

Kinship systems: inuit of the arctic essay



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Kinship Systems: Inuit of the artic Dorothy Young ANT 101: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology Christopher Deere December 16, 2011 Kinship Systems: Inuit of the Artic The Inuit people have adapted quite well living in the extreme cold of the artic. They live in the artic area of native North America. Commonly called “ Eskimo”, their territory extends more than five thousand miles along the Arctic Circle from Russia, Alaska, and northern Canada to Greenland. They are a people who have learned how to use all resources available to them.

Their social organization of the family is considered to be that of a “ band” (the band can consist of the “ nuclear family”, their children and children’s children and sometimes grandparents). Their background can be traced bilaterally (that is, from both parents) (Efland, 2003). There are three specific things that are unique to their existence. These are 1) The role of the Shaman (angakuk), 2) Their ability to use all the resources available to them, and 3) the way they share their food. The Shaman As stated before, the people live in “ bands” that consist of 60 to 300 members.

Usually these bands consisted of smaller camps or settlements. The smallest group is considered the Nuclear family (the parents, their offspring, other relatives such as grandparents, newly married children and their spouses. They did not always live in harmony. When food was plentiful; all was great. Needless, to say, when food was scarce; life gave way to highly competitive, uncooperative behavior. One of the advantages of having so many in one household is that the work can be shared and not be up to one or two people.

Today there are many nationalities that coexist with many generations under the same roof. A second advantage is there would be more men to hunt for food and more women to reproduce and nurture the children. The women also had to go out and gather the plant food and berries. The third advantage is there would be more women to swap with other bands. The swapping insured that there would be more boys born to make the bands stronger. Now when these bands reached a rather large number; a shaman would be chosen to head up the group.

He or she would be the oldest member due to their age; they would have the wisdom to lead the people. However, their power was considered to be negative because they could influence through fear. “ This typically put the group in debt to the shaman” (Efland, social groups). The uses of all resources Their need to survive is great. “ Two keys to remember as we look at the Inuit people are the harshness of the environment and the dependency on the sea and land”, (Efland, Introduction). The threat of starvation was real for these people.

Therefore, they learned how to use everything that was available to them. Keep in mind that the artic is rocky land with underlying permafrost this limits the growth of trees. Since wood is a rare commodity; snow and ice, along with skins, bone, antler, ivory, and the little wood they find is all fashioned into tools that are usable. As one story goes, one Inuit man did not want to go into the settlement. So he went into the artic wilderness and realized that he did not have any weapons. So he defecated and fashioned it into a knife, then used it to kill a dog.

Using the hide for harness and bones for a sled; he was able to get through the wilderness a lot quicker, (Wade, (2010)). This is just one extreme example that shows how the people can use “ whatever” they have as a resource. Sharing of Food The sharing of food among the Inuit people is not what you would think of today. They did not leave anything to store away. “ They follow a nomadic life within a defined territory and live what is called a subsistence economy, in which people produce only what they need for their survival”, (Nowak, 2010, pg. 0). What they don’t produce; the men kill the big game and bring it back to the “ band”. The women gather plant food, which can consist of berries and greens. Sometimes the women will kill small game; but nothing that really feeds a lot of people. What the band does not eat; they take to a neighboring band and feed them. As with any group of people; you have the stronger hunters and the weaker hunters. As long as it is necessary; the one that is successful with a large kill, will gladly share with everyone. Conclusion

The Inuit are a people that have taken what is at their disposal and made the best possible use of it for their survival. Most large cities have an appointed governor to lead them and help them be successful. They may not lead with fear; however they are not always liked either. You can’t make all the people happy all the time. The making of tools has evolved so much today. There are tools being made that almost seem senseless. As far as the sharing of food, you can see that going on in many different places, times of the year, and ways.

The Holidays bring out the best in most and this leads to giving of food to many who would, otherwise, go with nothing. The Inuit have taught us many

lessons. They also remind us to have patience with each other. References
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