

# LIKING SCALE

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## LIKING SCALE

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Social Psychology, Measurement Psychology

### 1. Core Definition

The Liking Scale is a standardized psychological instrument designed to empirically measure the degree of positive regard, respect, and non-romantic affection an individual holds for another person. Unlike measures of passionate attraction or romantic commitment, the Liking Scale focuses specifically on quantifying feelings of admiration, favorable evaluation, and perceived competence concerning the target individual. It fundamentally serves to assess the quality of friendship and platonic relationships, capturing the sentiments typically associated with enjoying someone's company and holding them in high esteem. The scale is built upon the premise that attraction is a multidimensional construct, requiring distinct measures for components such as deep attachment (love) and respectful affinity (liking), thereby allowing researchers to precisely delineate these related but separate emotional states within various interpersonal contexts.

The conceptual framework underlying the measurement defines **liking** as encompassing two primary dimensions: first, a positive assessment of the target's personality, skills, and overall adjustment; and second, the respect and admiration accorded to the target individual. A high score on the Liking Scale indicates that the respondent views the other person as highly competent, mature, well-adjusted, and generally superior in character compared to others. This positive cognitive and affective evaluation is critical, positioning the Liking Scale as a crucial tool for studying the dynamics of friendship, peer acceptance, and general social bonds that do not involve sexual attraction or intense dependency. The instrument compels participants to rate their agreement with statements reflecting these dimensions, translating subjective feelings into objective, quantitative data useful for social science inquiry.

The distinction between liking and other forms of attraction is central to its utility. While relationships categorized by liking often involve mutual enjoyment and shared activities, they typically lack the intense emotional volatility, physical preoccupation, and reliance on the partner for fulfillment that characterize romantic love. Therefore, the scale provides a necessary tool for researchers who seek to understand the structural composition of relationships outside the passionate spectrum, offering insights into the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of strictly platonic connections. Its precision allows for correlational studies investigating how personality traits, shared experiences, and contextual factors influence the development of strong, respectful, non-romantic bonds between individuals.

### 2. Etymology and Historical Development

The Liking Scale was first proposed and developed by the influential American social psychologist

**Zick Rubin**, primarily through his seminal work published around 1970 and elaborated upon in his 1973 book, *Liking and Loving: An Invitation to Social Psychology*. Rubin's development of this instrument was a direct response to a significant gap in empirical social psychology; prior to his work, the complex phenomena of attraction, particularly romantic love, were often treated as unitary, difficult-to-measure concepts, or simply assumed to be stronger versions of the same underlying feelings. Rubin argued compellingly that for social psychology to mature as a science, it needed valid and reliable instruments capable of separating and quantifying these distinct emotional experiences.

Rubin approached the measurement challenge by first gathering descriptions of relationships defined by either friendship (liking) or deep affection (loving) from subjects. He then distilled these anecdotal descriptions into specific behavioral and attitudinal statements, which formed the pool of items for both his Liking and Love scales. The systematic creation process involved rigorous statistical analysis, including factor analysis, to ensure that the resulting items clustered into two distinct scales. This methodological rigor was groundbreaking, establishing a precedent for the quantitative study of intimate and non-intimate relationships. The resulting Liking Scale was validated as measuring components such as admiration and positive evaluation, consistently distinct from the components of caring and attachment measured by the corresponding Love Scale.

The historical significance of the Liking Scale lies in its successful empirical differentiation of key relational constructs. By demonstrating that liking and loving are statistically independent, though often correlated, concepts, Rubin provided social psychologists with the necessary tools to test nuanced theories regarding relationship progression. His work catalyzed a massive wave of subsequent research into the psychology of relationships, moving the field away from purely philosophical discussions toward empirical investigation. The scale quickly became, and remains, one of the most widely cited and utilized instruments for assessing non-passionate affection in academic research settings globally.

### 3. Differentiation from Love

The central theoretical and practical utility of the Liking Scale stems from its intentional contrast with **Rubin's Love Scale**. Rubin defined loving as a state involving attachment (a need for physical and emotional proximity), caring (a profound concern for the partner's welfare), and intimacy (the desire for close, confidential communication). Liking, conversely, lacks these elements of passionate intensity and deep emotional dependency, focusing instead on objective evaluation and respect. For example, statements on the Love Scale often reflect a willingness to sacrifice one's own needs for the partner, whereas Liking Scale items focus on appreciating the partner's character or skills.

This theoretical differentiation holds significant implications for understanding various stages of relationship development. In the early stages of romantic relationships, or in enduring platonic friendships, scores on the Liking Scale may be extremely high, reflecting mutual respect and admiration. However, as a relationship transitions into committed, romantic love, scores on the Love Scale typically increase dramatically, indicating the development of deep attachment and dependency. Researchers utilizing both scales can therefore track the evolution of a relationship, observing whether the affective component (liking) remains stable while the attachment component (love) intensifies, thereby providing empirical evidence for models of relationship transition, such as those proposed by social exchange theory or equity theory.

Moreover, the separation of these two constructs has been vital in studying relationships where one element is present without the other. For instance, an individual might score highly on the Liking Scale for a professional mentor or a respected colleague, appreciating their competence and character, without scoring highly on the Love Scale. Conversely, complex, dependent, or even abusive relationships might show low Liking scores (low respect/positive evaluation) but high Love scores (intense attachment or dependency), highlighting potential relationship pathologies that require the distinct measurement capabilities offered by Rubin's framework. The scale thus provides a fine-grained tool for diagnosing the emotional composition of diverse interpersonal bonds.

#### 4. Key Characteristics and Components of the Instrument

The standardized Liking Scale typically consists of 17 distinct items, though variations and shorter forms exist, all designed to capture the two core dimensions of respectful affection. Respondents rate their agreement with these statements, often using a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The items are phrased to be unambiguous and directly relate to the perception of the other individual's attributes and the emotional response they elicit. The clarity and simplicity of the wording contribute significantly to the scale's high inter-rater reliability and ease of administration across various demographic groups.

The first primary component measured is **Positive Evaluation**, which reflects the belief that the target individual possesses desirable traits and is generally well-adjusted and mentally healthy. Example items include statements such as, "I think is one of the most competent people I know," or "I would recommend for a responsible job." This component emphasizes cognitive appraisal--the intellectual judgment of the other person's worth and capability--rather than mere emotional response. High scores here indicate a strong belief in the superiority of the target individual's character and abilities compared to the general population.

The second component is **Respect and Admiration**, which focuses on the feeling of esteem and honor directed toward the target. Statements reflecting this factor might include: "I have great

confidence in 's good judgment," or "I think is unusually well-adjusted." This factor captures the motivational aspect of liking, suggesting that the respondent is motivated to seek the target's company and values their opinions due to perceived virtue and wisdom. The cumulative score across all items provides a comprehensive measure of the individual's overall level of respectful liking, allowing researchers to compare liking levels across different relational partners or across time within a single relationship.

## 5. Psychometric Properties and Validation

The Liking Scale is widely regarded for its strong psychometric properties, which account for its enduring popularity in social psychology research. **Reliability** is consistently demonstrated through high internal consistency, often yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients well above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the individual scale items effectively measure the same underlying construct. Test-retest reliability, measuring stability over time, has also been shown to be robust, suggesting that an individual's level of liking for a specific person is a stable attribute, provided the relationship itself remains unchanged.

In terms of **Validity**, the scale exhibits robust evidence for construct validity. As hypothesized by Rubin, Liking Scale scores correlate highly with measures of friendship closeness, frequency of positive interaction, and self-reported admiration, while showing a significantly weaker, though still positive, correlation with measures of passionate love or sexual desire. This pattern confirms that the scale successfully isolates the conceptual domain of respectful affection. Furthermore, factor analyses frequently confirm the two-factor structure (Positive Evaluation and Respect/Admiration), supporting the theoretical division of the construct.

Criterion validity is often established by demonstrating that scores on the Liking Scale predict behaviors associated with friendship and positive social interaction. For instance, high liking scores predict greater willingness to engage in shared activities, offer emotional support, and express satisfaction with a platonic relationship. Conversely, in studies involving couples, low Liking Scale scores, even if Love Scale scores are high, can predict relationship instability or dissatisfaction, underscoring the necessity of respect and positive regard for long-term relational health. These rigorous validation processes ensure that the numerical outcomes of the scale accurately reflect the psychological state being measured.

## 6. Applications in Research and Practice

The Liking Scale has been instrumental across numerous fields of social and organizational psychology. In academic settings, it serves as the foundational metric for studying **friendship formation**, group cohesion, and the processes of peer acceptance and rejection, particularly in developmental psychology studies concerning adolescents and young adults. Researchers use the

scale to explore how factors such as similarity in attitudes, shared activities, and proximity influence the development of deep, platonic bonds, providing empirical support for classic theories of interpersonal attraction.

Beyond traditional relationship research, the scale's principle of measuring respectful regard has been adapted or utilized in organizational psychology, as alluded to in the source material. While the original Rubin scale measures feelings toward an individual, organizational research often employs instruments derived from or conceptually similar to the Liking Scale to gauge employees' affective responses to their workplace, supervisors, or team members. For example, measures of job satisfaction often include components related to liking one's colleagues or respecting management, influencing metrics like team performance and employee retention. The provided example of company directors using the scale "to attain the workforces opinion of their conditions and working life" suggests an adaptation where "liking" is directed toward the working environment or the institutional culture itself, reflecting general positive regard and satisfaction with the organizational structure and personnel.

Furthermore, in clinical and counseling psychology, the Liking Scale can be a valuable diagnostic tool. Therapists may use the scale to help clients quantify the quality of their social network, differentiating between relationships based on genuine respect and those based on obligation or external factors. Understanding where a client falls on the spectrum of liking for key individuals in their life aids in identifying sources of relational strength and potential areas of conflict. Its broad applicability across developmental, social, and organizational contexts solidifies the Liking Scale's status as a fundamental measurement tool in the study of human interaction.

## 7. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its widespread use, the Liking Scale, like many psychometric instruments designed to quantify complex emotion, faces several persistent criticisms. A core philosophical challenge revolves around **reductionism**: the argument that translating the rich, nuanced subjective experience of liking a person into a single numerical score inherently oversimplifies and diminishes the complexity of human emotion and connection. Critics suggest that the standardized items might fail to capture idiosyncratic or culturally unique expressions of respect and admiration, leading to an incomplete or overly narrow measurement of the construct.

Methodological debates often focus on the issue of **social desirability bias**. Because the Liking Scale primarily measures positive regard and respect, respondents may feel compelled to present themselves as highly admiring or respectful of others, leading to inflated scores, particularly in public or high-stakes testing environments. This potential for ceiling effects--where many respondents score near the maximum possible score--can limit the scale's ability to differentiate between genuinely high levels of liking and socially conforming responses, thus obscuring subtle

variations in interpersonal affect.

A further area of criticism concerns **cross-cultural validity**. Rubin's original scale was developed and validated predominantly within Western, individualistic cultures where respect and positive evaluation are expressed and valued in specific ways. In more collectivistic or hierarchical societies, the cultural norms surrounding the expression of admiration and the meaning of competence might differ significantly, potentially rendering the direct translation or application of the Liking Scale problematic. Researchers utilizing the instrument in non-Western contexts must therefore undertake careful adaptation and re-validation procedures to ensure that the construct being measured is equivalent, rather than merely relying on linguistic translation.

## 8. Further Reading

[Rubin's Liking and Loving Scales \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Zick Rubin \(Wikipedia\)](#)

Rubin, Z. (1970). Measurement of Romantic Love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16(2), 265-273.

Rubin, Z. (1973). *Liking and Loving: An Invitation to Social Psychology*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.