

THE GOVERNMENT OF ADOLESCENT BOYS' HEALTH-RISK BEHAVIOUR

*A CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE BOYS' COLLEGE IN
THE NORTHERN SUBURBS OF JOHANNESBURG*

Abstract

This study takes an exploratory approach to understanding the government of health-risk behaviour (HRB) among adolescent boys at Galbraith College – an affluent high school situated in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Data were collected from parents, College representatives and the boys themselves using semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The study borrows theoretically from Foucault, with a focus upon the techniques that parents and the College use in order to 'govern' the HRB of adolescent boys. Overall, the study finds that parents and the College promote the use of traditional 'disciplinary' techniques when governing the HRB of the boys, for example rules, monitoring, surveillance and punishment for breaking rules. Indeed, the parents and College have created what Foucault would call a 'network of gazes' to allow for constant surveillance of the boys. However, they also engage 'alternative' strategies, such as educating boys on the dangers of HRB, promoting boys' self-esteem and providing 'safer' alternatives to HRB. The boys interviewed displayed an ability to exercise agency in assessing and minimising the risks they faced. Based on this finding, the report recommends that parents and the College shift focus to these 'alternative' government strategies (which rely on boys' agency) rather than relying on more traditional, 'disciplinary' approaches (which tend to undermine their agency).

Keywords: adolescence; risk; affluence; discipline; Foucault; governmentality

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Research Report Abstract