

MEGACHURCHES AND SELF-HELP: IDENTIFYING AND SOLVING PERSONAL PROBLEMS

David A. Snow, Jimmie Bany, Michelle Peria, and James E. Stobaugh
University of California, Irvine

Abstract

We report on a team fieldwork project entailing ethnographic observations and interviews at multiple megachurch research sites in southern California. The study was initiated in the winter of 2007 as a fieldwork project for students enrolled in a two-term seminar conducted by David Snow and Calvin Morrill on field and observational methods. Nine of the twenty-five students enrolled in the seminar constituted the core of the initial fieldwork team, and number of the students, including those involved in this presentation, continued with the fieldwork following the completion of the seminar. For this session, we discuss the rationale for and character of the team research conducted, and present preliminary findings focusing on the self-help character of the megachurch phenomenon. In particular, we discuss the diagnostic and prognostic framing of a host of problems that function as both recruitment and commitment-building mechanisms, and then focus on one such designated problem, how the megachurches have dealt with it, and how the problem-defining and –resolution process has been experienced by those who have funneled through it. We then suggest some implications of our findings for assessing the appeal and growth of megachurches in the U.S. today.