

Wife — Nuliq

NULINGR'TUA.— I'VE GOT A WIFE.



Photo: Akhiok husband and wife, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the National Archive, Seattle.

Everyone in Alutiiq society was expected to marry. Although marriages were not typically arranged, there were preferred marriage partners. According to anthropologist Birket-Smith, a young person was once particularly encouraged to marry a cousin. However, not all cousins were potential mates. Parallel cousins (your parents' same-sex siblings' children) were considered siblings and were not appropriate spouses. But cross cousins (your parents' opposite sex siblings' children) were desirable mates. For example, a young man in search of a wife would consider marrying his father's sister's daughter, or his mother's brother's daughter. A cross-cousin was only one choice for determining a marriage partner.

In addition to their many domestic activities - making clothing, stitching boat covers, weaving, cooking, and caring for children, Alutiiq wives helped to maintain their husband's hunting luck. First, they could never touch their husband's weaponry and had to seclude themselves in a special hut during each of their menstrual periods. By observing these taboos, they ensured that their husband's hunting gear was not polluted by their fertility. Additionally, wives had an obligation to assist their husbands with hunting rituals. The wife of a whaler, for example, was instructed to stay indoors and remain quiet while her husband was hunting, so she would not scare the whale. And when the dead whale washed ashore, she was responsible for giving it a drink of freshwater.