I. General Information

A. Title: Adjective Check List (ACL)

B. Authors: Harrison G. Gough, Ph.D. and Alfred B. Heilbrun, Jr., Ph.D.

C. Publisher: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 3083 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

D. Forms; groups to which applicable: There is a single form that may be used for observer and self-report methods of data gathering. The checklist is for general use with normal and delinquent adolescents, normal adults, and limited use with psychiatric populations (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983). The ACL also has been used to assess children as young as eight years old (Landazabal, 1999).

E. Practical Features: The ACL is a versatile tool for assessing personality and perceived psychological tendencies. The instrument is composed of 300 adjectives that are used in everyday life. The four-page booklet of the combined item booklet/answer sheet is easy to read and use. Instructions are short and simple. The ACL can be used for observer- and self-descriptions.

The combined item booklet/answer sheets are also available in Spanish (hand-scoring only) from the publisher. The ACL has been translated into many languages by researchers for use with people of non-U.S. cultures (Williams, Satterwhite, & Saiz, 1998).

F. General Type: Idiographic and normative personality assessment by self or observer.

G. Date of Publication: 1983 (latest edition)


I. Time required to administer: Approximately 10-20 minutes for normal adults.
J. **Purpose for which evaluated:** For use in a counseling context with adults and adolescents.

II. **Purpose and Nature of the Instrument**

A. **Stated purpose:** The authors of the ACL note that "Although the ACL was initially developed for use by observers in describing others, it can be used in self-description...in addition, the ACL can be employed to characterize the ideal self, a future or past self, a legendary personage, a geographical region, a commercial product, an idea, a belief, a theory, or almost any other thing.... The range of application, in fact, is almost limitless, and new and unforeseen uses of the method await only the creativity of future researchers" (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983).

B. **Description of test, items, and scoring:** The ACL consists of 300 adjectives comprising 37 scales that include measures of psychological needs based on Murray’s (1938) needs, ego functioning based on Berne’s (1961) theory of Transactional Analysis, creativity and intelligence based on Welsh’s (1975) Origence-Intellectence concept of these constructs, and "Modus Operandi” and Topical Scales created by the authors. In order of the report presentation, there are four (4) Modus Operandi scales, 15 Need scales, nine (9) Topical scales, five (5) Transactional Analysis scales, and four (4) Origence-Intellectence scales.

The 300 items are responded to simply by checking off the box next to the adjectives that the respondent considers as self- or other-descriptive. Hand-scoring can be derived from the ACL manual, although the publisher notes that hand scoring requires the creation of scoring keys from the manual and can be time-consuming, whereas computer scoring is more convenient. ACL protocols with less than 20 items or more than 250 items checked are to be interpreted very cautiously, while, protocols with fewer than 10 items or greater than 270 items checked are usually invalid.

C. **Use in Counseling:** The publishers state that the ACL can be used in individual and relationship counseling settings, as well as in team building, personal and career development, and identification of conflict. For example, scores on the Topical Scale "Counseling Readiness" can provide information about the utility of counseling for an individual at a given time.

An extensive bibliography of articles and texts citing usage of the ACL is available from the publisher as a separate publication. These articles show ACL usage in different topics that are relevant to counseling such as aggression, assertiveness, creativity, self-esteem, change following an intervention, learning disability, parent-child relationships, marital distress, spirituality, group feedback, job success, leadership, power, and vocational interest.

III. **Practical Evaluation**

A. **Usefulness of the Manual:** The manual is relatively user-friendly and informative. Knowledge of basic statistics is needed to understand the majority of the
manual. The manual thoroughly describes and discusses the scales and their psychological implications, describes some of the creative uses of the ACL, provides six case illustrations and a list of items (adjectives) composing each scale. Normative data by gender and the total number of items checked are given for transformations of raw scores into standardized scores. The manual also provides reliability coefficients by gender for each scale, a sample test form and a sample Profile Recording Sheet.

B. Adequacy of directions; training required to administer: The ACL can be easily administered to adults. The instructions are short, clear, and self-explanatory. The ACL is available as a hand-scorable four-page booklet and as a single sheet for computer scoring.

The publisher classifies the ACL as Level "C" material. In order to purchase and interpret the ACL, the examiner must have satisfactorily completed a course in the interpretation of psychological tests and measurement at an accredited college or university, and possess an advanced degree in a profession that provides training in the interpretation of psychological tests from an accredited college or university.

C. Scoring services available and cost: Scoring services are available from the publisher as detailed above. For more information, contact the publisher or visit the publisher’s website at www.cpp.com.

IV. Technical Considerations

A. Normative Sample: The normative sample consists of 4,144 females and 5,238 males. The male sample was drawn from groups of high school students (634), college students (936), graduate students (621), medical students (718), delinquents (293), psychiatric patients (50), and adults (1,986). The female sample was drawn from high school students (410), college students (1,214), graduate students (336), medical students (990), law students (52), and adults (2,092). Ages are not given in the manual for the normative sample.

B. Reliability: Alpha coefficients were calculated from scores of 591 males and 588 females. The derivation of these samples is not described in the manual. Alpha coefficients for the males range from .56 for Change and Succorance to .95 for Favorable, with a median of .76. Alpha coefficients for females range from .53 for Counseling Readiness to .94 for Favorable, with a median of .75. For the males, all scales except the Change and Succorance scales have alpha coefficients over .60, and, for the females, all scales except Counseling Readiness have alpha coefficients over .60. These scores fall within the range of acceptable reliability coefficients for personality measures.

Test-retest data for males was gathered in a six-month interval from a sample of 199 (99 college students and 100 military officers). Test-retest reliabilities ranged from .34 for scale A-1 (high origence, low intellectence) to .77 for aggression, with a median of .65 (10
scales had retest correlations lower than .60). Test-retest data for females was gathered in a one-year time interval from a sample of 45 college students. Correlations ranged from .45 for Femininity, A-1, and A-2, to .86 for Exhibition, with a median of .71 (nine scales had retest reliabilities below .60).

C. Validity: Convergent and discriminant validity information is provided in the manual via correlations of ACL scales with the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Terman Concept Mastery Test, and a General Vocabulary Test. These findings support the construct validity of the various scales. The ACL manual provides data showing that the social desirability response bias is "relatively inconsequential as a determiner of scores on the scales of the ACL" (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983, p.33). More recently, the ACL has been correlated with measures of the Five-Factor Model (FFM), which has been shown to provide a useful interpretive reference point for understanding the construct validity of the ACL scales. Based on their patterns of relations to the FFM, some of the ACL scales appear not to reflect their putative constructs and should therefore be interpreted carefully (e.g., Self-Control, the Adapted Child scale and the Origence-Intellectence scales A-1 to A-4).

ACL marker scales for these five major personality dimensions have also been developed and evidence good construct validity (John, 1990; Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1991; FormyDuval, Williams, Patterson, & Fogle, 1995). Using these scales can help expand the interpretive and predictive power of the ACL.

At the time of the 1983 publication, the ACL had been translated into French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese and Thai. A review of abstracts indicates favorable cross-cultural use of the ACL in at least 10 countries (Williams, Satterwhite, & Saiz, 1998). ACL scales have been related to outcomes in varied contexts such as predicting investor behavior and measuring change resulting from spiritual activity. The ACL has been cited in over 700 publications since the publication of the first manual in 1965, and more validity data can be gleaned from these articles.

V. Evaluation

The ACL is a broad-based, versatile personality assessment tool that can be used in a variety of contexts with adults and adolescents. A clear strength of the ACL is the variety of ways in which the adjective list can be used to generate profiles describing personally salient perceptions of different phenomena: self-personality, ratings of others' personalities, personalities of famous people, ratings of ideal personality, stereotypes, characterizations of groups of people or cultures of cities. For counselors, the ACL is a very flexible and easy to use instrument. It is ideal for measuring therapeutically related issues, including the client’s progress in treatment and clinical outcome. The identification of FFM markers in the ACL enhances its usefulness in understanding inner motivations and predicting salient psychosocial and health outcomes, such as well-being, stress levels, and coping ability. One must use caution in interpreting the Self-Control, Adapted Child, and Origence-Intellectence scales as their FFM correlates do not support the putative nature of these scales as described in the manual.
REFERENCES


