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The Presentation of Self Reminded Me of Dale Carnegie's Best Selling How to Win Friends and Influence People

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Dr. Ralph Turner, professor emeritus of sociology at the University of California Los Angeles, wrote this memoir for the Erving Goffman Archives and approved posting the present version on the web.

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August 4

Hello, Dmitri,

I have read the materials you sent me and given considerable thought to your request. After reading your essay and the three interviews you sent, I realize that my own interaction with Goffman was much too casual and infrequent to permit the kind of understandings and reactions that you are dealing with. I have read and appreciated most of his works, including *The Presentation of Self*, which I read in 1958. My first impression was of an affinity to Dale Carnegie's best selling *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which I had read in the 1930s. Although the aim of the two books was quite different, both tried to bring to light the subtle nuances of interpersonal encounters. I notice that my copy, published as a monograph by the University of Edinburgh in 1958, has considerable underlining! Others have noted that *The Presentation* inspired a broadened perspective of what could legitimately be called sociological analysis. I was impressed that Goffman regarded his thinking as work in process rather than finished pieces. I remarked to him at one time that I found his concept of role distancing quite useful, and his reply was to the effect that he had already gone far beyond that concept.

I must comment that I tend to be skeptical of attempts to explain how a scholar comes to choose a topic or a point of view when the
subject is not around to rebut or enlarge on the explanations, though I respect the effort that you are making to reach a fair and balanced understanding of what Goffman was doing.

I know that this reply is not helpful in what you are doing. But I must say again that my relations with Goffman were never extensive or deeply personal enough to be really useful for your project.

With best wishes, Ralph