

# Reciprocity Theory

(REGAN, 1971)

Academy of Medical Educators

**THEORY  
CORNER**

**ScEI Club**

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## Background

Reciprocity theory (Regan, 1971), rooted in social exchange theory, posits that human relationships are governed by mutual give-and-take and that individuals feel compelled to return favors or kindness received. In medical education, this theory underscores the importance of reciprocal relationships between educators and learners, where trust, respect, and shared responsibility foster deeper engagement and learning. Studies have explored reciprocity theory in various settings, including physician – patient interactions and resident & attending rotation evaluations.



University of Colorado  
Anschutz Medical Campus

## Further Reading

Cohen PA. Student ratings of instruction and student achievement: A meta-analysis of multisection validity studies. *Rev Educ Res* 1981; 51: 281-308.

Gardner AK, Scott DJ. Repaying in kind: Examination of the reciprocity effect in faculty and resident evaluations. *J Surg Educ* 2016; 73: e91-e94.

Regan DT. Effects of a favor and liking on compliance. *J Exp Social Psychol* 1971; 7: 627–639.

Roberts CA, Aruguete MS. Task and socioemotional behaviors of physicians: A test of reciprocity and social interaction theories in analogue physician-patient encounters. *Social Sci Med* 2000; 50: 309-315.