The Post-Columbine Era: Risk Perception, Criminalization, and Securitization in American Public Schools

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Bio:
Eric Madfis is a lecturer in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Northeastern University in Boston, where he has been a research associate at the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict and frequently teaches courses in Juvenile Delinquency and the Sociology of Violence. He has published numerous articles and book chapters on school rampage shootings, school criminalization and security, theoretical criminology, and crime in the media. In the fall of 2012, he will begin a position as an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Washington, Tacoma.

Abstract:
There has been a dramatic transformation of school discipline and security in American public schools since the turn of the 21st century. Scholars attribute this change to both the fear associated with highly-publicized rampage shooting events as well as to larger political ideological projects of neoliberal governance. Prior analyses, however, lack an understanding of exactly how the transition towards school criminalization was facilitated and, in particular, have failed to consider the agency and perspectives of those tasked with managing the safety of educational institutions in a post-Columbine world. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with school and police officials, this study reveals the administrative perspective that is crucial for understanding how and to what extent the fear and anticipated risk of school rampage has facilitated the rapid expansion of risk assessment, criminalization, and securitization in American public schools. In addition to addressing the causes of enhanced school discipline and security, the consequences of these developments for both public education and mass incarceration will be discussed.