Morwe

The Coping Strategies of Students who Witnessed Violence during the South African #FeesMustFall Movement

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Abstract

The 2015/2016 academic year was an academic year that saw South African university students and leaders and the state engage in intense negotiations over free quality education. A considerable number of students joined this movement and were involved in or witnessed violence without realising how violence can harm them. This paper uses the interpretative phenomenological approach to interrogate the coping strategies employed by six students (who were part of the #FMF movement), in response to the violence that they witnessed at their campus. The findings reveal that witnessing violence is stressful. At some point, these students felt powerless and employed maladaptive coping strategies to deal with the threat of violence that they faced. The study recommends that university programmes be augmented to help students adopt a combination of the problem-focussed and anticipatory-focussed coping strategies to foster adaptive styles when coping with violence.

Keywords: coping strategies, #FMF, attention, university students, intervention

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1. Introduction

The widespread university students' protests occurring worldwide indicate that students are not as apathetic as initially thought. Altbach & Luescher (2019) point out that globally students play an essential role in challenging and advocating for social justice reforms. Student activism is a perennial and at times a costly feature of university life. Protest costs can be financial, physical, and psychological. Despite their costs, protests have proven to be an effective means to express grievances. The effectiveness lies in the number of people involved, the unity that they display, and the attention that they get from the public and the authorities, who are often the target of their grievances (Tilly, 2004). The masses of students who come together to express their grievances to the authorities are called student movements. Luescher-Mamashela (2015) points out that student movements are an informal conglomeration of organisations that pursue norm or value-based goals. Norm-based goals focus on specific issues and aim to change the system. The concern of value-based movements is broader political issues. Movements pursuing either of the stated goals can resort to violence, subsequently, presenting psychological effects for the students.

Recent student movements like the 2014 Umbrella Revolution in Hong-Kong, the 2011 Chilean Winter, the Occupy Wall Street in North-America, the 2010 United Kingdom, and the 2014 South African #FeesMustFall (#FMF) are evidence of the numbers and unity that students across the world displayed to express their grievances (Cini & Guzmán-Concha, 2017). All of these movements presented either norm or value based goals. Unaffordable fees were the main grievance of students in all of these protests. Often a small group of protestors engage in violence like arson, lootings, attacks with (Molotov cocktails and bricks) and verbal threats (Galovski, Peterson, Beagley, Srasshofer, Held, & Fletcher, 2016). During these clashes police officers may use stun grenades, rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse students (Meth, 2017). The students' militancy indicated their commitment to the worthiness of their cause, despite the potential physical and psychological harm. Irrespective of where the protests occurred, government's unresponsiveness and police provocation created conditions that led to students using violence (Assinder, 2010; Newburn, 2015).

Violent protest result in long term insurmountable physical and emotional consequences for the students. Galovski, Peterson, Beagley, Srasshofer, Held, & Fletcher (2016) state that witnessing a violent protest has a harmful effect on the community and the police officers. Hence, students have to devise adaptive or non-adaptive alternatives to cope with the threat of violence that they witnessed. Hanratty, Neeson, Bosqui, Duffy, Dunne, & Connolly (2019) assert that avoidance, numbing and increased arousal are typical coping strategies. Roger (2016) lists these coping styles: avoidance, emotional and task. Of these

styles the former two styles are passive and either deny or pine over the violence witnessed. Examples of avoidance coping styles are anger, distortion and ignorance, whereas, fear, guilt, and helplessness are the examples of the emotional coping styles. Task coping styles are detached and solution driven to deal with a threatening situation. Literature posits that the task coping style is the most adaptive of these strategies, because it empowers the user. However, in environments where individuals are constantly under threat, avoidance coping is beneficial to mediate current and future threats (Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer, & Higson-Smith, 2013). Avoidance coping may be beneficial for youth who are constantly exposed to violence in their community. Louw (2015) ranks South Africa has the highest protests per capita and ranks 11nth in a group of 50 largest economies, in 2014, 80% of these protests turned violent. The high exposure to violent protest

may compel students to use either avoidance or emotional coping strategies. However, the choice of strategy depends on biographic factors, the nature of the threat and efficacy of the strategy.

According to Risager & Thorup (2016) the fear of arrest, a criminal record and physical harm are primary concerns of students; the above data also indicates that students are often under-prepared for the emotional effects of engaging in protests. Consequently, after the #FMF movement, 12% of university students experienced moderate to severe symptoms of depression, and some abused substances, attempted or committed suicide as coping strategies (Eskell-Blokland, 2019; South African Depression and Anxiety Group [SADAG], 2016; (Sefotlane, 2018). The above number might be higher as these statistics relate to students who sought help. Further exacerbating the challenge is the limited literature on coping strategies for those who witness violent protest. Therefore, this paper seeks to address this knowledge gap as it explores how students coped with the violence that they experienced during the #FMF campaign at the University of the Free-State (UFS).

2. Contextualising violence within the UFS #FMF movement

#FMF is a post-democratic, non-partisan South African student movement that started in 2015 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The 2016 academic year tuition fee increase that had been announced facilitated this movement. Since students at other universities shared the concern, the movement spread to other public universities. Although fees was a common issue across universities, student demands differed per campus, like at the UFS, racial exclusion was the students' concern. Initially, the movement was non-violent, but it became violent with longevity and spread. Violence in movements is a consequence of protestor frustration because of their needs not being addressed or a provocative measure, counter-movement infiltration, and police

provocation when dispersing protestors (Fomunyan, 2017). Apart from the psychological harm caused, violent student protest contradict the traditional purpose of the university to produce well-rounded active citizens (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013), as university education shapes students and provides them with the necessary skills to deal with the challenges that they experience. This development is likely to occur in a supportive environment, and in this case, the history of South African universities shapes the student's demeanour.

South African universities have a history of language, race and geographical location segregation. Depending on their ethnic group, white students used Afrikaans or English, as their medium of instruction, therefore black students felt excluded because they had no choice of the their medium of instruction. Post-democracy, these systemic dynamics remain. At the UFS and other Afrikaans medium institutions, the students protested the end of racism and called for the use of English as a teaching language. However, since the UFS had a conservative protest culture, #FMF was subsumed under the Workers and Students Forum (WSF), a collaborative organisation for the outsourced service workers', and students'. Implementation of the fee increase by the university, failure to increase workers' salaries (as promised) and intimidation of staff members who sought clarity regarding their salaries gave the protest impetus (Van der Westhuizen, Labuschagne, & Kekana, 2015). Students identified as the ring-leaders of the movement were either arrested, suspended or expelled for non-compliance with a court order (Jansen, 2017). The results was that forum members resolved to disrupt the Intervarsity Rugby Tournament at the UFS Shimla Park stadium, as a means to force engagement with the authorities.

After the match was disrupted for the third time, spectators (most of whom were white) descended on the field and assaulted the protestors. The match continued sometime afterward. Ginsberg (2013) suggests that disruptions are provocative, which implies that the protestors should have predicted the spectators' outrage. The continuation of the match angered the protestors, as they interpreted this action as a rejection of their cause and a lack of interest from the authorities. Moreover, the police officers pointed guns at the black students, fired at them using rubber bullets, and raided their campus rooms, which enraged these students. None of these actions affected the white students. The broadcast of the events of the day on national media garnered public support.
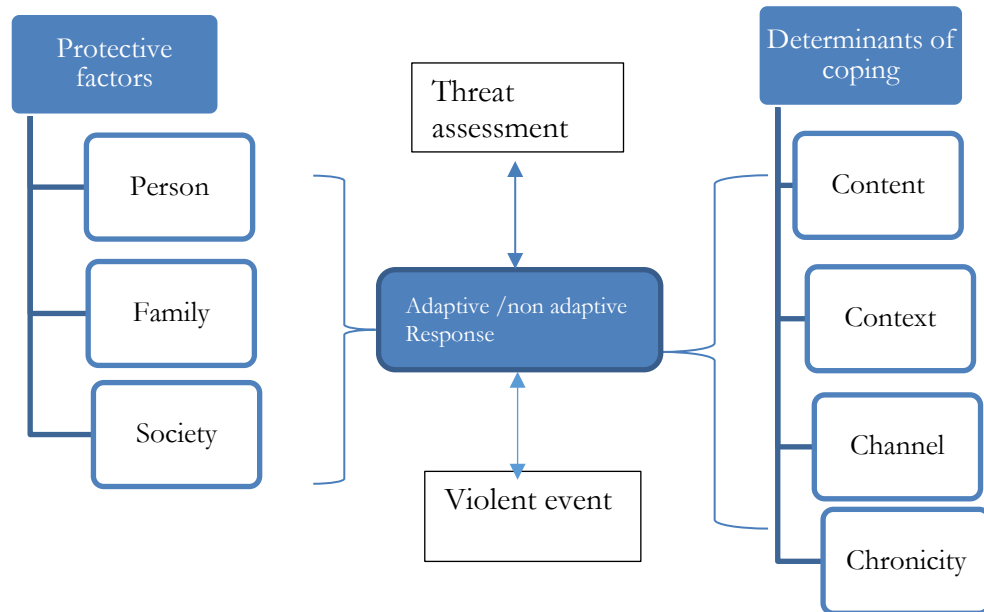
Ketelaars (2017) indicates that the national media plays a role in encouraging students to join in the protest. "Repression provides moral justification for student' violence, delegitimises authority, and increases commitment to the goals of the movement" (Reicher, 2019). This level of commitment makes participants oblivious of the psychological effects of violence during protests.

The discussion provided above illustrates that the #FMF movement exposes students to long term emotional effects like anger, fear, withdrawal and denial and that some use negative coping strategies. The next section outlines the process of adopting coping strategies.

3. The integrated violence framework

Violent protest are stress-inducing events that compel those involved in them to find ways of coping. This study uses the Boxer & Sloan-Power (2013) integrated violence framework, which is based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory, to explore the coping strategies used by students. The framework describes the relationship between the one's environment and the choice of coping styles in response to a threatening situation. The theory defines stress as any event that requires individuals to appraise the event and devise a strategy to cope with the perceived danger. Coping is an individualised behavioural, cognitive and emotional response that helps to foster adaptability to a threatening stimulus (Broidy, & Santoro, 2017). The process of choosing a coping style is a complex one, necessary exercise for internal stability. Coping is attained when the strength of the threat dissipates. Figure 1 below illustrates the framework.

Figure 1: Integrated framework of violence

Source: Boxer and Sloan-Power (2013)

The Boxer & Sloan-Power (2013) framework posits that the individuals' response to violence is a result of the interplay between protective factors and the characteristics of the violent event, namely its intensity, chronicity, content, and context. Protective factors are constitutional and environmental strengths that minimise vulnerability to risk. The more supportive these protective factors are, the higher the likelihood of an adaptive response to violence.

Broidy & Santoro (2017) argue that marginalisation increases the likelihood of violent protest, hence coping is determined by the following aspects (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013):

- The content or nature of the violence can be a threat of or actual physical violence that ranges from mild to catastrophic. Disruptions and sit-ins are examples of mild violence.
- The context refers to the physical environment where violence occurs. Within the context of this study violence occurs at the university.
- The channel relates to the experience of violence - acoustic, visual, or actual. Victimisation challenges a person to devise a means to lessen or avoid the impact of violence.
- Chronicity depicts the frequency of exposure to violence. Frequency can be episodic, sporadic, periodic or chronic. Roger (2016) shares that ruminating on the violent event makes the event chronic. Protest events at the UFS escalated from

once-off race related brawls to the violent Shimla Park Stadium incident that cascaded to the university residences.

Protective factors and coping strategies integrate to allow a person to assess the level of threat that the violent event. The violence and the proclivity of the environment to violence determines whether the person will choose an adaptive or non–adaptive style. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) categorise coping styles as emotion and problem-centred styles: the former regulates the emotions that violence elicits; the latter are action-based and aim to change the violence. Cherewick et al. (2015) identify other coping styles, namely emotion, behavioural and cognitive. The first two address the cause and beliefs about the problem. The ypologies suggest that coping is reactive and not anticipatory (Booth & Neill, 2017). The recurring violent protest that South African youth experience, mean that students can predict violence and avoid it (Kaminer, n.d.). Over-exposure to violence may lead to young people opting for an emotional style, rather than a problem-solving coping style, because they have limited capacity to change the status quo. Non-adaptive styles alter the feelings about violence, instead of dealing with it and may present adaptation challenges (Roger, 2016). However, it may help the student to assess his/her capabilities when threatened. Among these strategies, there is support for problem focussed strategies. However, a recent longitudinal study revealed that using several positive coping strategies lessened reliance on the non-adaptive coping strategy (Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). Therefore, coping represents is an interplay of emotions, behaviours and thoughts of an individual in response to a threat. This indicates that coping is a dynamic process that allows a person to choose and replace a style based on its efficacy, the protective factors, and the perceived level of threat.

4. Materials and methods

The interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used in this study to explore how university students cope with the violence that they experienced during the #FMF campaign. The rationale for using the IPA was that it is hermeneutic, and thus supports the researcher's subjectivity - as a university student and employee, the researcher experienced the emotional effects of student protests (Jeong & Othman, 2016). Prior to conducting the study, the researcher solicited permission from te authorities and also obtained consent from the participants.

The criteria for inclusion in the study was experience of violence during protests at UFS; although, historically, protests at UFS involved little or no violence. Participants were undergraduate, resident students in the second year of study, and enrolled in the Humanities and Law faculties. A total of six black participants – three female and three

male - between the age of 19-25, participated in recorded interview sessions. These sessions were arranged at their convenience.

The researcher used self-selection and snowball sampling procedures to select participants. Two participants were ordinary students, and the rest held leadership positions in the university student organisations. A non-random sampling procedure allowed the researcher to obtain relevant information from committed parties (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide and analysed using constant comparison and thematic analysis. The results are provided in the next section.

5. Results

The data gathered during the interviews revealed that students used negative coping strategies to deal with the threat of violence that they faced at their institution. Anger, shame, fear, mistrust and denial were the common coping strategies that the participants used. A synopsis of each strategy is provided below.

Anger
"Obviously, if I knew that you were the person that was beating me up back in the (Shimla Park) stadium, now that I'm here you have to pay back! They started breaking the windows, to get the attention of the white students." Xolani, male student

"What they did was to say to me: 'We are giving you the opportunity to tell us why we should not make the withdrawal final.' I was angry, because they were putting me in a position where they [law firm] wanted me to beg for a position and to compromise my position as a student leader." Itu, male student leader

Xolani's statement indicates the belief that violence is an acceptable tool for revenge. Anger is a goal-directed, confrontational behaviour that uses power to subjugate, threaten and elicit feelings of doubt in the target person. In this case, it is domineering and empowering emotion that allowed Black students to show that they were not scared of the White students. Itu contained his anger so as not to engage in confrontation with the authorities, because they had the power to affect his future career. Anger gives one a temporary sense of control and power over a stressful situation.

Mpho succinctly captures this when he stated: *"We are humans, and we have anger. We know that as blacks, when we need something and we do not get it at that time of our*

need, we run to the streets." He associates anger with race and states that blacks become angry when their demands are not met, and this is evidenced in blacks forming the bulk of participants in overt violent protest in South Africa. It is probable that he has not witnessed violent protest where whites were in the majority. Overall, his statement shows the efficacy of street protests, because they confront the status quo and temporarily offer protestors (often a disenfranchised group) an opportunity to regain their sense of power (Dawson, 2014; Sbicca & Perdue, 2014).

Itu's anger escalated because of his status and lack of power as a student leader and he, seemingly, was a target of internal and external victimisation. He assumed the law firm's approach was an attempt to weaken the movement, because the efficacy of a movement depends on the resoluteness of student leaders. For him, the collaboration between the institution and its partners was aimed at collapsing the movement and making him lose credibility as a student leader. Therefore the university authorities use coercion to either diffuse or break student movements, although these strategies have limited efficacy (Lee, 2016).

Shame
"When we use violence, we are listened to. We also get media attention (media, social networks). So, I kind of agree with the censoring of violent protests by the SABC (South African Broadcast Corporation), because I would not want my younger brother at home to see me on TV burning a school. It is wrong. The SABC was right to ban these images" Lesedi, female student leader

Lesedi expresses the instrumental nature of violence in protests, but simultaneously cites her disapproval, as she agreed with the SABC banning the screening of the destruction of public property (Makhafola, 2016). In this light, the banning of the protest action had a positive result for her personally, as she could maintain her image and standing in her family. However, she indicates a dilemma, as she views using violence as behaviour unbecoming of a university student, which could limit her future career prospects. The reason for her feelings of shame are perhaps because, engaging in violent protest goes against the purpose of HE, which is to produce active and critical citizens who will promote social justice (DHET, 2013). The feelings of shame could also be because of embarrassment and therefore fear about facing her peers after the university suspended her without following due process. Contrarily, shame could also relate to non-participation in the protest and having to deal with disparaging remarks from peers.

Fear
"The meeting in the morning heightened my sense of paranoia as to whom we can trust. As the evening came, and even some of the security came, this thing has been

traumatic. 'We broke the light, so that we remain in the darkness." Gugu, female student leader

"*People were leaving, because someone who lives with us at the residence said to us that he thinks we are not safe on campus and took us to his brother's place" Xolani, male student*

The events that followed the Shimla Park protest, including the altercation that happened later at the residences, led to students feeling insecure and fearful. For Gugu, the fear was not only for her safety, but also for her victimised colleagues, as indicated by Itu. References to paranoia, lying to the security officers and sitting in the dark to avoid being seen, illustrate the intensity of her fear.

For Xolani, the twin sources of his fear were other white students and the police, especially after the police stormed the residences and arrested black students. The desolateness of the university further increased his sense of possible victimisation with little or no potential help, as he said that the campus was 'quite desolate' and 'quite empty.'

Mistrust
"*Stop lying, Mama (Dr. C. Makhetha-Vice Rector: Student Affairs and External Relations."Anonymous student on SABC Morning Live (Mohlahlana, 2016)*
"*All that the university is interested in is its reputation." Gugu, female student leader*

Trust is an important quality for all types of relationships to be functional. "Trust is a belief in how individual actors working for the institution perform their roles" (Jackson, Kuha, Hough, Bradford, Hohl, & Gerber, 2013: 5). Trustworthiness means honesty and acting as expected, but the turn of events at UFS reflect the lack of trust between the students and the university authorities. The inadequate response of university management to the racism at the institution, and labelling the students as troublesome and liars further alienated them from the black students. Because of this, a student interjected during the live interview, appealing to one of the senior managers to be honest. Whilst interjecting the student spoke calmly and even called the Vice-Chancellor "Mama" as a sign of reverence. The student may have realised that he was unlikely to get another opportunity to make the public aware of how events had unfolded on the campus. Hence, Gugu's assertion that the institution is only interested in its reputation.
The television interview occurred during a prayer march that was broadcast nationally. The need for a prayer march indicates that the institution was aware of the damage to its reputation, which needed salvaging. Students saw the prayer march as an attempt by the university management to silence them and Vongani indicated that the university had

previously sanctioned "*A silent march. They did not want us to sing. They did not want us to do anything.*"

Denial
"Some students needed counselling. Many were traumatized. I counselled myself."
Mpho, Male student

Mpho's quote reveals the level of trauma that students witnessed from either observing or participating in violence. Although he understands the importance of counselling in helping one to cope with traumatic situations, he felt that he did not need external support to cope. Mpho's claim that he did not need counselling, and that he counselled himself can be denial. Morrell (2007) associates denial with the social expectation that males ought to be dominant. Mpho's statement suggests the typical social construction of masculinity that links seeking help to weakness. Nevertheless, him saying that "some" and then "most students were traumatised" shows his awareness of the impact of the violence on students and the value of psychological services. Denial is also common among student leaders because of the need to maintain the momentum of the protest and fear of losing credibility if seen to falter or give in to their emotions (Matthies-Boon, 2017). Denial can be either a negative or a positive coping strategy that allows one to deal with the challenge faced. Although, denial does not promote active coping, it may be the best short-term strategy to deal with a threat (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986).

The data gathered revealed that students opted for a negative coping style when threatened with violence. This coping style may have negative implications for the students' wellbeing and their significant others, as discussed in the next section.

6. Discussion

This study employed the integrated framework of violence to investigate the coping strategies that university students used in relation to the violence that they experienced during the #FMF protests. The results confirm previous findings that violent protest threaten those experiencing them (Matthies-Boon, 2017; Szabo, 2019). The environment, content, channel and chronicity determines the viable coping strategy, which can be adaptive or non-adaptive. Relating to the environment, the UFS has continuous history of racism, hence, students race-based attitudes and stereotypes can foment violence and affect the transformation of their university (Allen, 2011; Fillieule, 2012). The environmental pressures that students faced seem instrumental to students using non-adaptive styles of coping for the #FMF movement violence. Therefore, the university environment predisposed students to violence.

Participants chose anger, fear and shame in response to the violent incident - all of which are negative behaviours that involve distancing oneself both psychologically and physiologically from a stressful event. Maladaptive behaviours can be internalised or externalised, despite their category they harm a person's wellbeing and affect social functioning (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2012). Students who experience violence at university become psychologically affected and experience (Richmond, 2014: 23) "distraction, distress and impaired ability to study," particularly when there is no support system. Student leaders face the twin pressures that of being an activist and a registered student (Speckman, 2015). Matthies-Boon (2017) study of 40 Caireen youth activists revealed that the lack of support systems and no social change exacerbated activists' traumatic experiences. Hence, these activists numbed their emotions, avoided political discussions, and downplayed the effect of their experiences, though they appreciated those of their colleagues. Conceiving experiences as non-impactful may prevent seeking support. Cherewick et al. (2016) share that external support may reinforce adaptive coping behaviours. However, the content, context, channel, and chronicity aspects of violence determine supportive behaviours (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013) .

Externalised styles relate to acting out in a bid to avoid psychological or physical harm. A typical example of this is anger, with the internalised style being withdrawing and expressing a lack of control of the situation. Anger is an unconscious impulse reaction to a threatening stimulus; it is aimed at defending or securing benefits (Jost et al., 2012; Lee, 2015). Whichever coping style the students choose, their background, the severity of the stressor, their experience and modelling by significant others are influential (Boxer, Sloan-Power, Mercado, & Schappell, 2013).

The expression of anger is socially acceptable and a powerful way of venting frustrated emotions. Angry people are unlikely to control their actions, and some are flabbergasted when they realise the effect of their action. A participant in a study done by Matthies-Boon (2017) lamented that being part of the movement altered his pacifist values. The intensity of the perceived threat and a lack of political change, seems to motivate anger. A Turkish study confirmed that when people are angry, they tend to engage in fights until exhaustion (Weenink, 2014). Therefore, anger is a consciousness-altering emotion.

In authoritative and post-authoritative contexts like South Africa, violence and militarism remain a blueprint for resolving conflict (Pandey, 2012). Hence, the mid-match and post-match confrontation between black and white students at UFS and spectators seems to be a self-assertion strategy to maintain reputation (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015; O'Dea, Bueno, & Saucier 2017). For both groups, violence helped to deal with the perceived threat. When comparing the spectator and protestor numbers, it seems that the spectators

over-reacted, as they were unlikely to suffer substantial harm compared to the protestors. Therefore, the institutional and community dynamics between these two groups determined their interactions.

Further fuelling the anger was the university's contribution to the violence, as it did little to safeguard protestors from the subsequent stadium assault, police raid, the arrest of students and the victimisation of student leaders. Whereas black protestors bore the above consequences, both groups may have interpreted management's inaction at the stadium as rejection and disrespect - thus the lack of self-control by both parties. An American study on youth violence confirmed these sentiments (Bushman et al., 2016). In summary, the personal disposition of protestors and spectators, their assessment of the perceived threat, in terms of intensity and modality, influenced their adoption of the externalised coping style.

Students who opted for an internalised, emotional coping style, namely fear or denial, realised that they were powerless. While exposure to adverse life events can potentially increase the propensity to violence four-fold, fear interferes with building one's psychological capital (Aliyev & Karakus, 2015; Pandey, 2012). Fear is a self-preservation emotion when facing danger, and fosters information seeking and learning to promote coping (Morrison & Rockmore, 2016). However, it is a debilitating emotion if it remains unresolved (Roger, 2016).

Kaminer (n.d) states that fear does not always mean cowering, as it may trigger aggression if a person feels trapped. The statement one participant made that the campus was "*quite desolate and empty*" emphasises the level of fear that the students felt, and reveals their insecurity. Resident students were afraid that the police officers would raid the residences, arre st them again, and use unreasonable force against them (Oxlund, 2016; Thamm, 2015). That week, the university became more insecure, and black students seemingly felt isolated, as the presence of the private securities increased their fear (Peñafiel & Doran, 2018).

Considering that the majority of white students had vacated the institution and that police and security officers at the campus victimised black students, the participants' feelings were reasonable. Therefore, black students witnessed violence, both indirectly and directly. The nature of their fear ranged from threats of physical impact to chronic physical impact. Two events escalated students' fear and intensified mistrust and anger. Firstly, not a single spectator who instigated was arrested despite the presence of video footage. Secondly, the management denied that the police officers had raided black students' residences. This action backfired when one of the students countered the statements that the VC: External Affairs made on live television. This denial of facts

illustrates the university management's concern with its reputation. Conversely, such denial signified an indirect admission of liability. A study on lying demonstrated that people in powerful positions were liable to lying (Carney, Yap, Lucas, & Mehta, n.d.; Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015). In a polarised environment like the UFS the lies of the authorities intensified the lack of trust that black students had for them. Bradford, Huq, Jackson, & Roberts (2014) the lack of trust hampers the establishment of positive relations and shared identity between those concerned.

Shame is a conscious, internalised and disparaging emotion that accounts for the violence. However, shame increases vulnerability and anger, hence, it justifies violence (Gibson, 1993). During the #FMF the politicians and the public shamed students. They called students spoilt, unknowledgeable Marxist-rabble-rousers and counter-revolutionaries undeserving of being at university because of their continued protests (Mantashe, 2015; Naidoo, 2015). Meanwhile, the authorities pleaded with parents and community leaders to persuade students from protesting. Similar conditions were prevalent at the UFS, where instead of the university management addressing institutional challenges, it chose to organise a prayer march. Though prayer has proven to be an effective strategy to cope with traumatic events. Cherewick et al., (2016) for the UFS it was an inadequate response to the Shimla Park incident. Instead of pacifying students from engaging in violent protest it seems that shame made students angry.

The number of violent protest that occur in South Africa may numb students to violence. Contrary, Shields, Nadasen & Pierce (2009) study investigating the effects of community violence on primary school-going pupils from low income and violence-prone areas in Cape Town found that violence in the neighbourhood presented less posttraumatic symptoms for them. Mrug, Madan, & Windle (2015) also found that youth exposed to high levels of violence were unlikely to react erratically to violence, unlike their counterparts who were exposed to moderate violence. Thus, desensitisation to violence was a protective rather than a risk factor. Gaylord-Harden, Dickson, & Pierre (2016) study confirmed the above findings, though their findings were inconclusive because of the small sample of youth in the high violence exposure group. Mrug, Madan, & Windl (2015) points out that habituation to violence contributes to the perpetration of serious violence in late adolescence.

The results of this study indicate that all the students opted for externalised and internalised coping strategies. Though self-denigrating, these strategies may have positive effects on the individual as they propel one to explore alternative ways of coping.

7. Conclusion

The paper revealed that there has been a resurgence of students' movements across the world. Movements are goal- directed entities that aim to address student grievances and have proven efficacious. Though efficacious student movements often attract violence, which affects protest participants. Therefore, this paper used the integrated framework of violence to establish the coping strategies that UFS students used to cope with the violent protest they witnessed on their campus.

The study revealed that UFS students employed non-adaptive coping strategies. The choice thereof included cognitive evaluation of the context, content, channel, and chronicity of violence. Within the UFS the uncaring university management, especially towards black students, necessitated students' options for non-adaptive coping styles (Brancati, 2014). Whereas negative coping strategies are regarded as avoidance, they increased self-esteem and reduced the severity of the stressor because those using them have a positive outlook on life (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013). Irrespective of students' opting for negative coping strategies, these gave them a sense of control, an opportunity to self-preserve and not to be fearful about future threats (Morrison & Rockmore, 2016; Koerth-Baker & Keno, 2019). Protective factors, namely, personal and social factors, determine coping strategies.

8. Limitations and implications of the study

The study presents the following limitations. Firstly, the study sample was small and included students in the Law and Humanities Faculties thus the results cannot be generalised to the entire institution or other institutions, because the context is different. Secondly, the study was conducted in real-time, a few months after the protests. Therefore it was not possible for the researcher to assess the long-term effects of the protests on the students. Thirdly, all the participants were black, because the researcher was unable to find interested white students.

Implications of the study

The study findings imply the following:
- Universities need to investigate the effect of the #FMF and its related protests on the overall well-being of students.
- There is a need to examine race relations and find means to reconcile black and white students, this, and this may lessen violence incidences at the campus.

- There is a need for the university management to understand that their students' come from diverse backgrounds that require that the management adapt and respond to their needs
- In addition to the counselling services offered at universities, there is need to offer personal development skills to students so that they are equipped with skills to respond to stress- inducing situations.
- Creating circles of care which are environments within which students can offer each other emotional support with the guidance of an experienced facilitator who can be a senior student. This recommendation is in line with the lack of trust that students have towards the university management.
- Beyond the institution, there is a need to review the way police officers respond to student protests. Notwithstanding the modification of crowd control strategy, the modes of intervention that police use pose a danger to students.

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