

THE INUIT WAY

A GUIDE TO INUIT CULTURE



PRODUCED BY PAUKTUUTIT INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

REVISED 2006

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PAUKTUUTIT
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

FORWARD

The Inuit Way has become one of the most popular and important documents Pauktuutit has produced in our twenty-two year history. With more than ten thousand copies in print, *The Inuit Way* has helped a broad range of Canadians gain a better understanding and appreciation of our culture.

The Inuit Way is much more than a simple introduction to traditional Inuit culture. It provides the reader a starting point for understanding the cultural underpinnings of modern Inuit. As a people, we have undergone immense changes in a generation. Despite the many changes our society has encountered, we retain strong ties to the land and our traditions. People coming to the north today see Inuit taking part in many aspects of modern life—working in an office environment, watching hockey on television, shopping at local stores, making political speeches. What they may not see at first is that Inuit continue to have a strong, unique culture that guides us in our everyday life—our close ties to the land, a dedication to community and a strong sense of self-reliance.

The Inuit north has changed with astonishing speed since *The Inuit Way* was first published in 1989. At times, the rapidity of these changes has threatened to overwhelm us. However, Inuit are known for our tenacity and ability to adapt. Today our communities are strong and vibrant. We have settled all our land claims and are increasingly taking control over our lives.

I am optimistic this revised *The Inuit Way* will contribute to this positive evolution. I am confident that it will continue to encourage understanding and lead to a strong and optimistic future for Inuit and for all who come to Canada's north.

Martha Greig, President
Kuujuuaq, 2006

THE INUIT WAY

A GUIDE TO INUIT CULTURE

PAUKTUUTIT INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

PAUKTUUTIT MISSION

Pauktuutit fosters greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women, advocates for equity and social improvements, and encourages their participation in the community, regional and national life of Canada.

Pauktuutit leads and supports Canadian Inuit women in policy development and community projects in all areas of interest to them, for the social, cultural, political and economic betterment of the women, their families and communities.

PAUKTUUTIT VISION

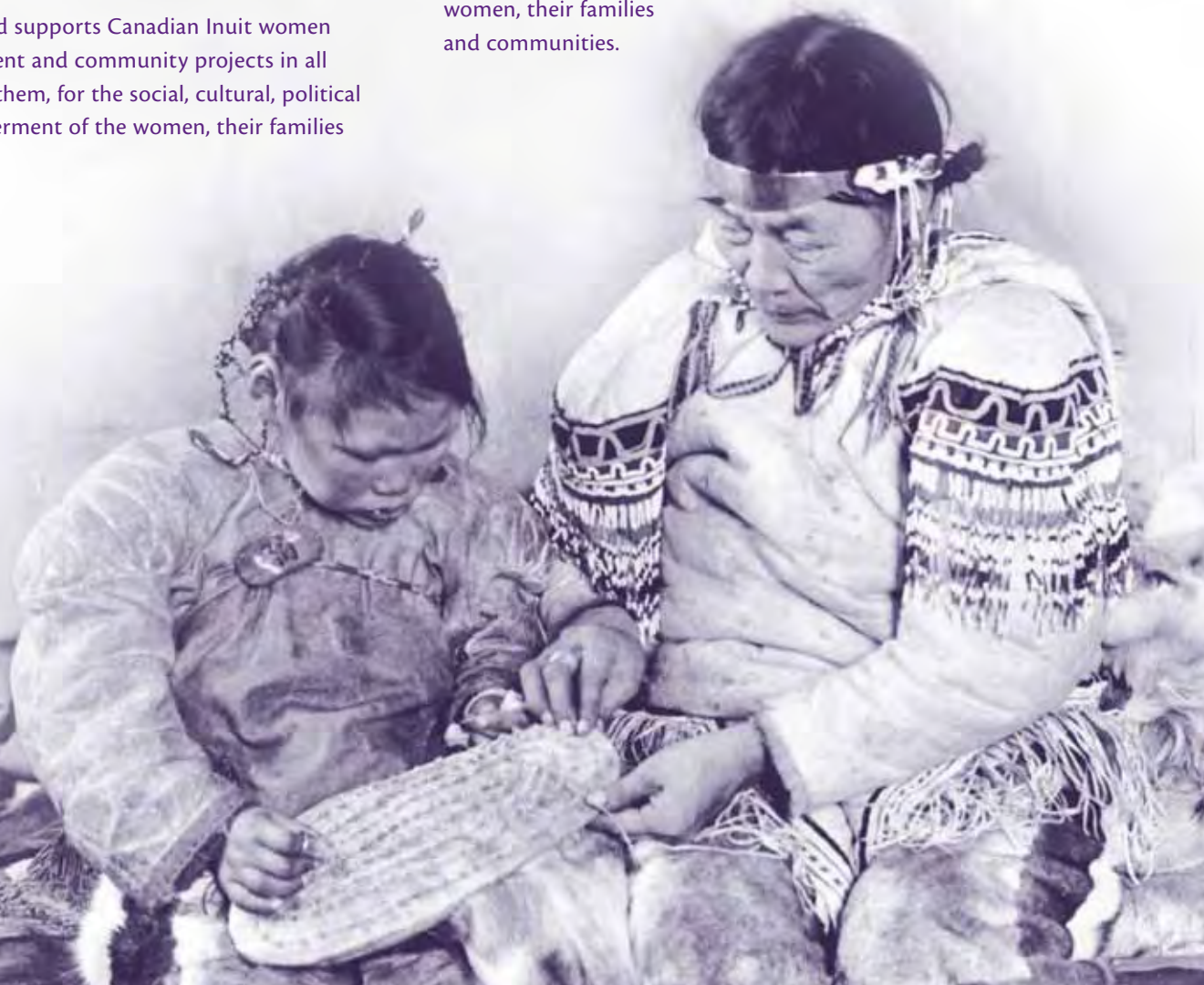
Pauktuutit's vision is to be a dynamic, visible, influential and prosperous organization, supporting Inuit women and providing leadership, voice and excellence for the betterment of Inuit women, their families and communities.

MOTHER AND CHILD SEWING

Passing on knowledge and culture to the children and next generation.

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PAUKTUUTIT MANDATE

1.

Promote the rights and interests of Inuit women and children;

2.

Provide the Inuit women of Canada with a united voice;

3.

Work towards better social, economic and political conditions for Inuit women;

4.

Work for the betterment of individual, family and community health conditions through advocacy and program action;

5.

Encourage Inuit women to take their rightful place in society;

6.

Promote equity for the independent view of Inuit women in all levels of Canadian governmental and non-governmental structures;

7.

Motivate Inuit women to realize their potential as individuals and as a group;

8.

Promote self-confidence and self-reliance amongst Inuit women;

9.

Provide resources to ensure that our children are raised with Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)—
Inuit values, heritage, culture and language;

10.

Encourage the involvement of Inuit women in all levels of Canadian society and

11.

Facilitate collaboration between Inuit women and other aboriginal peoples.

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Thank you David Boulton, for undertaking the research and writing for both the original and the revised version of The Inuit Way. Thank you Anna Tyers for excellence in graphic design and technical support for both versions. David and Anna worked together on the initial Inuit Way, and collaborated closely with me to revise and republish the material—a valued professional association and friendship.

This new production of The Inuit Way was translated into syllabics by Leonie Kunnuk. Thanks to the Pauktuutit staff who assisted in the review of the draft text. It has been both a pleasure and privilege to work with all of those responsible for the production of this remarkable document.

*Jennifer Dickson
Executive Director
April 2006*



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien

Canada



More than ten thousand copies of *The Inuit Way* have been provided to a broad range of interested individuals and organizations. It has been widely acclaimed as the single best resource to introduce Inuit culture to others and has been cited in such important resources as the 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Canada's Arctic has changed substantially since 1989 and Pauktuutit felt that it was time to update the publication for the growing number of Canadians who request this important resource. First-time visitors to the Arctic will learn many new things about Inuit from this publication, while veteran northerners may broaden their knowledge and understanding of the cultural underpinnings of modern Inuit society.

Inuit culture is not monolithic but rather varies from region to region, community-to-community, and can even vary in practice from Inuk to Inuk. Nor is it a culture frozen in time. Inuit adaptation is perhaps our most notable trait, and this characteristic continues to serve us well in the

modern context. As a result, certain aspects of the culture described here may either be expressed in an altered manner in some regions or in fact may not be found at all. In this publication we have attempted to identify some of the regional variations in the culture, and invite you to check other resources for specific characteristics of a region or better yet, ask an Inuk about our culture.

For interested readers, a list of selected readings is provided in back of the book. While far from exhaustive, the list provides some good background on a wide range of issues involving Inuit culture, current issues and the relationship between Inuit and non-Inuit.

1. The organization name was changed to 'Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada' in 2005.
2. The term 'Inuit' means 'the people' in Inuktitut, the Inuit language. It is the term Inuit use to refer to themselves. 'Inuk' is the singular form of Inuit i.e. "*I met an Inuk from Pond Inlet at the airport*". The term 'Eskimo' is no longer in common use and is considered offensive by some Inuit. The Inuktitut language varies considerably across the Arctic. While Inuit from within the same region are likely able to communicate with other Inuit in their region or perhaps the adjoining regions, some areas such as Nunatsiavut and Inuvialuit may pose challenges to Inuit from other regions.

Inuit are not to be confused with the Innu, a First Nations People who live in Labrador and parts of Quebec. They have a distinct culture, language and history.



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A LITTLE
HISTORY

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Prior to contact with Europeans, Inuit were entirely self-sufficient. They lived in small, autonomous, nomadic groups, dependent upon hunting, fishing and gathering for survival and for all their physical needs. Customary law was followed, characterized by its informal nature, flexibility, and its reliance upon social pressures to ensure that people acted appropriately. Inuit had developed a rich material culture, based primarily upon hunting and fishing technology. Spirituality centered upon beliefs in animal and human-like spirits, including the spirits of deceased relatives. A variety of taboos affected many aspects of life and a rich mythology explained both the natural and the supernatural world (See Sedna insert).

As contact with outsiders³ increased in the twentieth century, Inuit culture began to alter and adapt to the modern world. In the early 1950's, the pressure to change increased dramatically as Inuit were moved into permanent settlements by the federal government. Permanent settlements provided access to schools, health care and material attractions of the modern world. Some families moved to avoid famine and the hardships of life on the land and to take advantage of the benefits that community life promised.

Despite adopting various features of modern life and southern culture, many Inuit continue to live according to traditional values that arise out of their own rich cultural heritage. While differences exist among modern Inuit as to how closely they follow traditional values, all Inuit are proud of their culture and recognize the importance of keeping it alive. Many Inuit continue to have close ties to the land and consider their relationship to the land to be essential to their culture and to their survival as a distinct people.

The legend of Sedna

The legend of Sedna is a well-known Inuit legend. As in many legends, it contains epic struggles that reflect the challenges and tensions that exist within a culture. The legend of Sedna provides insight into how Inuit culture values the family and children very highly, and yet due to the challenging environment in which they exist, are sometimes are forced to make difficult decisions. The overpowering role of nature is always evident, as is the presence of sometimes malevolent forces.

According to one version of this legend, Sedna was a beautiful Inuit girl who was pressured into marriage by her father. Unknown to Sedna, her new husband was actually a raven who fed her fish and kept her in a nest on an island far away from her family. Her father, who missed Sedna terribly, went in his kayak to rescue her but the raven, with his special powers, called up a storm. The father panicked and pushed Sedna into the cold water. As she clung to the kayak, her frozen fingers and hands were broken off and fell into the sea where they became seals, whales and other sea mammals. Sedna could no longer struggle and sank into the water where she became a goddess of the sea. Her frustration and anger continue to be expressed through the creation of storms and high seas. Inuit hunters have treated Sedna with respect for centuries to ensure she will allow Inuit to harvest her bounty. Today some hunters still sprinkle a few drops of fresh water into the mouths of sea mammals they harvest to thank Sedna for her generosity.



Illustration by Robert Ramsey

MODERN COMMUNITY LIFE

Canada's 56,000 Inuit live in mostly small isolated communities of fewer than 1,000 people ranging from the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories, to Nunatsiavut—the eastern coastal regions of northern Labrador. A few communities are larger. For example, Kuujuaq in Nunavik, Rankin Inlet in the Kivalliq region and Inuvik in Inuvialuit, each have between 1,200 and 2,500 people. Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut boasts a population of 7000 to 8000. And well over 4,000 Inuit now live in southern urban areas including St. John's, Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Edmonton.

The world Inuit live in has changed substantially since the original *Inuit Way* was published. All four Inuit land claim agreements have now been signed. This accomplishment is the result of a long, complex process whereby Inuit and federal, provincial and territorial governments negotiated comprehensive land claim agreements. These agreements provide Inuit with a number of benefits including rights to

land, cash payments and the establishment of new political and economic entities that ensure these land claim agreements are fulfilled.

These agreements provide important tools and resources that enable Inuit to exercise a great degree of control over their lives, both in the present and in the future. For example, in Nunavut, there is now a public government responsible to all the people of the territory, including the 85% majority who are of Inuit heritage⁴. In Nunavik (Northern Quebec), a self-government agreement provides extensive local control over many aspects of life in the territory. Self-government will also soon be a reality for the Inuit living in Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador).

Structures have been established to ensure the Inuktitut language is kept alive and strong and Inuit culture is retained and strengthened. In fact, Inuktitut is one of the very few Aboriginal languages in the world that is not in



Nain Labrador c.1910
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danger of being lost. For example, the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut conducts much of its business in Inuktitut, and the Government of Nunavut has adopted the principles of Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ), an official policy to engage Inuit traditional knowledge in government operations and procedures. Steps such as this ensure that Inuit language and culture is not relegated to a museum but is embraced as a vital and living culture that continues to evolve and guide Inuit in the modern world.

Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)

Don't let the phrase scare you. It simply refers, in Inuktitut, the Inuit language, to the Inuit way of knowing, or traditional knowledge. Inuit culture is alive and well in Canada's modern north. There is no better indication of this ongoing vitality than IQ. IQ has been adopted as an official policy of the Government of Nunavut, in its commitment to develop practices and policies that are consistent with the culture, values and language of the Inuit majority. For example, certain workplace values, including teamwork, cooperation, consensus-based decision making and conservation are actively promoted. These are consistent with Inuit values and enable Inuit to be more comfortable and 'at home' in the workplace. By embracing IQ, the Government of Nunavut has succeeded in ensuring Inuit cultural values are an important element in the daily life of government employees.

Inuit communities are dynamic and life flows according to seasonal cycles that are tied closely to the land. In the spring, as the days begin to lengthen, the excitement is

tangible in communities as people eagerly look forward to going out on the land to fish and spend time camping. Summer, with its abundant sunlight, is treasured as an opportunity for families to spend time together at a camp far from their communities, engaging in many activities that their ancestors have followed since time immemorial. It is a special time when children learn much of their culture from their elders. Autumn tends to be a time when people get back to more routine aspects of community life—work and school—while they anticipate the early onset of the long, cold, dark winter.

Except for the brief lull during summer when many families are out on the land, Inuit communities are bustling, active places that tend to be both dynamic and hospitable. Common activities are community feasts, bingo, sporting events such as hockey and the constant visiting that lets people catch up on what is going on with family and friends. Many communities have active church groups, which organize events and help provide social services to the community. A typical community has a nursing centre, a police station, at least one church, one or more retail outlets, schools, a hamlet (municipal) office, an airport, and various organizations including a hunter and trapper organization, a women's group, a day care, a local radio station and a selection of small businesses.

Inuit culture remains strong and permeates all activities of northern life. Children in day care are taught Inuktitut and learn traditional games and crafts. The curricula followed in many regional school systems contain a substantial focus on Inuit cultural, language and historical content. There are many opportunities for Inuit youth to go out on the land to learn traditional land skills including hunting and fishing, how to travel safely, how to make clothing and the importance of treating the land and its resources with respect.

Inuit have changed in many ways since they moved from the land into modern permanent communities.

Inuit have changed in many ways since they moved from the land into modern permanent communities. They are avid hockey fans, connect with the world via satellite phone, TV and the Internet, love fast food and action movies and are actively involved in making their communities better places to live. There are Inuit nurses, pilots, presidents of successful corporations, members of Parliament and legislative assemblies, Senators, lawyers and premiers of territories.

For the first time visitor to the north, these first impressions imply that Inuit have thoroughly embraced the benefits of modern life. This is true but it is important to note that in doing so they have not left their complex and ancient culture behind. Beyond the initial first impressions are a people who maintain a very strong tie to their traditions, people who have distinct values and mannerisms that are different from those of the visitor. Picture this image—a lawyer with a briefcase and wearing sealskin kamiks (boots), or the member of the Legislative Assembly who debates the fine points of the annual budget during the week, then takes her children out on the land to fish and camp on the weekend. Inuit have one kamik in the modern world, and they also have a solid foot in their distinct traditional culture. We hope *The Inuit Way* is a useful tool to help you begin to understand Inuit culture and assist in the building of a bridge between the two cultures.

TRADITIONAL INUIT LIFE

Prior to living in the communities, Inuit lived in small, family-based groupings that traveled seasonally in pursuit of food. These groups relied upon caribou, fish, sea mammals and



TOP
*Emelia Merkuratsuk (born Menzel).
1896–1985. Picture taken c.1980.
Emelia's great grand-daughter Heidi Langille,
born Metcalfe, works at Pauktuutit as
Early Learning & Child Care Coordinator.*
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BOTTOM
*Former Pauktuutit president Mary Palliser
at the November 2004 AGM with Tony Hodge,
Nuclear Waste Management Organization.*
©PAUKTUUTIT ARCHIVES

Responsibilities for many facets of Inuit life were no longer held within the family but were assumed by agencies and anonymous government employees often living in distant cities. These factors caused considerable stress and tension with Inuit society and created a legacy of social ills that continue to resonate today.

TRADITIONAL LAW

For many years, the customary laws of Canada's Aboriginal peoples were ignored by the legal system because they did not fit into modern legal concepts of how laws should work. Aboriginal customary laws were not usually written down, nor were there people who were given special authority to enforce these laws. As well, punishments for misbehavior were often applied unevenly against offenders. However, these societies did have clear codes of behaviour that were well understood by all members of the society. People who did not follow these codes could expect to face a range of reactions from the community depending upon the severity of the offense. These societies were self-governing and able to maintain a primarily stable and peaceable existence.

Inuit society governed the behaviour of its members with a complex set of values, beliefs and taboos that clearly defined the expectations of how people should behave. These rules of behaviour, and ways to deal with infractions, were passed on to younger generations through oral traditions of the group and by following examples set by older members.

NO FORMAL AUTHORITY

There was no formal authority among the Inuit to decide whether a person's behaviour warranted a response from the group, what penalties were to be imposed, or to ensure that penalties were actually applied against the offending party. The entire community was responsible for the maintenance of peace and order. If there were some question as to the appropriate penalty to be imposed, community

elders would be consulted to obtain their opinion concerning how a similar situation was handled in the past. In cases involving serious threats to the community, adult members would meet to discuss the matter publicly and arrive at a group decision as to what should be done.

FOCUS OF CUSTOMARY LAW

The primary difference between Canadian law and Inuit customary law is a matter of focus. Historically, Canadian law has sought to punish the offender and focuses primarily on the offence committed rather than the particular details associated with the offender or the victim. The priority within Inuit customary law was not to necessarily punish the offender or provide 'justice' per se but rather to ensure that the community returned to a state of harmony, peace and equilibrium. The history of the offender, details surrounding the particular incident, and the amount of harm inflicted upon the victim, all played important roles in the determination of an appropriate penalty. Individuals who were considered to be of particular importance to the well being of the community, such as a primary hunter, may have been treated with greater leniency. This was due to the belief that the imposition of a more serious penalty would not be in the best interest of the community. Above all, it was felt that any penalty imposed must not worsen an already difficult situation.

Within the community there was general agreement on what was expected of individuals in terms of their behaviour, how they conducted their lives and what the commonly held values of the community were. The spiritual beliefs of the people also clearly outlined how people should behave with other people as well as with the natural and supernatural world. As a result, everyone within the group knew that certain behaviours would not be tolerated, particularly if that behaviour threatened the peace, security and stability of the group.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Within such small, intimate groups there existed many opportunities for conflicts and tensions to arise. The end of the winter season was a time when tensions would flare up, as everyone had been living in close quarters with extended family members for many months. As well, food supplies were likely to be running low and people's ability to pack up and leave an uncomfortable situation was restricted.

Many violent acts that occurred seemed to have been caused directly or indirectly by disagreements over women. However, a variety of other behaviours could also bring about socially imposed penalties. Among the most common types of behaviour considered improper were lying, stealing, laziness, excessive mocking or gossiping, being considered volatile or unpredictable, jealousy, and excessive bragging.

METHODS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Inuit dealt with unacceptable behaviour in several ways. The most common reaction to such behaviour was to ignore the situation, or to mock, shame and gossip about the person who was acting inappropriately. To someone from another culture, these means of dealing with misbehavior may not appear to be very harsh punishment. However, due to the small size of the camps, people had little privacy and were in frequent contact with all other community members. As well, there was a great degree of interdependence among people, based upon both social and economic realities. This interdependency and intimacy meant that when someone broke one of the social rules, everyone in the camp would soon know about it. Since people had little contact with others beyond the immediate group, they would be highly sensitive to open disapproval. Perhaps food would not be shared as readily, or an invitation to go hunting would not be extended. As a result, these informal methods of social control were very effective in maintaining

the basic peace and harmony of the group and in ensuring that people generally behaved in accordance with community expectations.

Ignoring the Problem/Withdrawal

In instances where there were minor problems with a person's behaviour, such as someone being rude, a common reaction would be for the 'victim' to simply ignore the situation and continue as if nothing had happened. By choosing this method of dealing with the problem, people would hope that the problem would simply disappear or resolve itself without any active intervention on their part. If the problem persisted long enough, sanctions would be called upon to correct the situation.

Gossip

As in all societies, gossip served several important purposes in Inuit society and was used both by individuals and by the group in response to a wide variety of behaviours. Typically, gossip provided an important means for people to pass on information and for all members to learn about acceptable behaviour. People who were considered lazy, greedy, overly self-centered or demanding were good candidates for a gossip campaign. However, the alleged misbehavior did not necessarily even have to take place. In fact, the person gossiping might be just as guilty of acting inappropriately as the accused person, and had simply deflected attention and thereby avoided detection. Community gossip acted to let the accused person know that their behaviour was considered inappropriate and that it would not be tolerated further. It also let the offender know that the behaviour should stop before more severe action would be taken.

There were specific rules attached to gossiping however, and breaking these rules could put the gossiper in an uncomfortable position. For example, there were limits on how

much gossiping a person could do. A person who was considered to be gossiping too much or too cruelly, could have the table turned on them and be gossiped about. They also risked violence at the hands of the person they were gossiping about if it was considered that they had gone beyond acceptable limits.

Today, gossip continues to be an active means of encouraging people to follow acceptable rules of behaviour. It acts to reaffirm the values of the society and keeps everyone attuned to what these values entail. Gossiping also provides a release for pent up aggression and frustration that people may feel, while limiting the physical damage that is done. It is less disruptive to gossip about someone you may dislike than it is to punch him or her in the nose.

Shaming or Embarrassing

Shaming or embarrassing a person was another effective means of altering a person's behaviour. For example, if a man were thought to be lazy or not contributing enough to the camp, it would be considered appropriate for someone to go over to his area and start doing some of his chores for him. In effect, this would be saying *"Not only do I have to do all my own work, but it seems that I should do yours too as it is not being done"*. This would place the accused in a vulnerable position because it would appear that his lack of effort placed unfair demands on others, a decidedly unacceptable behaviour.



Ridicule

Ridicule was also used to control people's behaviour. People whose behaviour was deemed inappropriate would be made the brunt of jokes and teased by the community, often in the context of gossiping. This joking ranged from gently poking fun at someone to quite crude and insulting jokes made at their expense. Again, if someone joked too much or for too long, they risked incurring the wrath of their subject, or for they themselves to become the subject of gossip and ridicule.

Social Ostracism

In situations where these relatively mild forms of social pressure were ineffective in altering behaviour, stronger options were available to the community. One of the more serious methods of inducing a change in behaviour was expulsion or ostracism of the offender. Social ostracism isolated the person from full participation within the social life of the camp. While not completely ignoring the person, people would not seek out the offending person's company or they would greatly limit their interaction with the person. Attempts on the part of the ostracized person to obtain information or start a conversation would likely be met with a disinterested and non-obligatory "eeee". The ostracized person would be ignored to the point where they were made keenly aware that they had acted inappropriately and that their ostracism would continue until the community was convinced their behaviour had changed and would not recur.

Once the group decided that the person's behaviour had changed and that the offence would not likely be repeated, normal relations would be re-established.

Physical Ostracism

If the problematic behaviour persisted, or if there was a more serious infraction such as the continued violation of taboos or bullying, the offender could be physically ostracized from the group. This would most often take the form of the camp moving in the absence of the offender or without their knowledge. This was a particularly serious sanction because without the social and economic safety and security provided by the group, an individual would be in a very precarious situation. Once the group decided that the person's behaviour had changed and that the offence would not likely be repeated, normal relations would be re-established. People, and even entire families, who persisted in acting inappropriately, might be kept on the outside of the group for very long periods of time.

Other Means of Social Control

Inuit also had several more formalized means of resolving disputes and conflicts. These methods most always involved men, as it seems that women resolved most of their disputes by the informal methods described above. These more formal methods included fistfights, wrestling and song duels. It was the right of all men to choose one of these methods for resolving a dispute. It was very difficult for anyone to refuse a challenge and still maintain his reputation and status within the camp.

Fist Fights

For fistfights, the opponents would strip down to their waists in a public place and take turns punching each other in the temple or in the shoulder. No resistance or attempt to avoid the blow was offered. The fistfight would continue until one of the men gave up. Once someone gave up, the issue was considered resolved and further antagonism was unlikely.

Wrestling

Wrestling matches were conducted in much the same manner as fist fights. Two men would strip down and begin to wrestle in front of the entire camp. The victor of the wrestling match would be the man who wins the dispute by proving his superior strength.

Song Duels

Certain Inuit groups, including some from the Central Arctic and Greenland, used ridicule in the form of song duels as a means of conflict resolution. For example, two men who had failed to resolve a conflict by other means would secretly compose derisive songs about their adversary. The men's wives would also learn these songs. The whole camp gathered in a large igloo to observe the song duel. The wives would sing their husband's song in turn, while the husband would beat a drum and dance in the middle of the igloo. The entire community would observe the competition and thoroughly enjoy the wit and humour of the songs. Usually there would be no specific mention of the particular reason for the conflict in the song. The contest was really comparing the character and resourcefulness of the two opponents.

Each contestant would disparage his opponent's character, sexual vitality, honesty, strength, ability to hunt and virtually any aspect of a person's life where they would be sensitive to criticism. The person who had composed the most cutting, humorous and witty song received the most positive response from the audience and would be considered the winner. This would effectively end the conflict and life would return to normal.

This method of dispute resolution proved to be effective for several reasons. The formal nature of the duel required that the contestants think very carefully about what they were going to say in their songs and, incidentally, about the cause of the conflict. This tended to prevent sudden, impulsive actions that might further jeopardize the peace and stability of the community. The song duels also allowed private disputes to be brought into the public sphere where the group could consider the issues and be informed of what was happening in the community. Once a winner had been determined in a song duel, there was less likelihood that the conflict would continue, because the settlement had been made publicly. Thus the duel acted as a catharsis and cleared the air of aggressive feelings in a relatively safe manner. The loser, if not satisfied with the outcome, could still resort to a fistfight whereupon the issue would be more concretely settled, but he would also risk being known as a sore loser.

FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL RATHER THAN THE OFFENCE

There were many details surrounding a particular event that could influence the corrective action the community took. The identity of the offender in terms of his position within the community was taken into consideration. For example, if the best hunter in the camp offended everyone, it would be unlikely that his punishment would be as severe as a person of less importance to the group's overall well being.

This practice may at first seem unfair to people unfamiliar with Inuit culture but it has a practical rationale. If a good hunter committed an offence and was physically ostracized, not only would the hunter be punished but the entire camp would suffer as well, because they had lost the services of an important provider of food. This does not mean such people were beyond reproach, but rather that they would more likely receive more lenient treatment at the hands of the community. The focus of attention was on who the offender was and their role in the community rather than on what offence had been committed. The basic rule was that the punishment must not cause more problems for the group than the initial infraction.

Inuit society was usually quite stable and peaceful. As described above, occasional violation of social rules was met with individual and community reactions that served to correct the offending behaviour. The central feature of this order and peacefulness was the close-knit, interdependent nature of the group and the fact that many people in the camp were directly related to each other. Informal social control mechanisms of the Inuit worked well in such a situation.

CUSTOMARY LAW IN THE MODERN PERIOD

The influence of Inuit customary law steadily eroded as traders, missionaries and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) began to establish a permanent presence in the Arctic and to exert fundamental changes to the Inuit world. The primary goal of the RCMP was to bring Canadian law to the north to replace traditional laws that existed. At first the effects of their efforts were minimal as there were only limited, seasonal contacts between Inuit and the very few white people who stayed in the north all year round. Gradually however, Inuit began to spend increasing amounts of time in and near the small outputs to trade, more white people stayed all year, and Inuit began to incorporate elements of southern culture into their own.

Inuit culture and customary law then began to undergo rapid and radical change, as Inuit began to move permanently into settlements. Canadian law enforcement agencies, including police and the court system, assumed many of the responsibilities of traditional law and acted as the main mediators in disputes. Such offences as crimes of violence or against property were now handled by these agencies, with little significant consultation with the community involved. As a result, Inuit were forced to accept and try to understand such alien legal concepts as: placing accused people in jail; conducting public confrontations between lawyers and people accused of crimes in order to establish their guilt; and the punishment of guilty people to repay their debt to society. Until recently, Inuit were allowed no input into how offenders in their communities were dealt with.

Traditional methods of social control such as gossip, withdrawal and ostracism, proved to be less effective in larger, permanent settlements. The mixture of people from various regions and the 'safety net' of social assistance affected the close bonds and the mutual dependence that had characterized life in traditional camps. Offenders became less dependent on a small circle of extended kin for both social contact and economic security. The threat of physical ostracism was no longer a matter of life and death.

This said, Inuit in modern communities continue to be quite sensitive to public criticism and will usually alter their behaviour in the face of gossip or social ostracism. Despite the fact that modern Inuit society is not as cohesive and homogenous as it once was, there continues to be a widely held understanding among Inuit as to what is expected of them in terms of their behaviour.

Community Involvement with Offenders

Inuit have been attempting to gain more influence into the way offenders are treated by the legal system. Throughout the Arctic, Inuit, and particularly elders, are acting as intermediaries between young people who have broken the law and the court systems. They feel that it is more important to treat the offender rather than the offence and that details surrounding the offence should strongly influence the penalty imposed upon the offender.

Innovative programs have been undertaken to reflect this position. In the Inuvialuit region, for example, the *Young Offenders' Act* allows members of the community to intervene on behalf of young people who have committed minor offences. Rather than appearing before a judge for sentencing, certain offenders may stay in the community and be counseled by local people who review the issues and develop a means to deal with the problem without making the situation worse. Recommendations often include alternative measures to encourage the offender to change offending behaviour. For example, if the offender is male, community intervention may allow him to go out on the land with an experienced hunter to give him time to think about his problems and to re-establish his bonds with Inuit culture. By keeping the offender within the community, traditional means of social control can be used effectively to ensure that the behaviour will not be repeated.

3. Inuit have developed various terms to refer to white people. Qallunaat (Igloolik and the high Arctic), kabloona (Baker Lake) are the most common. There is some debate as to its origin, and geographic variations as to what the term means. It may mean 'non-skin clothing', referring to the woven materials worn by the early sailors, or it may stem from variations of an Inuktitut word 'qablunaq', the bone behind the eyebrows. Apparently early Inuit felt that a distinguishing feature of European sailors was their prominent eyebrows and thus referred to them as Qaplunaat.
4. Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement directs the territorial government to develop a workforce that more fully reflects the percentage of Inuit who live in the territory.



C H I L D R E A R I N G

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Eskimo woman and children, Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, 1929.
J.D. Soper / © LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / BA-101309 / detail

Inuit methods of raising children differ considerably from those in southern Canadian traditions. To the outside observer, Inuit children enjoy a substantial amount of freedom, as indicated by the fact that when they are not in school, children stay up much later than southern children, they are often fed when they are hungry and not according to a set meal schedule, and are disciplined in a different manner by their parents. To the uninformed observer, Inuit parents may appear indifferent or overly lax with their children. Again cultural differences account for this misconception.

THE CHILD'S SPIRIT

Inuit believe that when a child is born, the 'soul' or spirit of a recently deceased relative is taken on by the newborn. The newborn is then named after this relative. This 'soul' manifests in the child in a variety of ways, including certain physical characteristics, skills or personality traits. Since the child is, in a sense, part of the person after whom they have been named, they are deserving of the same respect and treatment as this person received while they were alive. This means that the child knows when they are hungry or tired and in general what they want. It would not be considered appropriate, under these circumstances, to tell a child what to do, as this would be the equivalent of ordering an elder or another adult about, thus violating an important social rule in Inuit culture.

DISCIPLINE

These beliefs regarding children have resulted in Inuit parents allowing their children a much greater degree of freedom than most non-Inuit would be comfortable with. As long as they do not harm themselves, other people, or damage important items such as food or hunting equipment, there are few limits placed on the activities of children. This should not be interpreted as the parents being overly permissive,

because the practice includes certain limitations as well. For example, a child may receive affectionate cuddling or choice bits of food when he requests it, however, a child who is pouting or throwing a tantrum may be ignored. To do otherwise would be considered intrusive and would possibly slow the development of the child's ability to reason.

A large amount of freedom does not mean that Inuit children are not disciplined. Young children will be restrained if they persist in a potentially dangerous activity. Subtle verbal clues by older members of the family indicate to the child when their behaviour is inappropriate. Teasing is also used as an effective means of drawing attention to a child's poor behaviour. Older children are rarely physically disciplined but when this does occur it is, as in many cultures, more often an expression of the parent's frustration or anger than a real effort to change the child's behaviour. A more effective means of guiding an older child is to talk to another person about the child's behaviour within hearing distance of the child rather than to have a direct confrontation.

BIRTH OF A CHILD

Traditionally, the mother was often assisted in giving birth by an older woman experienced in childbirth. This older woman, in addition to lending assistance during the birth, may have also looked for clues that would indicate the future and character of the child. After the baby was born, the child assumed its place on the family sleeping platform next to the mother. From the day of birth, the baby was in almost constant contact with the mother, either in the hood of her parka, or nestled in the front of the parka feeding.

The birth of each child continues to be an event that is eagerly anticipated and cause for celebration. Soon after birth the baby is usually given a Christian first name and the father's Inuit surname. The baby still spends much of

Inuit believe that when a child is born, the 'soul' or spirit of a recently deceased relative is taken on by the newborn.

its early life tucked into the mother's traditional parka (amauti) and remains the favourite of the family. Older girls often assume some of the duties associated with raising young children.

It is interesting to note that while many Inuit babies today are born in hospitals or nursing stations, there is strong support among Inuit women for the return of traditional midwifery practices to assist in birthing. This support is coming to fruition as Inuit midwives may now assist Inuit women give birth in several regions across the north.

BREAST-FEEDING

Traditionally, breast-feeding lasted for a long time relative to general Canadian practices. A child would usually be weaned when the mother became pregnant with her next child. This was three years on average but it was not uncommon to have children as old as five years still being suckled if there were no younger siblings to displace them. Weaning was a difficult time for children as it heralded an end to the period when they were the center of the family's attention.

In modern settlements, breast-feeding is still widely practiced. It usually continues up for up three years but it is not unusual for a child of five to seek, and receive, the breast when it is requested. Bottle-feeding is common but it seems that breast-feeding, with its attendant convenience and health benefits, is becoming increasingly popular again.

Once weaned, the child was gradually encouraged to develop more adult behaviours such as self-control, patience, generosity and consideration for others. Instruction in these behaviours was carefully directed towards younger children. The child was expected to become more helpful around the home and to begin to learn skills that would help them later in life. In general, girls were introduced to these responsibilities earlier than boys and were expected to begin to assume responsibilities towards their younger siblings as early as four years of age. Children were also taught to show respect to elders, to be sensitive to their needs and to listen to their advice. As the child matured, they were allowed to either accept or reject the advice of older people without fear of criticism.

Children are much loved by Inuit. Households who do not have children are considered to be unfortunate and cold. Women often continued to have children right up to menopause. When children grow older, they continue to provide valuable assistance in maintaining the household and helping to support their parents in their old age. The youngest child is considered to be 'charming' and receives an unending flow of affectionate attention and indulgences. In a culture where expression of affection is restrained, young children and babies provide an outlet for relatively uninhibited demonstrations of affection.



TOILET TRAINING

Toilet training practices have changed little since traditional times. Young children were encouraged to try and relieve themselves at regular intervals, i.e. after rising in the morning, before and after meals, before going to bed. There was no stressful atmosphere attached to this process, as is sometimes the case in the broader Canadian culture. The child would be toilet trained when they were ready and no sooner. Although diapers have made this process more convenient for the parents, children are still largely allowed to develop at their own rate.

EDUCATION

Traditionally, Inuit children learned by carefully observing and following the examples set by their elders. An older person would spend time with a young person of the same gender and show them by example how to master various skills. As soon as the child gained a basic skill, his 'teacher' would encourage him to innovate and try to make things on his own. There was no particular time set aside for this education to take place. Teaching occurred when it was convenient and lasted as long as the child's interest held or until other business demanded the attention of the adult. The focus of Inuit education was learning by individual effort and observation rather than by instruction. Inuit children continue to learn all traditional skills by the attentive observation of an older, more experienced person. Nowadays, there are so many distractions for young people in modern communities that there is concern among adult Inuit that younger people are not learning enough about their traditional Inuit ways.

Attendance in modern schools is mandatory for all Inuit children. In the past these schools used a very structured curriculum transplanted from the south. Problems arose from this system however. The values taught by the schools

were found to conflict with traditional values the children learned at home. For example, Inuit children are taught at home to be non-competitive and not to ask people direct questions. The modern school system however, emphasized competition and encouraged children to question their teachers and each other. As well, there was a time when Inuit children were punished for speaking their own language at school. While this no longer occurs, many Inuit have expressed the need to have more influence on what is taught to their children and how this material is taught. They feel more emphasis should be placed upon Inuit culture and language throughout the educational system from day care to post-secondary institutions. Over the past decade, there have been substantial changes in the education system. Increasing numbers of Inuit are now becoming teachers and the curricula have largely been adapted to better reflect Inuit culture, language and values.

BONDS BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS

The bonds between children and adults are quite fluid in Inuit society in comparison to those in the larger Canadian society. Children are commonly seen darting around town visiting various households, staying for a quick visit, and then dashing off to visit another home.

While their right to seek attention and favours from any adult may seem like paradise for children, there is a down side. It can also seem like being surrounded by babysitters, as all adults can exercise authority over children in terms of discipline, instruction and disapproval for inappropriate behaviour. It can therefore be difficult for children to do things unobserved by adults. While any member of the community can influence the behaviour of the child, members of the immediate family continue to have the most responsibility for and authority over their own children.

ADOPTION

This fluidity of bonds between adults and children extends into adoption practices. A child who loses his natural parents carries no stigma in Inuit society. Orphans are readily accepted into another household, usually that of a close relative. There are also other methods of adopting children. For example, if a couple were unable to have children themselves, they could ask another couple who had several children, if they could adopt the next child they had. This request would usually be made via the elders of the adoptive parents. Generally, the elder would initially make such a request to close relatives but if this avenue proved fruitless, they could try more distant relatives or friends. Once adopted into the new family, the child would know who their biological parents were but their primary loyalty would be to the adoptive parents. The biological mother would often retain a special relationship with the child and often play an active role in their lives. Traditional adoption practices have now been legally recognized by northern governments and usually require only that the government be informed in writing when traditional adoptions occur.

FAVOURITE CHILDREN

While all children are much loved and desired by Inuit, not all children are loved equally. It is not uncommon for people to have their 'favourite' child or relative. Such special affection is usually stated in mild terms such as loving one child 'a little bit more' or that a child is 'particularly kissable'. In fact, traditionally such deep emotions were considered to be difficult and possibly harmful because during periods of separation from one's favourite child, one could fret and worry about the child too much.

Modern Inuit childrearing practices continue to have a strong basis in tradition. The main characteristics of these practices include: a deep love of children; a great degree of freedom for children relative to southern Canadian practices; a preference for indirect means of guiding a child's behaviour; teaching by example and observation; patience; consistency; and using humour to distract a child from poor behaviour. These methods have long been effective means of childrearing for Inuit. Their children developed self-reliance, discipline and assumed adult-like tasks much earlier in their development than children raised in many other cultures. Child neglect is uncommon in Inuit society. The fluid nature of the bonds between children and adults helps ensure that all children are wanted and cared for properly.

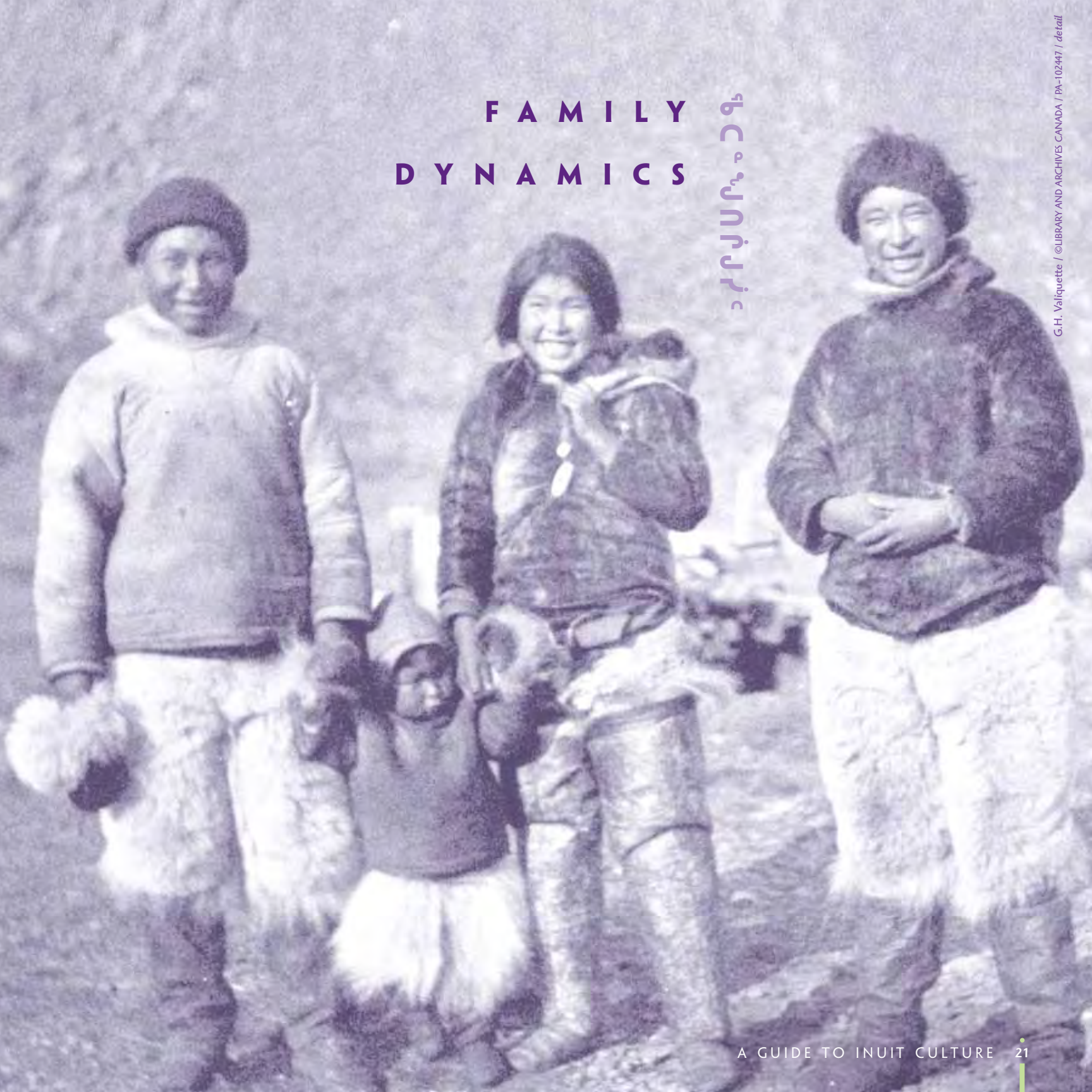


Mrs. Heslop / ©LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / e002213334 / detail



FAMILY DYNAMICS

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The traditional family grouping of Inuit throughout the Arctic included a father, mother, their children, and often other relatives such as grandparents and possibly an unmarried uncle or aunt. The membership and size of the family unit was flexible and could change quite rapidly.

Although Inuit spent much of their time in camps containing various numbers of other related families, there was always a distinction made between immediate family members and 'others'. Occasionally this distinction could become blurred. For example, it was a practice among the Inuit of the Central Arctic for two families who were very good friends to build a double igloo in order to be closer together. The amount of food sharing and general cooperation between families could resemble the degree found in a single extended family.

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE PRACTICES

Marriages took place when a girl was approximately 14 years of age (or sometimes younger) and when a man entered early adulthood, around 20 years of age. Marriages were usually arranged by the parents of the couple and often reflected a desire to strengthen the bonds between the two families. It was not uncommon for people to arrange marriages for their



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PHOTO 43332

babies, sometimes even before they were born. Marriages arranged this early were not as binding as those arranged for more mature people. In some parts of the Arctic, it was traditional that a man would come into camp and 'steal' his new wife away, sometimes throwing her over his shoulder or onto his komatiq (sled) and begin to leave the camp. This was symbolic of the fact that the wife's

family didn't want her to leave nor did she want to leave. After much yelling and laughing, the newlywed couple would leave her family and join her husband's family in his home territory.

THE HUSBAND

The basic family unit in Inuit society relied on tradition and cooperation between husband and wife. The husband had primary authority outside the home and had responsibility for being the primary provider of food, making tools and weapons, constructing shelters, tending to dogs, and looking after the general welfare and safety of the family. He made most decisions concerning when and where the family would move and when would be the best time to visit the trading post.

The husband took an active role in childrearing but was overshadowed in his influence by his wife. If the couple had a son, the father would begin to pay more attention to him than his daughters and spend more time teaching him the skills and knowledge he would need to survive. The husband was considered a good man if he was a good provider, industrious, modest, generous and generally behaved according to the Inuit ideal of adult behaviour.

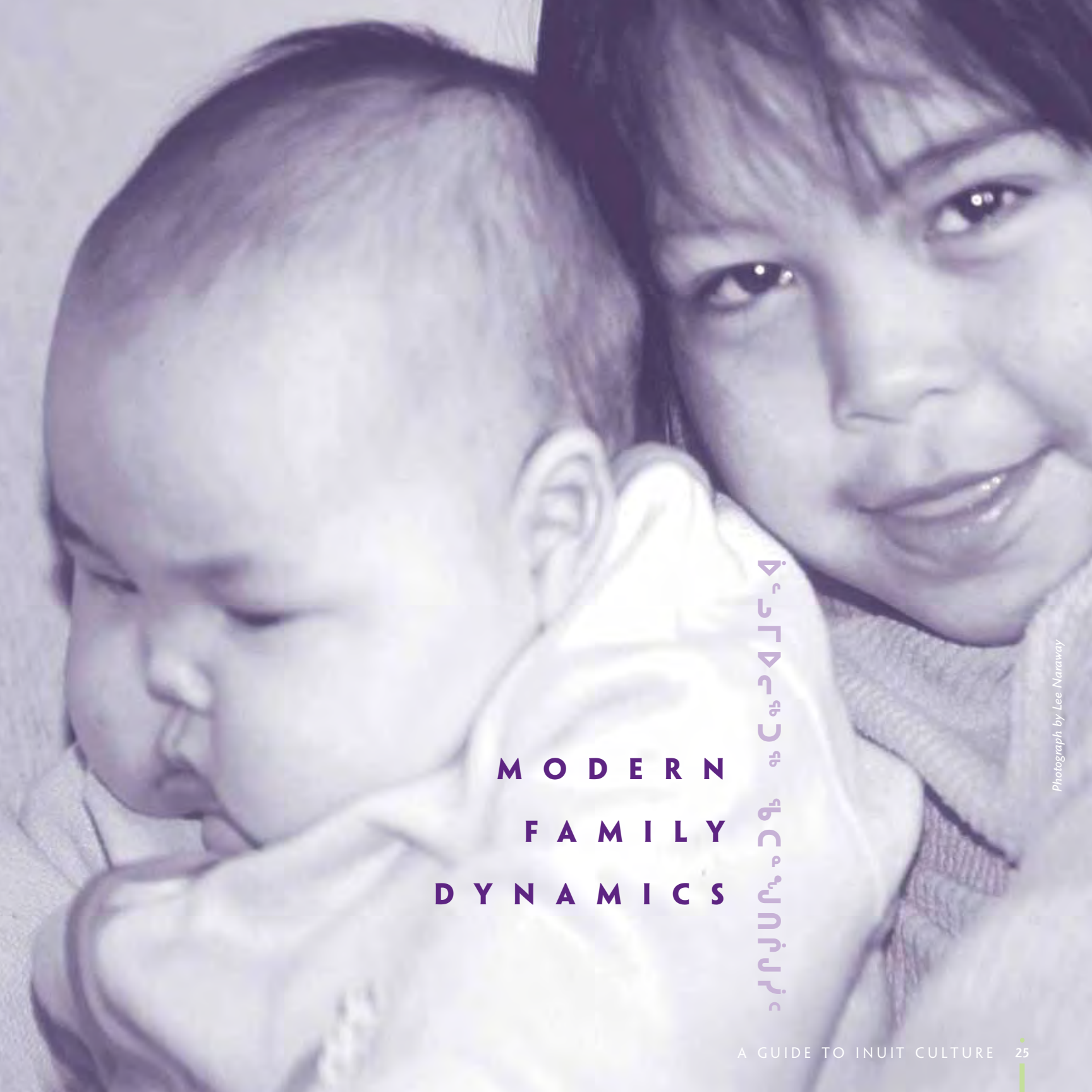
THE WIFE

The wife had primary authority within the home where she enjoyed considerable autonomy. She had the main responsibility for childrearing although all members of the family, particularly older girls, actively participated in raising the children. The wife was also responsible for all domestic duties including preparation of food, drinking water, cleaning and making of clothes and boots. As well, she was responsible for the making of tents, skin containers and the covering of the boat or kayak. The ideal wife was considered to be hard working, cheerful, generous and considerate of others, a good mother, and one who did not gossip too much.



"SHOE FLY'S" WEDDING DAY
Grandmother of Veronica Dewar,
a past president of Pauktuutit.
Shown here as a young woman.

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M O D E R N
F A M I L Y
D Y N A M I C S

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Photograph by Lee Naraway

The circumstances of the modern Inuit family have changed considerably from those experienced traditionally. Large communities, access to health care, formal education for children, wage employment, and many other characteristics of modern life have irreversibly affected Inuit family dynamics.

Despite these rapid changes, Inuit maintain a strong family orientation. People feel that they can always depend upon their families for assistance and support if it is needed. Family loyalties generally outweigh any other obligation a person may have, including those to the community at large. Visitors to the north will likely notice that Inuit seem to always be traveling to see family in other communities despite the high cost of air travel.

The basic family unit continues to be the immediate family, although other relatives often live with the family as well. Because there is a serious shortage of housing in most communities, it is not unusual to find members of several families sharing the same often very cramped accommodation.

With access to modern health care, the structure of Inuit families has altered. The mortality rate for children has dropped off dramatically and adults generally live longer. As a result, a higher percentage of children, young adults and elders make up Inuit families today⁵.

MODERN MARRIAGES

Arranged marriages are now a thing of the past. Couples now marry for love rather than for economic or social reasons. Spouses are often found outside the settlement. Inuit generally marry when they are in their late adolescence or early adulthood. Parents and elders continue to have some influence on the marriage plans of young people but their advice can be disregarded without fear of serious retribution.

Sexual activity before marriage is common and not considered by most Inuit to be wrong. If a woman becomes pregnant during this period, there will likely be some pressure applied by the local minister and the parents of the couple for them to marry. No stigma is attached to children who are born out of wedlock. In cases where the mother is very young⁶ or cannot look after the child, grandparents often assume responsibility for looking after the child.

Marriages usually take place in the local church and are joyous ceremonies and a time of celebration. The newlyweds may live in their own home if there is sufficient housing available in the community. However, the severe shortage of housing in most Inuit communities means that most new couples will live with relatives until accommodation becomes available.

The couple has the option to move to a community other than that of the husband's. Although Inuit generally prefer to remain close to their families, the fact that one of the spouses may come from another community combined with the scarcity of employment opportunities may affect the couple's decision about where to live. If they choose to move away, frequent visiting keeps family bonds strong.

ELDERS

Elder family members continue to play an important role in family life and are treated with great respect. They are considered wise and essential sources of knowledge about the past. They are often sought out for their story telling and advice on many issues. Children are taught to be respectful towards their elders, to greet them before anyone else, to try and anticipate their needs, and not to express knowledge towards elders unless they are asked.

It is unfortunate that many young Inuit have not retained enough of their language skills to speak comfortably with

Because there is a serious shortage of housing in most communities, it is not unusual to find members of several families sharing the same often very cramped accommodation.

their elders in Inuktitut. The problem exists largely because many children prefer to speak English they have learned in school, from television and videos. While most Inuit children can speak Inuktitut, the language has changed over time to the point where elders use traditional terms and phrases that many young people cannot understand.

CHILDREN

The lives of modern children have altered extensively compared to the period when Inuit lived on the land. They are now exposed to a world that is vastly different from the one their parents experienced. As they attend modern schools and become involved with technologies and entertainment from around the global village, children spend much less time with their parents than they did traditionally. This has placed limits on the effectiveness of traditional methods of childrearing, as these relied heavily upon maintaining close and more exclusive contact between parents and children.

ADOLESCENTS

Teenaged Inuit, once they are out of school, spend their time working when work is available, traveling to other settlements to visit relatives and friends, hunting and fishing, and socializing with other young people within their communities. There is generally little pressure put on them



TOP
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PHOTO 39726

BOTTOM
*Rachel Uyarasuk from Igloolik.
Born 1905. Photo 2006.*
©PAUKTUUTIT ARCHIVES

by their families to find a full-time job or to continue their formal education. They are left to develop at their own pace and to decide what they want to do with their lives. Limited recreational facilities in the smaller communities, very high unemployment rates, combined with high expectations picked up from television and other telecommunications, lead many Inuit teenagers to view their communities as boring and many express a desire to leave for larger settlements or to go 'down south'.

THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN

Although there continues to be cooperation between many husbands and wives, with the introduction of the wage economy and social assistance, the survival value of this partnership has faded. The partner's sphere of influence still usually reflects traditional practices, with men generally having more authority on matters outside the home and women retaining primary authority within the confines of the home.

With unemployment a serious problem in most arctic communities, many Inuit men participate in a 'mixed economy'. There is often a limited supply of permanent jobs and seasonal or part-time jobs are quickly snapped up. To supplement these wages and family incomes, hunting and fishing bring in a major source of food and the occasional extra cash. Further activities include handicraft/art production and working as guides for tourists. Many men now take an active role in childrearing but women continue to be predominant in this area.

As well as being the primary childrearer, women run the home. This includes cleaning the house and the family's clothing, cooking, babysitting and making and repairing clothing. Since women have much greater access to wage labour jobs, many are also now the primary income earners in their families. With the high unemployment rates in

many communities, however, many women are unable to acquire full-time employment so they add to the family income by taking part-time jobs or making arts/handicrafts at home. Women continue to actively participate in hunting, fishing and gathering activities to feed their families.

While many women maintain their traditional duties, an increasing number are choosing a different route. Inuit women have become active in the formation and operation of economic and political organizations ranging from local to international levels. Her traditional primary authority within the home has helped give Inuit women the confidence and tenacity necessary to take such an active and productive role in these organizations.



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5. In 2004, Inuit had an average age of just 20 years, compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians, whose average age was 38.
6. In 2000, the pregnancy rate for young women aged 15–19 years was 161.3 per thousand in Nunavut and 103.7 for Inuvialuit, compared with 38.2 for Canada.



COMMUNITY
DYNAMICS

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L.D. Livingstone / ©LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / PA-126894 / detail

Traditionally there was a seasonal rhythm to community life among the Inuit. During the summer months in the central and eastern Arctic, small groups composed primarily of one or two families would gather at a location considered to be good for fishing or caribou hunting. In winter, there tended to be larger groupings involving several extended families whose primary activity during this period was seal hunting. This was also a time of intense social interaction.

In Nunavik (northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador), groups would travel inland in the fall to follow caribou herds to their wintering grounds. The Caribou Inuit in the central Arctic would live inland year round to pursue caribou herds. Beyond these differences, these groups followed a seasonal rhythm similar to other Inuit groups.

Membership was flexible and changed frequently to reflect changing alliances and tensions within the groups. The layout of the camps reflected where the strongest alliances and animosities lay. Families that were particularly friendly camped close to each other, even sharing a large igloo in the winter or placing their tents facing each other in the summer. Families who did not get along would either not move to the same camp together or would inhabit opposite sides of the camp.

KINSHIP

Kinship played an integral role in the structure of Inuit camps. Kinship bonds were established by birth, marriage, adoption, and by sharing a name with someone. There were also a variety of 'fictive kinship' relations that would further bind people together who were not otherwise related. These bonds ensured that virtually all the people in the camp were related to each other in some way. Combined

with an intricate system of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities, the community was tightly knit and interdependent.

DECISION MAKING

Inuit society was largely egalitarian, without hierarchy or formal authority. Individuals were largely free to do as they wished as long as their actions did not disturb others. The basic system of making group decisions was consensus. Major decisions affecting the group would be discussed among the adults. People would voice their views, discuss the issues and compromise until the final decision was one everyone could accept. People with special skills, talents or knowledge such as a respected hunter, elder or a shaman⁷, could be solicited for their opinion on a particular issue but their advice was not binding. Their ability to influence others was limited by the degree to which people chose to follow their advice.

COOPERATION

Cooperation among camp members was essential for the survival of the group. Seal hunting, a staple for many Inuit families, required a large number of hunters to participate if the hunt was to succeed. There was greater security in having a network of people to contribute food and other supplies when one's own supply was depleted. Competition was considered inappropriate behaviour as it could cause tensions within the group and threaten the vitality of the group.

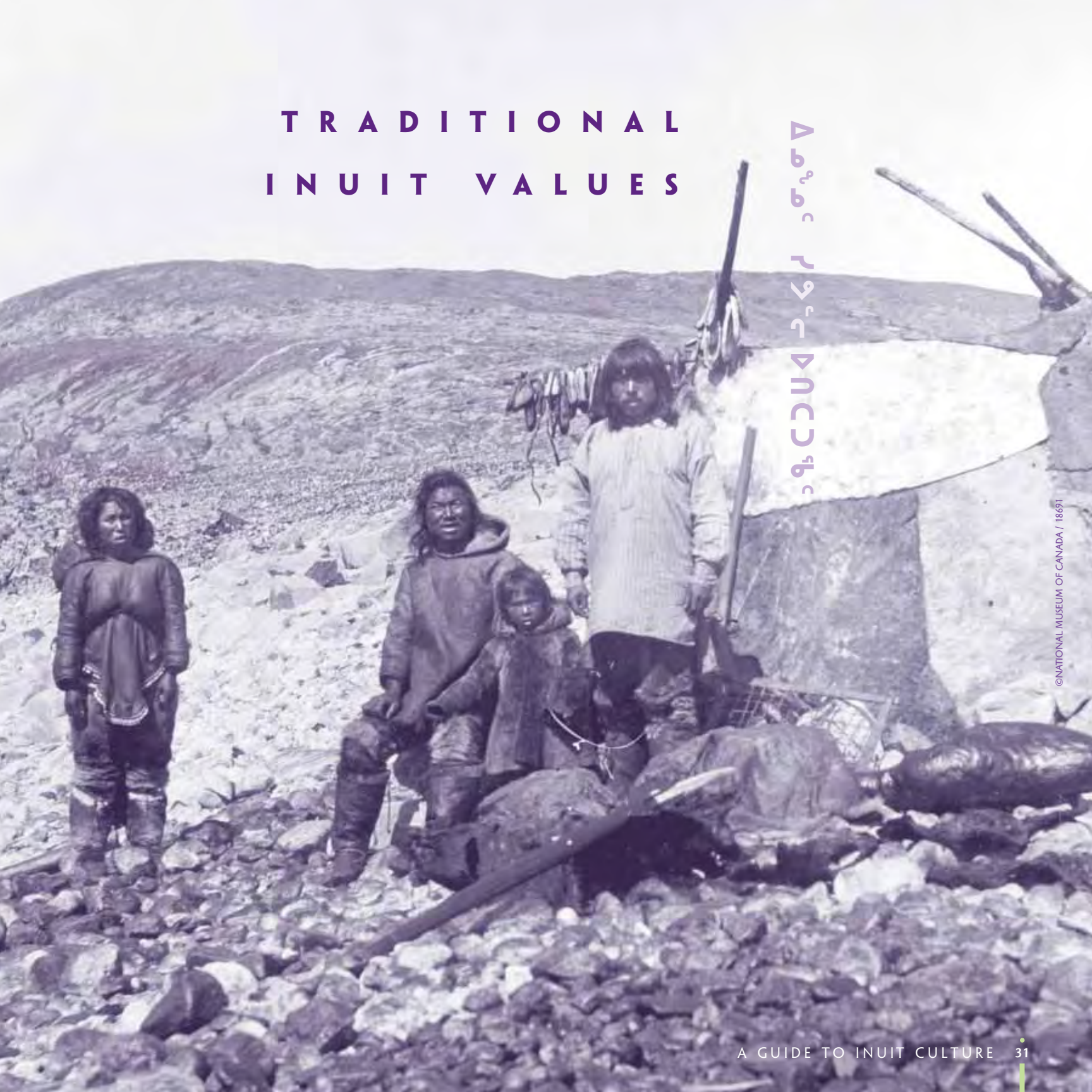
This form of community organization required a great degree of harmony to operate effectively. Discord and tension could disrupt the entire group, affect its welfare and even survival. To ensure that the society encountered minimal disruption, certain values were held to be essential.

7. Spiritual leader.



TRADITIONAL INUIT VALUES

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To understand the dynamics of the traditional Inuit community, it helps to have an appreciation of the characteristics held in esteem by its members and the values that Inuit were expected to live by. In the following section, there is a description of what the 'ideal' characteristics of Inuit are according to traditional values. As the Inuit came under the increasing influence of modern culture, some of these ideals have changed. However, the basic values of modern Inuit society find their origin in the past and continue to play an important role in sculpting the unique culture of the Inuit.

Regret for the passing of the 'old ways' and dissatisfaction with aspects of modern community life continue to keep alive the desire to maintain traditional values for many Inuit. This does not mean that Inuit want to return to their old way of living. They still recall the privations and harshness of that life and have no wish to give up the relative comforts of modern community living. However many Inuit maintain close ties to the land. They wish to preserve the traditional skills and knowledge necessary to live off the land and sea while embracing core cultural values that defined who Inuit are.

INDEPENDENCE, INNOVATION AND PATIENCE

In Inuit society, one of the most important and respected characteristics of a successful person is their capacity for self-reliance and their ability to meet life's challenges with innovation, resourcefulness and perseverance.

Traditionally, these traits would greatly increase the chance of survival for the individual and the group.



Patience and the ability to accept those realities that are beyond one's control are two other valued character traits. These attitudes were essential to maintaining subsistence in the Arctic, be it waiting patiently for hours at a time by a seal's breathing hole or being unable to travel or hunt for days and weeks due to violent and lengthy storms.

These two sets of traits were critical to survival in traditional Arctic life. However, looked at from a different perspective, there is an important dichotomy between the two. On the one hand, Inuit tend to admire people who encounter a problem, work out a solution and then solve the problem. Yet, on the other hand, submission in the face of problems one can't do anything about is also an acceptable response. Resignation and fatalism can often be their response when they are dealing with a public servant or nurse, where they feel their input is unwelcome or irrelevant, or they are at the mercy of the official they are dealing with. As a result, they may not volunteer necessary information or ask questions that might clarify a situation.

To show frustration or anger is considered a childish response. An adult would be expected to either solve the problem, or, if the problem seems insolvable, accept it as such. Of course this can lead to frustration on the part of both the Inuk seeking help and the official or health professional attempting to help them. By understanding some of the cultural background of Inuit, the person trying to help may be better able to find new ways to deliver the assistance needed.

Inuit also feel that tact and humility are important qualities of an independent adult. Competitive behaviour and

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boasting about one's accomplishments is considered ill mannered because in effect, the person would be calling attention to the relative successes or failures of others. Traditionally, bragging about hunting was believed to tempt animals to avoid that hunter and anyone who hunts with him thus potentially deprive the family and community of food.

Today, competitive games that test a person's skill and strength act to direct competitive and aggressive feelings into acceptable behaviour. However, bragging about one's success in these games is still considered to be inappropriate behaviour.

TRADITIONAL SHARING

In addition to a strong value being placed on individual independence, the practice of sharing was held to be of utmost importance to Inuit. Within the complex network of kinship bonds present in traditional camps, there were strict rules governing the sharing of many things, including food, natural resources, one's labour, and on occasion, spouses. Hospitality was considered an essential trait and could rarely be refused without the host losing face. People who were thought to be taking advantage of other people's generosity or not reciprocating that generosity, were gossiped about.

MODERN SHARING PRACTICES

The strong tradition of sharing continues into the modern era although it has changed considerably since Inuit began to work in the wage economy. While Inuit have been involved in the fur trade for a long time, direct bartering of skins for



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supplies was the regular practice. As money became a more common feature in Inuit communities, people were not sure how that money, or the things that it purchased, was to be shared. Within a household, food, natural resources and social assistance are generally shared by members of the household. Money from labour or trapping remains with the earner to spend as they see fit, although some contribution to the household is expected.

Large items purchased with earned money, other cash or significant amounts of replaceable goods, such as gasoline or dog food, have increasingly been lent (as opposed to given) with specific agreements being made as to when they will be returned. People making such requests are now more likely to be close relatives or good friends.

These gradual changes in sharing practices have led to some degree of confusion. Take, for example, the case of an Inuk who has a relatively well-paying job. He is not required to necessarily share the money he earns nor the goods purchased with these earnings. However, according to traditional values, people should share their goods with others. Thus, it would appear that the person who seems to be better off in terms of their access to money and the material goods it affords, arrived at that state because they did not share enough of their goods. Despite the fact that people may admire their hard work and relative success, they may be the target of social criticism due to the perception that they were not generous enough. Inuit can thus become torn between the values of the broader society and those of Inuit traditional values.

NON-INTERFERENCE

Inuit place a high regard on the right of individuals to lead their lives free from interference from others. This belief strongly affects the way Inuit interact with each other. Basically, this belief causes Inuit to often feel a certain degree of discomfort when exercising authority over other Inuit, even if the position they hold necessitates such authority. Inuit are also unlikely to welcome someone trying to dictate their actions to them or to speak for them without their consent. This can obviously affect how employers interact with Inuit employees.

This emphasis on the non-interference in the affairs of others is taught early in life. When children begin to show signs of maturity, they are encouraged to be considerate towards other people and to not impose themselves on others. In school, this may place Inuit children in awkward situations. For example, a teacher may ask two children to choose teams in order to play a game. The children will likely feel uncomfortable because they are placed in a position of power where they have to rank their classmates according to their ability to play the game. While all the children are likely to have an idea about their classmates' abilities, it is not considered polite to bring public attention to the fact that some are more skilled than others. In a situation like this, it would be more appropriate for the children to decide amongst themselves how the selection will take place. The teams will still be formed but without anyone being placed in an uncomfortable position.

LEADERSHIP

The practice of non-interference influences the way leadership occurs during hunting parties. An experienced and respected hunter may be seen as a leader in certain situations or for certain tasks, but he leads more by example and by taking the initiative rather than delegating people to certain tasks. When the event is over, so is his leadership. People



TOP
Two sisters. Photograph by Lee Naroway.

BOTTOM
Charles Gimpel / ©LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / e004923412 / detail

In modern Inuit society, people have the right to do what they like without feeling the need to inform others of their actions.

who stress their views too strongly or who attempt to direct the actions of other people are considered 'bossy' or 'pushy' and may be the subject of gossip or social ostracism.

Inuit leaders at every level of political involvement are still bound by traditional values and can see their public support dwindle if they go against these values too often. This is discussed in greater detail below.

THE MAKING OF REQUESTS

The value placed upon a person's independence affects the way requests are made between Inuit, even in social situations. Since direct requests are considered rude and aggressive, a guest may make their wishes known only by making indirect hints about what they would like. A direct request would be seen as placing the guest in the lesser social position and would insult the host for not having had the insight or consideration to perceive the wishes of his guest. It also risks placing the host in an awkward position if he is not able to fulfill the desire of his guest or did not feel comfortable in granting him his request. This oblique way of making requests allows the host to refuse a request indirectly by pretending not to get the hint or to simply ignore it. Direct refusals are also considered aggressive and rude.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE

Inuit often find it uncomfortable to respond to direct questions concerning other people and their motives. It is con-

sidered a violation of that person's privacy to speak about them in their absence. People feel no obligation to explain their behaviour or to inform others of their plans as this would be considered compromising their independence. Asking about another's actions implies that there is something suspect about the person's motives. When an Inuk is asked a question about another person, they are likely to respond with "I don't know" which probably indicates more about their willingness to speak about another person than how much they actually know about them.

Some anthropologists have felt that one reason that Inuit camps were so peaceful and orderly was the importance attached to non-interference by the members of the community. Children that were playing loudly were encouraged to play out of earshot. Quarrels and fights between adults were rare in camps and settlements unless alcohol was involved. Pushy, noisy behaviour was considered to be an infringement on other people's right to have peace and quiet. In a situation where people were forced to live very close to each other, at times for extended periods, attempts were made to minimize points of conflict and abuses of others' rights.

In modern Inuit society, people have the right to do what they like without feeling the need to inform others of their actions. For example, two people may be planning to go fishing. One party may change their mind at the last minute and not inform the other person of this change in

plans. The person who altered their plans would usually not be criticized because to do so would be to interfere with their decision and would imply that they may be responsible to the other person.

This practice can lead to difficulties when Inuit interact with formal agreements such as rental leases or the re-payment of debts. An Inuk may fully intend to comply with the original agreement, but according to traditional Inuit values, either person maintains the right to change their mind without consulting with or gaining the consent of the other party. Some Inuit feel that this attribute means that they may make decisions as problems arise without being hindered by previous agreements.

This can be an obvious source of misunderstanding and frustration when appointments aren't kept or people don't show up for work because something more important to them came up, and it can be highly disruptive to the commitments of other people. Some Inuit feel uncomfortable with work schedules and punctuality. Not feeling free to change their mind, and feeling that they're obliged to inform others when they do, means that for them a significant degree of self-determination is felt to be lost. If an Inuk feels like spending the day hunting, and he is willing to forgo his wages, he may feel that no one should complain.

Here, then, lies an important cultural challenge—the contrast between traditional and modern life, between individual independence and communal commitment, between shorter and longer-term decision-making.

According to traditional Inuit culture, the individual may (in some cases must, for survival) make independent decisions regardless of previous circumstances; whereas aspects of modern Canadian culture emphasize commitment to work schedules, time clocks and signed agreements. Some

Inuit may react to such conflict by withdrawing from active participation in the workplace, providing a minimum of effort or enthusiasm for the work, or by simply quitting to go enjoy a less complicated life of hunting and fishing for awhile.

AUTHORITY

Inuit who achieve positions of some authority can be caught between fulfilling the requirements of their job and honouring the traditions of their culture. For example, take the plight of a young Inuit employee working at the local co-operative store. A senior relative who happens to owe the co-op a sum of money comes into the store to purchase some goods on credit. The employee is obliged to carry out the wishes of the co-op—to serve its customers and cut down on people who have a bad credit history. On the other hand, by his familial relationship with the customer, he must respect and obey the elders' wishes. If he extends credit, he could be criticized by his superiors at the co-op. If he doesn't, he could be criticized by his relatives for being disrespectful.

To further complicate the matter of authority, Inuit tend to feel that people in positions of power make decisions based on personal feelings. For example, if two people apply for social assistance and only one application is approved, the people involved may feel that the decision was based on the personal reasons of the official, that the official does not like one of the applicants. In this particular example, some Inuit can feel that they should receive social assistance if they decide they need it and feel that conditions attached to eligibility intrude upon their lives and sense of independence.

Many Inuit have adapted well to being in authority positions. However, even among this group, a significant number report that they occasionally feel uncomfortable making decisions



that exert authority over others. They may describe their positions in terms that downplay the authority and influence of the position. Certain positions that require a lot of decision-making are likely to have a high turnover of personnel or be staffed by non-Inuit. While increasing numbers of Inuit are assuming senior positions in government, businesses and non-governmental agencies, many will attest to the pressures placed on them by attempting to maintain a foot in two cultures.

POLITICS AND DEBATE

The sense of individualism and independence affects peoples' participation in political events and other decision-making meetings. During public meetings when a vote is being held on an issue, it is not uncommon to see only those in favour of the motion indicating their choice. If these people are

particularly earnest in voicing their opinions, they may be privately criticized for stating their opinions too strongly. Rather than voting against something, those who are against the motion will often discuss the issue privately in order to avoid a direct confrontation with those who disagree with them. Furthermore, these abstainers may not feel bound by a majority vote and may continue to act as they choose in spite of the motion. To do otherwise would be considered an infringement on their independence.

STRANGERS AND FRIENDS

Inuit differ in many ways from people from other cultures in their interactions with strangers. Although Inuit women, when embarrassed or feeling shy, may lower their eyes and grin, the usual greeting for both men and women is a smile and a handshake.

According to urban Canadian customs, it is good manners to arrange in advance to visit others, to share an event, a meal, or exchange information.

Visitors who are friendly, sympathetic, who are not aggressive in the pursuit of information, and who develop some sort of rapport will find Inuit helpful, friendly and hospitable. On the other hand, people who arrive (literally) out of the blue to Inuit communities, don't explain what they are doing in the community, ask personal questions, and stay for only a short period of time, may find themselves considered aggressive, somewhat rude and the subject of speculation among the locals. If the visitor isn't clear in stating their intentions, they will find that Inuit tend to be cautious about interacting with them.

Visitors may find the way Inuit visit people rather unusual. According to urban Canadian customs, it is good manners to arrange in advance to visit others, to share an event, a meal, or exchange information. One rarely 'drops in' on anyone other than very close friends or immediate family members. Inuit, particularly in smaller communities, are not generally restrained by these social rules and may simply enter a friend's or neighbour's house without any advance notice. As well, rather than talk, a visiting Inuit friend may simply wish to literally "see how you are" and sit quietly sipping tea and observing what is going on in the household. In these situations, conversation is possible but not essential for a successful visit.

DISPLAY OF EMOTIONS

Inuit tend not to display strong emotions publicly as this is considered immature and may place others in the potentially awkward position of being forced to react to a situation they consider to be a very private matter. So a stranger may see a smiling and attentive Inuk but their underlying emotions may be quite different. Emotions are expressed more freely in small, more intimate groups. If the person feels he must express himself emotionally, it is felt that this expression should involve only those that he feels are responsible for his emotional state.

Inuit often express their emotions very subtly, in the tone of voice or the lifting of eyebrows. While appearing to be almost imperceptible to the stranger, Inuit are adept at picking up the slight intonations and facial expressions from each other that reflect emotional states. Inuit perceived by friends and family to be depressed or lonely may be treated with particular attention by others, although it would be considered ill-mannered to make a specific reference to the emotional state of another person.

Although the values of Inuit culture emphasize the importance of the individual and the right to run one's life without interference, the Inuit are a very socially oriented people. Someone who withdraws from the social world will likely be considered anxious or troubled and will be the object of



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concern. The ideal adult behaviour is considered to be maintaining one's individuality and independence while being a fully responsible and participating member of society.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical contact among Inuit differs from that found among many others. It closely reflects the social attachment among the people involved. For example, within certain intimate groups, be it a family at their fishing/hunting camp or a group of young men spending the night together, sleeping arrangements may be communal, with everyone sleeping together under an assortment of coverings. Families may also sleep together in settlements if the housing conditions limit other possibilities. Traditionally, this communal sleeping was an essential sharing of warmth in frigid conditions and a human need for emotional and physical comfort from others.

Public expression of affection is reserved primarily for children. Kissing or hugging between adults in public is not generally considered to be proper adult behaviour. Younger people generally follow the examples set by the adults in the community but are more likely to show affection openly than their parents.

WITHDRAWAL IN UNFAMILIAR SITUATIONS

According to custom, Inuit in an unfamiliar social or professional milieu will likely react by withdrawing socially while observing the situation carefully until they figure out what the situation is and how they should behave. Hence, when an Inuk is in a dentist/doctor's office, or applying for a job, or for social assistance for the first time, they may seem rather withdrawn and un-communicative because the situation may be new to them and they are unsure of what is expected of them. Add the fact that they likely perceive the official as having incredible resources at their



command to be distributed solely at their discretion, and one can begin to understand why they may be feeling uncomfortable.

INUIT PERCEPTIONS OF NON-INUIT⁸

Some Inuit feel that non-Inuit are aggressive, prying, domineering and too free with unsolicited opinions. While people in public positions elsewhere may be valued for their ability to manage people and situations in order to improve production or solve problems, these traits run contrary to Inuit values and can make some interactions tense and unpleasant. To compound the difficulty, the cultural value of non-interference prevents Inuit from openly telling others

how they feel. It takes a very perceptive, experienced person to pick up the subtle signs of disapproval from Inuit. As a result, some Inuit may find constant contact with non-Inuit a strain and withdraw from regular close contact with them for a period.

Inuit have become increasingly confident and sophisticated in their dealings with non-Inuit and with institutions. Inuit society is growing increasingly complex and multi-faceted as people follow the many new and diverse options becoming available in the Arctic. However, even the most successful Inuit express the need to get back to their home communities and spend time on the land with other Inuit where they can truly relax and recharge their own 'cultural batteries'.

8. For a humorous perspective on Inuit views of non-Inuit, readers are referred to the article in the bibliography written by Zebedee Nungak, a respected Inuit leader from Nunavik.





DIET

Another aspect of Inuit life that a newcomer to the Arctic is sure to notice is their diet. The traditional Inuit diet centered upon the meat and fat from a variety of hunted species, including seals, whales, caribou, and fish. Inuit also depended to a lesser extent on arctic hare, ptarmigan, polar bear, arctic fox, musk oxen, and various other species of birds, mammals and fish.

Large amounts of blubber, oil and fat were consumed to provide a good source of heat-producing energy. Berries and a few herbs were included in the diet but made up a very small proportion of it. The Inuit also had an intimate knowledge of medicinal plants that served to help keep them in good health.

Due to the fact that the main fuel available for heating, lighting, and cooking was seal oil, most of these traditional or 'country foods' were consumed raw, either frozen or aged. This provided Inuit with a healthy diet, since the

meat contained all the essential nutrients needed to maintain a healthy existence. Aged meat and fat also provided a welcome change in flavour, texture, as well as adding important nutritional elements to their diet. If done correctly, foods can be aged in the Arctic for much longer than in the south without going bad.

The modern Inuit diet has changed considerably, as a wide variety of food is now available in every arctic community. However, modern foods bring their own challenges. Fresh, nutritious food is very expensive in northern communities when compared to the same items in southern Canada because of high transportation and storage costs. Heavily processed and 'junk' food is more affordable but since it is full of sugar and other unhealthy additives, dental and some health problems including diabetes have increased. On balance, traditional country food continues to form an essential nutritious and culturally valued staple for most Inuit families.



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CONCLUSION



Inuit have undergone incredible changes in a very short period of time. A brief fifty years ago, the vast majority of Inuit were living a traditional lifestyle centered upon nomadic hunting, fishing and trapping. While they were in regular contact with white people and modern institutions, traditional Inuit culture remained largely intact.

When they lived on the land, Inuit survived by working together, by having an intimate knowledge of their environment and by being able to adapt to that environment. These skills are proving to be no less valuable today in modern settlements.

Inuit presently maintain a foothold in two worlds—the traditional world of their ancestors and the modern world where they live. They watch soap operas on television, ride skidoos, travel internationally, operate successful corporations and argue fine legal details in courts of law. At the same time, Inuit continue to live their lives largely according to traditional values, cherish the time they spend on the land, enjoy visiting relatives and friends, and eat country food.

The commitment to maintaining traditional values while living in the modern world is difficult for any culture. Traditional answers to modern problems may no longer be effective. Alcohol and drug abuse, high unemployment, family violence, high suicide rates and a large gap in understanding between generations of Inuit, are all part of the high price Inuit have paid for their rapid transformation.

Inuit traditional culture has been in peril of being overwhelmed or undermined for decades. But Inuit ideals are strong and have served Inuit well for millennia. These values have and will continue to play a significant role in the way Inuit define themselves and in the ways they build their society in Canada's vast Arctic. It is hoped that the information presented in this booklet assists the reader in gaining a greater knowledge and insight into Inuit culture, and thus be better able to understand and appreciate Inuit as they work towards a creating a successful future of their own choosing.

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Inuktitut Magazine. This fascinating magazine is produced by the national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. The magazine provides Inuit writers the opportunity to describe their thoughts and insights regarding Inuit history and culture (www.itk.ca).

Nunatsiaq News—www.nunatsiaq.com. This is a very good source for current news and issues in Nunavut. A number of good resources are found at the web site as well as access to the latest edition of the paper.

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