

# Culture and conflict resolution

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Avruch proposes to develop the idea that “ culture is a derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors.” p 5. Culture is seen as individual beliefs or attitudes. Traditionally, a culture was categorised as a tribe or ethnic group. Today it is this and more; it encompasses many ideas such as class, gender, religion and occupation. Avruch discusses various understandings of culture and the inadequacies within these meanings.

Avruch’s deliberate discussions about the term culture highlight the way culture is viewed and perceived by others. His examination of the various definitions of ‘ culture’ point out the many individual misinterpretations and how they affect the world view.

Socially, culture is seen as an upper class appreciation of the arts and refinement. This ‘ high culture’ refers to “ special intellectual or artistic endeavours or products”. p 6. This meaning relates to a very small portion of any social group.

Avruch quotes Edward Tylor’s definition of culture as “ that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired as a member of society” p 6 to underline his second meaning of culture. All people have culture specific to a social group or nation. It encapsulates all which we believe in.

Thirdly, Avruch discusses the scientific side of culture and quotes Franz Boas in saying “ the uniqueness of the many and varied cultures of different

peoples or societies.” Acceptance of the world’s diversity and the treatment of all equally reinforce the scientific nature of culture.

The inadequacies reviewed in this reading highlight the individual interpretation of the term culture. Avruch weighs up the pros and cons of the use of this term. He analyses the ideas of culture as being homogenous; a ‘thing’; uniformity amongst group members; a singular culture; a custom or tradition; and being timeless. Culture comes in many forms and this focuses on the need for diversity when thinking about culture. It is no longer uniform where we all think and act the same way, nor is a culture a stable ‘thing’. It is an ever changing notion formed mainly by the individual.

Avruch show how many different meanings lie within the term ‘culture’. By looking at traditional and contemporary explanations of culture, Avruch opens our eyes to how we interpret this concept. We are shown a different view point and are therefore able to critically ponder our own individual meaning of culture.

Culture is a complex concept that can be interpreted in many ways, by many different people. Is it an open or closed concept? You be the judge.