Inupiaq [Inupiat] - Alaska Native Cultural Profile

Topic Selections:

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- Profiles by Village

See recent MEDLINE citations for
Alaska Native or Eskimo via PubMed
Medline Plus - Consumer Health Information

- Main EthnoMed Page - *Via HealthLinks*

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Hepatitis of Unknown Etiology

Helicobacter pylori Infection
Infectious Disease Report by Region - 1998
Mortality Stats
Radiation Crisis and Eskimo Populations - *PubMed*
Radiation Contaminants in the Arctic - *PubMed*
Radioactive Contamination and Caribou - *PubMed*
Respiratory Syncytial Virus
Streptococcus Pneumoniae
Suicide
Tobacco Abuse
Tuberculosis

- American Indian/Alaska Native Resources -NN/NLM PNR
- HIV / AIDS: Education and Prevention for Native Americans/Alaska Natives - NN/NLM PNR

****NOTE**:**

When searching for information concerning Alaska Natives you may need to incorporate the term "Eskimo". There are many Indigenous peoples native to the Arctic whom do not consider themselves "Eskimos" and the very term "Eskimo" may be problematic. However, the term Alaska Native or using only a specific tribal name [i.e. Inupiaq], may often yield poor search results.

Our Land and Environment

Geography

Click Map for Larger Detail

- Profiles by Village

The territory of the Inupiaq Eskimos (white area on map) includes: 1) North Slope Borough (NSB) consisting of seven villages, served by the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, 2) Northwest Arctic Borough consisting of eleven villages and 3) Bering Straits Regional Corporation includes 16 villages. Barrow Alaska, the most northern U.S. city, is located within the NSB territory and situated 700 miles north of Fairbanks AK and approximately 1000 miles below the north pole. [1] R. Craig, [8] http://indy4.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/maps/ak/alaska.html#arcticslope [P. Giese]

Winter months in Barrow are very cold dipping to -56F, to a summer time high of +78F with the summer average of 40 degrees. Total darkness prevails in this arctic community between Nov. 18th and January 24th and the sun never sets during May 10th through August 2nd.

With the impact of global warming, Barrow AK has experienced warmer temperatures than Kotzebue AK which is situated in a transitional climate zone, where as Barrow AK is classified as an arctic climate zone. [1] R. Craig, [4] http://www.alaskan.com/namesedd.html

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History and Politics

Preceding early European impact Inupiaq communities extended from the Norton Sound, south to the Canadian border. Numerous district dialects of Inupiaq were associated with a particular territory or community. Burch, whose expertise is in Kivolina AK and subsequent areas points out that some Inupiaq people remained close to established communities while others were mobile. Though marriage often occurred within established groups, marriage union commonly occurred between individual groups. Villages were

relatively small and some inhabited areas have witnessed continuous or seasonal occupation in excess of 10,000 years such as the fish camp Mary's Igloo. Such long term occupation quite naturally included intermarriage and blood lines were crossed creating an environment much like a large extended family. Dialects, clothing details, and personal adornment difference would distinguish one group from another. Though each spoke Inupiaq, regional differences were distinct enough to distinguish a person's home district. [1]R. Craig, [6] http://borealis.lib.uconn.edu/ArcticCircle/HistoryCulture/ Inupiat/1800s.html

"In ecologically less favorable districts, local families might include a dozen or so members whereas in highly productive areas, local family size could reach as high as 50 or more. Major population centers such as Point Hope and Point Barrow, located along sea mammal migration routes, contained several large local families clustered in distinct locations or neighborhoods, each set linked together by various affinal and consanguineal kinship ties." [6] http://borealis.lib.uconn.edu/ArcticCircle/HistoryCulture/ Inupiat/1800s.html

- Economics of Dependency
- Alaska Natives and the Land Claims Settlement Act of 1971, by Norman Chance

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Language

Spoken Language

The Inupiaq language consists of Inuit-Inupiaq families of polysynthetic languages spoken from Siberia [Yup'ik] to Greenland [Inupiaq]. For Inupiaq People language is very important to Inupiaq culture and traditions. The languages of the Inuit peoples constitute a subfamily of the Eskimo Aleut language family. A major linguistic division occurs in Alaska, according to whether the speakers call themselves Inuit (singular, Inuk, as in Inupiaq) or Yuit (singular, Yuk, as in Yup'ik). The eastern branch of the subfamily generally called Inupiaq in Alaska but also Inuktitut (meaning "like an inuk") in Canada and Kalaallisut (Kaladtlisut, meaning "like an kalaaliq") in Greenland stretches from eastern Alaska across Canada and through northern into southern Greenland. It consists of many dialects, each understandable to speakers of neighboring dialects, including speaker of distant dialects found in Greenland [Inupiaq] or Russia [Yup'ik]. [1] R. Craig, [16] http://www.campus.bt.com/CampusWorld/pub/Ultimate_Challenge/

"Because these languages are among the most complex and difficult in the world, few explorers or traders ever learned them; instead, they relied on a jargon composed of Danish, Spanish, Hawaiian, and Inupiaq or Yup'ik words. The Inupiaq and Yup'ik languages themselves have a rich oral literature, and a number of Greenland authors have written in Greenland Inupiaq." [16] http://www.campus.bt.com/CampusWorld/pub/Ultimate_Challenge/

Like too many Indigenous Peoples, the Inupiaq were literally forced to learn English. If the BIA teachers heard Inupiaq being spoken, the transgressor(s) was swiftly punished, Alaska Natives did not escape this tragedy.

- More Language Information

Alaskan Picture Writing

"Edmund James Peck is usually given credit for the adaptation of Evans' Cree Syllabics to Inuktitut, but this is not strictly correct. The adaptation was actually made by John Horden and E.A. Watkins, missionaries sent from England to the Diocese of Moosonee." [11]http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/north/nor-iv/paper/pap-170e.htm#Inuktitut Syllabics: the Origins

The only place where Inuit developed their own systems of writing was Alaska. A well known translator there was Uyagok, an Inupiaq speaker from the Unalakleet area, a translator for the early missionaries. Rueeu Uyagok, literally meaning "like a rock or stone".

In the Buckland area of Kotzebue Sound, Inupiaq speakers, Lily Savok and Qutliuraq Ruth Ekaak developed a style quite different from the Yup'ik speaker called Helper Neck, though not fully developed until 1914. Another system developed on the Nunivak Island, Yup'ik speaking area, by the wife of a missionary named Edna Kenick in the 1940s.

Other forms of picture writing were developed by individual Inupiaq speaking persons, who had unique understanding of their own personal invented systems.

Another innovator about 1900 was Yup'ik speaking Uyagok *(same surname as above, but I'm am told these are separate persons)* also known as Helper Neck, who developed another system of picture writing. "Other Inuit, working at the Moravian mission station and inspired by Uyagok 's innovation, developed their own picture writing systems, most of which could be read only by themselves. Meanwhile Uyagok continued to work on his system, adding extra symbols and eventually developing a syllabic writing system, that is, a system of writing in which one character represented one syllable; it was composed of Yup'ik (Eskimo) phonetics, English words and arbitrary symbols. While Uyagok developed his unique system, some of his closest associates continued to develop the earliest stage of his work, the pictorial writing." [1] R. Craig, [11] http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/north/nor-iv/paper/pap-170e.htm#Alaskan Picture Writing

- Inuktitut Fonts (Canada)
- Historical Perspective

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Family Life

Inupiaq Values

The Inupiaq People had a philosophy of life and lived it - *Inupiaq Values*. "Each generation learned these mores by observing the way their parents lived. The Elders of the community were the "teachers". If there were problems to discuss, the Elders got together, discussed it, and came to a consensus. Sometimes it was a man who was head of the group; and sometimes it was a woman. In their discussion they were impressed with those who expressed their wisdom and common sense and always included that person in any decision making discussion." [1] R. Craig

Child Rearing

Traditionally, parents communicated with their child through their language, facial and body expressions and tone of voice. Children began learning the Inupiaq language at a very young age. Additionally the child was sung to, with lots of crooning and enjoyment with the child. Quiet or unspoken form of correction was preferred by the Inuit. Loud, verbal disciplining was considered inappropriate and disrespectful. Yelling at a child too much would make the child "deaf" to talk or reasoning as time went on. It was also disrespectful to the name and being of the child. A spanking when necessary was looked on more favorably. A spanking "hurt the skin", but constant yelling "hurt the spirit". [1] R. Craig, [7] http://siksik.learnnet.nt.ca/Inuuqatigiit/1/h3a.htm

- Family & Kinship Values

Naming

Parents who admired particular persons would in turn take the Eskimo name of that person and give it to their child. Also, Grandparents who knew their forebears were consulted for additional Eskimo names. In other instances a couple would give the child a name of a recently deceased person or a name common within the family. [1] R. Craig

- Inuit view of naming

Rites of Passage

"Prior to Christian missionaries, boys had a "*gargi*" where the Elders taught them how to make implements and the skills for hunting. A "*gargi*" was the community building of the village. An adolescent boy was permitted by this teacher to follow the hunters in any season, thus providing important "reality checks" so learning wasn't merely "academic" in nature - learning was practical as well.

Adolescent girls were at home learning from women the skills of sewing, learning the care of children, cooking and how to manage a household. The girls also brought food to the boys at the "*gargi*" during the appropriate times." [1] R. Craig

In some instances a village may perform ceremonies throughout the year, but for individuals life is a continuous flow built upon levels of responsibility. Customs may vary between villages, but the increasing expectation of responsibility continues throughout ones life. At puberty a youth may be sent to an elder for a year of training.

Gender, Status and Age Relationships

Inupiaq women are not part of an urban underclass. The majority have stable incomes from employment or craft production and are homeowners. Further, many Inupiaqs have moved to major urban centers for a college education, warmer climate (arthritis concerns), health care needs, lower cost of living, due to Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 or the flow of oil moneys into the state. [1] R. Craig, [6]
http://borealis.lib.uconn.edu/ArcticCircle/HistoryCulture/Inupiat/nfc1.html [Nancy Fogel-Chance]

- Responsibility of Sewing
- Inupiaq Women and Urban Life
- Beyond Kin: Social and Cultural Life
- Growing Up in an Inupiaq Village

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Etiquette

Greetings

Tribal, village, clan and family affiliations are important to all Native peoples. When greeting a casual acquaintance "Where are you from?" is the most common greeting. Many Inupiaq people introduce themselves, naming their parents and village. This becomes the initial opportunity to understand the unique background and family ties of a new person and a show of mutual respect. [1] R. Craig, [2] D. Cowdery

Social Distance

Within the Alaska Native groups a visitor may not witness much public touching and hugging. A person who is expressing grief and become tearful, it may not be appropriate to touch the distressed person. However, intimate customs will vary from village to village. Today many Inupiaqs hug in public openly, but nose kissing is reserved for the interaction between a mother and child. [1] R. Craig, [1] D. Cowdery

Displays of Respect

"In ancient times the elders sat in designated areas up front during a community activity and a public path was created behind them. The Elders were so respected that no one walked in front of them." [1] R. Craig

The Elders were the traditional teachers, and eventually were replaced by the U. S. Government via certified teachers. Only recently (1970's), that an Elder's importance was realized again by villages seeking social

leadership to guide their communities away from confusion and disruptive social ills.

Today, the Inupiaq Elders still retain and know much traditional wisdom. [1] R. Craig

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Nutrition and Food

"In many Inupiaq communities of the Arctic and Sub Arctic, the informal sector is based largely on an active subsistence hunting and traditional uses of wild foods. Moose, caribou, whale, duck, fish, and other wildlife continue to provide substantial portions of indigenous people's diet (50% and higher in the case of some households)." [6]http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/arcticcircle/NatResources/subsistglobal.html [Gary Kofinas] The cooperation traditional to subsistence hunting in the north is still much in evidence. Today food is still shared by all Inupiaq. When a whale is hunted in Barrow AK, whether an Inupiaq is in Anchorage or Seattle, the person will "taste" some of that whale. The Inupiaq values reciprocity, trading partnerships, all are based on what have become known today as subsistence hunting. Subsistence living does not necessarily denote poverty and hunger. Many families had very active "subsistence" hunting and gathering economies which remain quite successful.

Since the earliest times hunted and gathered foods were distributed within community and family groupings. Today traditional *Caring & Sharing* patterns of reciprocity remain. "As an *Alaskan Gwich'in Athabascan Indian* explained, "We are subsistence people. Our *occupation* is hunting and fishing. This way we can feed our families and trade with our people. Caribou from the Chandler will give red meat to a family in Fort Yukon, while Yukon River fish find their way to a family in Chandler."
[6]http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/arcticcircle/NatResources/subsistglobal.html [Gary Kofinas]

- USDA Nutrient Values Database Searchable database of 5,000+ foods including several Alaska Native/American Indian food items. Search this database by typing a single word only such as: bison, deer, moose, muskrat, or cranberry.
- Artifacts: Hunting, fishing and caring for skins.
- Subsistence Hunting and the Global Economy

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Religious Life

"Beliefs ensured that values were practiced, followed, honored and passed on. There were beliefs that were told to children to ensure they followed a strict code of conduct. For example, the children were told that throwing sand near water would create rain. Why was this belief taught? Most children enjoy playing near water, there is usually sand near water and if the children threw sand in the air, more than likely another child would get sand in their eyes, their hair and on their body. To the Inuit, it is of utmost importance that you do not harm another, that you show respect, so this particular belief helped carry out these values."
[7]http://www.learnnet.nt.ca/ECE/ecss/Inuuqatigiit/1/b1.htm

"There were many taboos that an Inupiaq needed to be aware of, such as what we could or could not eat and how one individual lived would influence other people and the respect for Elders." [1] R. Craig

- World View

Traditional Medicine

Most communal rites center on preparation for the hunt, and myths tend to deal with the relations that exist between human beings, animals, and the environment. In Arctic Canada, Greenland, Labrador, and northern

Alaska, large numbers of Inuit have converted to Christianity.

- Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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URL: http://nnlm.gov/pnr/ethnomed/inupiaq.html