

Uncle — Angaaq, Ataataq

ANGAAQA. – MY UNCLE.



Image. Uncle. Watercolor painting by Cheryl Lacy, from Iqsani's Trout Hook. AM1007.

Alutiiq people reckon descent bilaterally. This means that children trace their ancestry equally through their mother's and father's lineages. A child is recognized as belonging to both sides of his or her family. While Alutiiq people share this practice with the Yup'ik, Iñupiaq, and Inuit societies of northern Alaska and Canada, they are unique in the Gulf of Alaska. Neighboring ?ingit, Athabascan, and Unangax? societies practiced matrilineal kinship. In this system of identifying relatives, children inherit family ties through their biological relationships with women. They are members of their mother's family.

Kinship systems are often reflected in the words people use to identify family members. For example, among societies with bilateral kinship systems like the word for uncle can be used for any uncle: your mother's brother or your father's brother. However, in matrilineal societies, there are often separate terms for mother's brother and father's brother. The Alutiiq language separates these terms. *Angaaq* refers to your mother's brother and *ataataq* refers to your father's brother.

In Alutiiq communities, extended family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—are an important part of many children's lives. Older relatives like uncles often act like parents, teaching, guiding, and caring for children as they learn adult skills. In the modern era, it is not unusual for an Alutiiq boy to be raised by his uncle or to act as a crewmember on his uncle's boat.