

Kinship, Family, and Exchange in a Labrador Inuit Community

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Abstract. Kinship, family, and household have received considerable attention in Inuit studies; this paper takes a comparative social networks approach to these issues. Here kinship connections are represented in network form as a composite of individual kinship dyads of descent, coparentage, or siblingship. The composite kinship network is then used as a standard of measure for the pair-wise distances of exchange/dependency dyads appearing in other social networks within the community (including the country-food distribution network, store-bought-food-sharing network, traditional-knowledge network, alcohol-co-use network, household-wellness networks, job-referrals network, and the housing network). This analysis allows us to gauge the role that kinship (of various distances, including household and family) plays in structuring exchanges across these various network domains. The data used here was collected in Nain, Labrador in January–June 2010. From 330 interviews, we extracted more than 4,900 exchanges and patterns of helping relationships among the 749 current adult residents of the community, and more than 10,000 kinship connections among a total of 1,687 individuals directly linked by descent, marriage or coparentage. The results of this analysis show that past emphasis on kin-oriented exchange in Inuit communities has mistakenly emphasized the nature of the exchange item (traditional versus store-bought (cash) economy) thereby missing important data on the nature of the exchange itself (reciprocal or one-way).

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