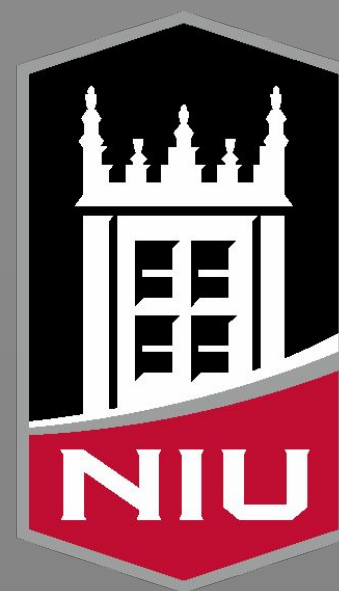
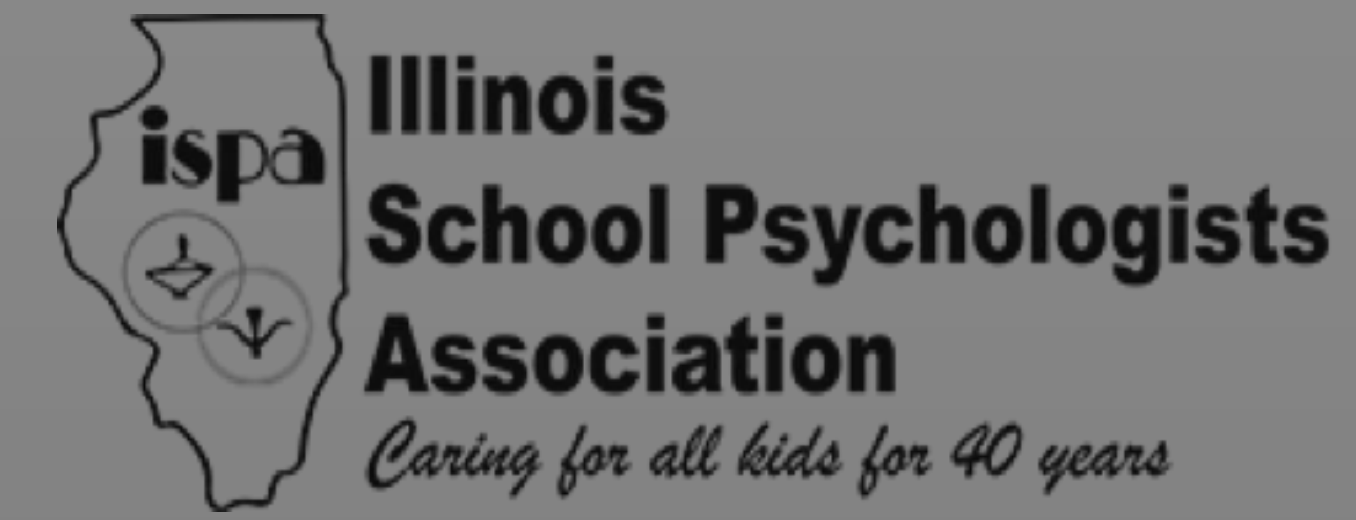


Indirect Offensive Language Use: Association with School Climate



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Introduction

- The extant literature indicates a strong association between the direct use of offensive language (OL), including homophobic language and racial slurs, with negative outcomes such as decreased school success (Poteat & Espelage, 2007; Poteat et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011).
- Most research on OL has focused on directed language toward individuals.
- Little research has focused on OL towards those with disabilities or on the casual and broad use of OL.
- The goal of the current study was to investigate the overall use of indirect OL, in association with school climate.

Operationalization

- *Offensive language*: inappropriate language pertaining to one's race, disability, or sexual orientation, and includes the casual use of slurs both directed at an individual and not directed at an individual (perhaps even among friends).
- *School climate*: the characteristics of school life based on students' perceptions of safety, student engagement, and interpersonal relationships (Cohen et al., 2009).

Predictions

1. All three types of indirect OL use (homophobic language, racial slurs, disability slurs) will represent a broader construct of OL exposure.
2. Reports of hearing OL will be negatively associated with perceptions of school climate.

Method

Participants

- Data were collected from a diverse, rural middle school with 6th-8th grade students ($N = 713$).

Measures

- The Delaware School Climate Survey-Student form (Bear et al., 2014)
 - 32- item self-report measure
 - Total school climate was used
- Adapted version of the Homophobic Content Agent Target (HCAT; Poteat, 2005)
 - 6 item, self-report measure
 - "Some kids call each other names such as:"
 - *gay, lesbo, fag, etc;*
 - *use the "r" word; OR*
 - *call each other racial slurs based on ethnic/racial customs, how they dress, or their food*
 - "How many times in the last week did someone call you these things?"
 - Q1: "a friend,"
 - Q2: "someone I did not really know that well."

Analyses

- To address Prediction 1, a one factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with all six items loading onto the one factor was run (refer to Figure 1).
- Regarding Prediction 2, a path model examining whether the latent factor of OL predicted school climate (observed variable) was analyzed.

Results

Table 1.

Demographic Descriptive by Gender, Grade, and Race

	Frequency	Percent
Males	382	53.7%
Females	329	46.3%
Sixth Grade	211	29.6%
Seventh Grade	279	39.1%
Eighth Grade	223	31.3%
White	327	45.9%
African American	90	12.6%
Hispanic	167	23.4%
Multi-Racial	96	13.5%
Other	33	4.6%

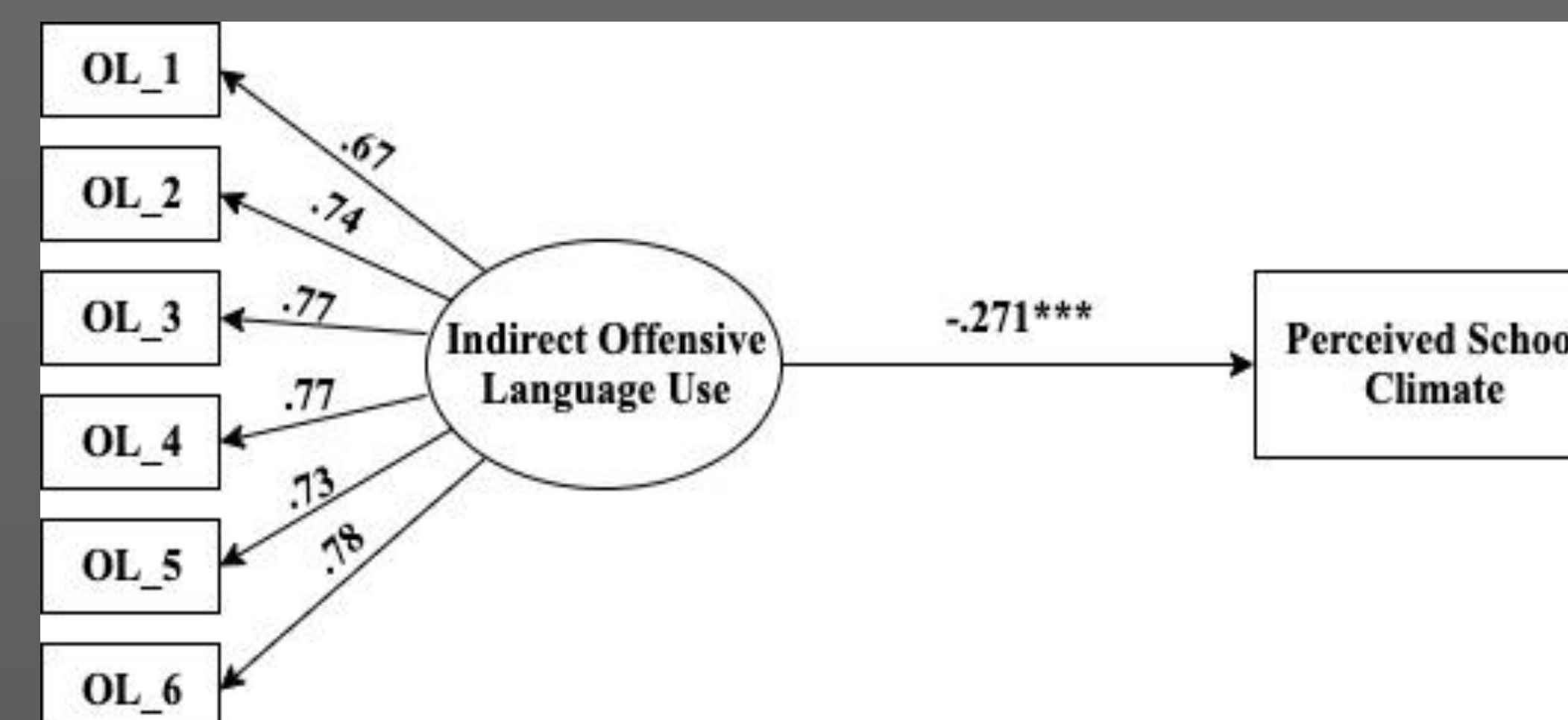


Figure 1. Illustration of the model. This depicts the significant associations uncovered in the current study.

Prediction 1: CFA model fit was analyzed and demonstrated adequate, but not strong fit: RMSEA (.130, 90% CI .114-.147), CFI (.891), TLI (.837), and the chi-square/df ratio less than 3 ($X^2 = 160.93$, $df = 9$; Kline, 2016; Kyriazos, 2018) with factor loadings ranging from .68 - .78.

Prediction 2: OL was a significant and negative predictor of school climate perceptions (Standardized estimate = -0.271 (SE = 0.044)

Discussion

- Although the fit of the CFA model was not ideal, outcomes suggest that disability, homophobic, and racial OL may represent a broader construct of OL use. This finding highlights the potential importance of examining all forms of derogatory language and considering their overall association with school climate.
- This study found that this broad construct of OL used in an indirect way was significantly and negatively associated with school climate, highlighting the importance of addressing indirect language use in any form in the school setting.
- Implications for the study include an emphasis on social-emotional curricula to address the casual use of inappropriate language, which may positively impact school climate.
- Programs addressing school climate should incorporate aspects addressing casual use of offensive language in schools.

Future Research & Limitations

- Future research should utilize a more diverse sample across developmental levels to ensure generalizability.
- The fit of the CFA should be examined in additional samples with longer measures pertaining to each for derogatory language use.
- A limitation includes the use of self-report measures, which leaves potential for response bias.