011, p. 16]. This term indicates support leading to handing over full responsibility and power, therefore, it leads to the realisation and empowerment of the representative of the marginalised group.

The other face of feminism (postmodern) is connected with the paradigm of radical feminism. This is the least homogenous cognitive approach out of all paradigms. It is characterised by: subjectivism, cognitive relativism, academic inconsistency. It is based on philosophical conceptions by: Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty, Deleuze. The key problem of reflection is culture described metaphorically. It can be identified with a discourse – if so, it exists only within the language. Therefore, in postmodernism it is difficult to speak about a research method, because it is a mental formation which by definition is anti-system, anti-theoretic, negating all

conceptions of truth. It is intellectual provocation, which uses deconstruction in order to pay attention to epistemological and ethical problems, but which does not give solutions to them.

Other faces of feminism, e.g. existential, corporal or psychoanalytical feminism can be connected with an interpretative paradigm, whereas liberal feminism can be connected with the functionalist paradigm. According to liberal feminists, sexual division of roles is harmful not only to an individual but also to the whole society, since the society makes a loss due to not using female potential.

Feminists are not consistent as to which paradigm should be the leading one. The paradigms which accept the objective cognitive criteria refer to feminism of great tales, whereas the paradigms which accept the subjective cognitive criteria refer to the difference feminism.

### **Final thoughts**

Feminism is a conflict between the female identity and female differences. Yet, all feminist thoughts aim at protecting specific subjects – that is women. In the current, rather chaotic form it allows to discover, understand and learn something from women who live and work in different countries, and women of different ethnicity. The feminist theory is most successful when it reflects life experiences. Women voice different opinions, sometimes even contradictory. Drawing up a map of feminism is still ongoing today. The fact that different faces of feminism allow women to express themselves is valuable in itself. P. Sztompka calls this the sociology of three. That is, the everyday sociology, which is inquisitive and formulates questions to the seemingly simple and logical events and situations encountered daily. It brings to light the daily nonsense which build the essence of everyday reality. This does not discredit the academic feminism actively taking part in the philosophical discourse. The traditional opposites, such as the mind and body, private and collective, gain a lot of meaning after being discussed in terms of feminism. On one hand, the intellectuals seek a common identity for women, one which would be based on their biological and psychological experiences. On the other, they eliminate the body from any discourse at the same time multiplying its cultural and metaphorical images. Feminism became very engaged in modern discourse. This resulted in creating a fresh view of the basic concepts which previously were only subjects for contemplation. Philosophy is an unlimited area of auto-creation for feminists. This is why the feminist thought should not be read in a too straightforward manner. It should not be interpreted as an ideology with an imperfect past. The important key terms are discussed in many ways.

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