

Socio-cultural influences: key definitions

The terms ākonga need before they can analyse participation: what a socio-cultural influence is, what a sociological perspective asks of them, and how self, others and society fit together.

Physical Education New Zealand · Te Ao Kōri Aotearoa

Read this alongside the influences resource. This page defines the ideas. The companion resource works through thirteen influences in detail, with examples and a worksheet.

What the terms mean

Socio-cultural influence

The ways social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors shape people's beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, choices and opportunities in relation to health and wellbeing.

A sociological perspective

Looking beyond individual choice, and asking how society, culture, relationships and wider systems shape whether a person takes part in physical activity, sport and health-related behaviour.

Two ways of explaining the same thing

A sociological perspective is a shift in the question. Instead of asking what is wrong with this person, it asks what is going on around them. Both explanations below describe the same Year 11 ākonga, Sam, who has stopped playing.

Individual choice explanation

"Sam just isn't motivated any more."

- Puts the cause inside the person
- Treats participation as willpower
- Suggests the fix is to try harder
- Explains nothing about why the pattern repeats across a whole cohort

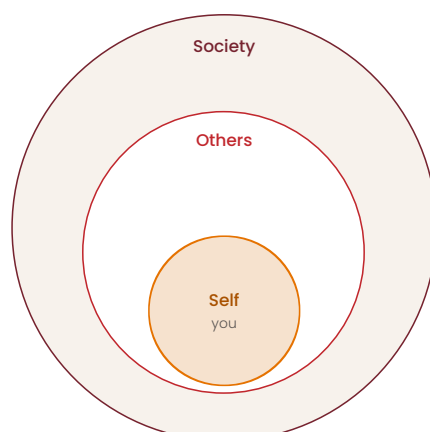
Sociological explanation

"Club fees went up, Sam's friends left the team, and training now clashes with a part-time job."

- Puts the cause in the conditions around the person
- Treats participation as shaped by access and relationships
- Suggests fixes someone could actually make
- Explains why the same thing happens to many students at once

Self, others and society

Three interconnected circles of influence. Each sits inside the next, so what happens at the widest level shapes the conditions at the narrowest one.



Influence runs inward, from society through others to the individual. It also runs the other way: people change teams, clubs and eventually the culture around them.

Self

The personal factors that influence a person's thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, attitudes, abilities, motivations and choices.

Confidence · enjoyment of sport · physical skills and fitness · personal goals and interests

Others

The people and relationships that influence a person's experiences, decisions and behaviours.

Whānau · friends and peers · teachers · coaches · teammates

Society

The wider social, cultural, economic, political and environmental influences that shape opportunities, expectations and behaviours.

Media · gender norms · school systems · sporting culture · government policy · access to facilities and resources

Six influences on ākonga aged 15 to 16

A worked example of the model applied to one age group. The tags show which circle each influence mainly operates in, though most reach across more than one.

Peer influence and social expectations

Friends strongly shape whether ākonga take part. At this age adolescents are less influenced by family and more by their peer group. Where friends value being active, participation is more likely; where a group prioritises other things, it drops away.

Others Self

School culture and academic pressure

As students move up the school, academic demands rise and physical education often becomes optional. Many report less time for sport because of study, assessments, part-time work and responsibilities at home.

Society Others

Family support and socioeconomic factors

Encouragement, transport, time and money all matter. Fees, uniforms, travel and equipment can be a real barrier, particularly for families under financial pressure.

Others Society

Sport culture and gender norms

Aotearoa has a strong sporting culture, and it carries clear ideas about who belongs in which sport. Some ākonga feel pressure to play a particular code to fit expectations or prove themselves; others find their sport gets less coverage, fewer pathways or open judgement. Either way the growing focus on winning through the mid-teen years pushes people out.

Society Self

Social media

A powerful influence at this age, and one that runs through all three circles at once: it shapes how ākonga see their own bodies, what their friends talk about, and which sports and body types get treated as normal.

Self Others Society

Accessibility

How easy or hard it is to reach opportunities for physical activity and sport: facilities, transport, equipment, clubs, programmes, safe spaces, time and money.

Society

Task: break each influence down

For each of the six influences, work through what it is, who it acts on, why it matters and how it shows up in practice. Then name which circle it mostly sits in, and check whether you agree with the tag on the card.

Name: _____ · Kura: _____

Influence	What	Who	Why	How
Peers				
School culture				
Family and money				
Sport culture				
Social media				
Accessibility				

Warm-up: word building

How many words of three letters or more can you make from these letters?

s o c i o c u l t u r a l

Use each letter only as many times as it appears above: c, l, o and u appear twice, everything else once.
Set a three-minute limit, then take the longest word from each group.

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Socio-cultural influences: key definitions. NCEA Level 1 Physical Education.

Companion resource: Socio-cultural influences on physical activity (thirteen influences, examples and worksheet).

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