

FROM THE EDITORS

VOLUNTEER AND SHIRKING BEHAVIORS AMONG THE DACA

Back in my graduate school days, I developed a deep admiration for Horace Miner's (1956) article "Body Ritual among the Nacerima" in the *American Anthropologist*. For those who are unfamiliar with Miner's work, the Nacerima are a market-driven society whose territory is located primarily between Canada and Mexico. I found Miner's observations about the strange elements of the culture of the Nacerima, such as their unhealthy obsession with the appearance of the human body and the odd rites that they perform to serve this obsession, to be insightful and profound. Over 50 years later, the Nacerima remain obsessed with the human body. This may explain the current fascination of many Nacerima with vapid yet comely thespians and troubadours.

After reading Miner's account, my hope was to someday have a similar opportunity to study a complex and unusual society. This hope was recently realized when I spent an extended period of time with and among the Ymedaca, also known more simply as the "Daca." The Dacca number just over 17,000 people, and they reside in lands throughout the world. Unlike the Nacerima, many Dacca have an unkempt and rumpled appearance. The Dacca's overall purpose as a society is to develop and spread their beliefs about how organizations function. Almost all Dacca spend considerable time indoctrinating young people with their beliefs, through formal lectures and informal interactions such as mentoring. Meanwhile, a growing subset of Dacca pursues an interest in divining new beliefs.

I found the latter process to be particularly intriguing. Although production activities within most societies are based on individuals pursuing their own self-interest, volunteer behavior has been central to the Dacca divining process since the society's inception in the 1930s. In particular, volunteers evaluate new attempts at divining and decide whether these divinations should be added to the Dacca's sacred scrolls. This approach has long served the Dacca well, but there currently is a disturbing trend that threatens to undermine the divination process. Below, I describe the divination process itself, a major challenge that the process faces, and possible solutions to this challenge.

The Divination Process

To outsiders, the divination process is very mysterious. Luckily, I was granted behind-the-scenes access to the process, which allowed me to unravel at least some elements of this mystery. Divinations are recorded within sacred scroll series. The Dacca society as a whole owns and operates four scroll series. The two oldest scroll series are the "Ay-em-jay" (often denoted as "AMJ") and the "Ay-em-are" ("AMR"). The former is devoted to divinations that are based on observation of events, and the latter contains divinations of a philosophical nature. One of the remaining scroll series offers descriptions of and advice about indoctrination practices. The final scroll series is new, and the Dacca appear to be still trying to fully master its mission and discern how to contribute to it. The past performance and great skill of the Dacca create optimism that these efforts will be successful.

Only a small percentage of divinations make it into one of the scroll series. Historically, for example, about 8 to 10 percent of divinations provided to the AMJ or the AMR have been included among the scrolls. Legend holds that fewer than 10 percent of the Dacca will ever place one or more of their divinations in one of these scroll series. This tale contributes to senses of fear, wonder, reverence, and bewilderment about the scrolls among many Dacca.

My investigation of Dacca divinations was conducted primarily within the AMJ. Determining which divinations will be successful and which will not is entrusted to two sets of volunteers. The designation of the first set is best translated as "holy judgment providers." Currently, this scroll series is governed by one primary judgment provider and his/her eight minions, each of whom renders judgments on approximately 100 divinations per year. Like the incumbents of any high-profile position, the judgment providers should be open to fair critique by their fellow Dacca. Curiously, however, the harshest criticism often seems to be offered by individuals who tend to eschew serving as judgment providers themselves.

The name of the second set of volunteers is best translated as "candid evaluators." Some evaluators are asked to contribute their efforts to a scroll series on a regular basis and are provided a special level of recognition in exchange. Other evaluators are

solicited on an occasional basis, particularly when a submitted divination fits their area of expertise. Typically, each member of a three-person team of regular and occasional candid evaluators independently examines a divination and provides a written assessment to a judgment provider, who then decides the divination's fate. It became readily apparent to me that without the ongoing contributions of the two sets of volunteers, the divination process would come to an abrupt halt, and no new scrolls would be produced.

A Challenge to the Divination Process

The stakes of success and failure within the divination process are enormous. Receipt of a "bup" (i.e., inclusion of one's divination within a scroll series) often brings forth exclamations of joy and wild gyrations of celebration. Those Daca whose work regularly appears in the scrolls enjoy job security, increased compensation, and fame among their peers. Given the attractiveness of these perks, it is not surprising that over time more and more people are attempting to divine new beliefs.

Unfortunately, a growing number of Daca appear to be shirking by refusing to offer their volunteer labor as candid evaluators. A new team of judgment providers took over the *AMJ* in July 2007. While it would be unrealistic to expect that every person solicited as an evaluator will accept the invitation, the judgment providers quickly found that in many instances they had to issue six, seven, or even ten invitations to obtain three commitments. The judgment providers know that a potential candid evaluator may have a good reason for declining to volunteer, such as an extended illness. Some of the refusals I observed, however, were quite puzzling.

In one example among many, a potential evaluator declined three requests to evaluate divinations because of workload issues and then promptly submitted his own divinations for consideration. This behavior is troubling because it increases the workload of others, and it violates long-standing Daca norms of cooperation and community. Another potential evaluator agreed to evaluate a divination and then never did because he was busy preparing his materials for the "erunet" process. Ironically, successfully navigating the erunet means that one has been identified as a leader within Daca society—a society that depends extensively on the sort of volunteer behavior that he was unwilling to provide. Some individuals agreed to evaluate a particular divination but were never heard from again. This is not a new trend. Daily, Dalton, and Rajagoplan (2003) expressed dismay that 14 people who submitted divinations to be considered for inclu-

sion in a special issue scroll (including one person who submitted two) were unwilling to serve as candid evaluators for the special issue.

The result of behaviors like these is that a gap is being created between the amount of resources needed for the divination process and the resources that are available to it. My time among the Daca makes it clear to me that the current situation faced by the *AMJ* (and perhaps the other scroll series as well) is likely to become difficult to sustain over the long run. The demand for volunteer labor because of increased interest in divination is simply outstripping the available supply of volunteer labor. This gap in volunteer resources threatens to undermine Daca society; perhaps this threat is reminiscent of how insufficient natural resources led to the dissolution of the ancient civilization on Easter Island.

Some Possible Solutions

From my vantage point, it appears that the Daca in general, and the *AMJ* in particular, have three options available to them for restoring the balance between resources needed and resources available. The gap between needed and available resources is so great that I would not be surprised if implementing all three options becomes necessary over the next few years.

First, the *AMJ* could increase its use of the dreaded "tcejer-ksed." The term tcejer-ksed is derived from an ancient Norwegian word meaning *condemnation with scorn*. The tcejer-ksed is a process wherein the holy judgment providers cast out a divination without soliciting input from candid evaluators. Daca often view the receipt of this outcome as a signal that their divinations are completely without merit, but it seldom is intended as such. Currently, approximately 30 percent of the divinations provided to the *AMJ* receive the tcejer-ksed. This rate could possibly be raised without fear of casting out a divination that a team of evaluators would have endorsed. Historically, the *AMJ* has wanted not only to embrace excellent divinations as worthy of inclusion in the scroll series, but also to provide helpful guidance about rejected divinations so that they might find their way into another scroll series. Thus, invoking the tcejer-ksed more often may be in tension with the *AMJ*'s goals. Without more volunteer resources, however, providing helpful guidance may prove to be an expendable luxury.

Second, a monetary tribute could be required from each Daca who presents a divination for consideration. There is powerful precedent for this idea. A neighboring tribe, the Ecnanif, have long

used this practice, seemingly without detriment, within some of their most prestigious scroll series. Requiring a tribute could have important benefits. Under the current Dacca system, no cost is associated with submitting a divination for consideration. It appears that this system may encourage people to submit divinations that are grounded in questionable inspiration, putting a needless strain on the volunteer labor of the evaluators. The superstitious belief among some that the judgment process offers random outcomes (e.g., Glick, Miller, & Cardinal, 2007) enhances the tendency to submit dubious divinations. A tribute would likely lead at least some people to ruminate more carefully before offering their divinations to the *AMJ*. The tribute could then be offered to the evaluators as a gratuity for their service. Perhaps this quid pro quo would encourage more people to participate as evaluators. Those individuals that evaluate several divinations could be rewarded with exemption from the tribute. Some Dacca seem likely to resist the idea of a required tribute because it could harm those of limited means, but their objections might be assuaged by creating a process for waiving the tribute for hardship cases. However, the imposition of a tribute could undermine the cooperative and communal norms that have historically been central to Dacca society.

Finally, the Dacca could ask or simply force shirkers to change their ways. It is my belief that, without this change, the divination system will be weakened, perhaps dramatically. This conclusion echoes the warning of Daily and her colleagues: "That individuals are willing to reap the full benefits of the peer review system without meeting their professional—and collegial—responsibility to participate in the system causes us to wonder what this behavior portends for the future of the peer review system" (2003: 157). One of *AMR*'s holy judgment providers recently pondered whether those people that refuse to evaluate divinations should be prevented from providing their own work for evaluation (Trevino, 2008). One of the scrolls that is most revered among the Dacca notes the folly of hoping for one behavior while rewarding another (Kerr, 1975). People who are reaping the benefits of divination without contributing to the evaluation process are being, in effect, rewarded for bad behavior. It seems that the Dacca would be wise to invoke the revered wisdom of the prophet Kerr and use it to reverse the damaging trend of shirking. Specifically, a policy of "no pay, no play" should be quickly implemented, in my opinion.

I offer one important caveat to this proposed policy. Some people contribute to the Dacca's well-

being through positions in its governance hierarchy, while others act as judgment providers for one or more of the many important scroll series that lie outside of the direct auspices of the Dacca. Both of these important roles are generally very time-consuming. As such, it would be unreasonable to insist that these people shoulder full loads as evaluators for the Dacca's scrolls or to penalize them if they are unable to do so.

Conclusion

More than 50 years after its publication, Miner's (1956) vivid description of body ritual among the Nacerima remains an accurate portrayal of key features of their society. Two years after that publication date, the Dacca created the *AMJ*, its first sacred scroll series. In the very first scroll issued, Goelz noted that within a group such as the Dacca, "the obvious problems are not always clearly defined, they are sometimes tragically neglected, or no definitive steps are taken toward their solution" (1958: 63). My time among the Dacca and at the *AMJ* leads me to fear that these words could be prophetic regarding the divination process. The 50-year history of the *AMJ* leads me to wonder: Can the Dacca divination process sustain itself in its present form for another five decades? If the present trend—wherein an increasing number of individuals engage in shirking behavior—continues, the answer will unquestionably be no.

Above, I outlined three steps that could be taken to improve the situation. All three steps are grounded in specific behaviors. An ancient exhortation of a wise member of the Namreg tribe offers a basis for a deeper and enduring second-order change in values and attitudes. In his "categorical imperative," 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant asserted that it is the duty of each individual to take no action that the individual would not want everyone to take. If the Dacca collectively were to take this imperative to heart, plenty of candid evaluators would be available to assess divinations.

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