



# Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader

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*The question of affect is central to critical theory, psychology, politics, and the entire range of the humanities; but no discipline, including psychoanalysis, has offered a theory of affect that would be rich enough to account for the delicacy and power, the evanescence and durability, the bodily rootedness and the cultural variability of human emotion.*

Silvan Tomkins (1911–1991) was one of the most radical and imaginative psychologists of the twentieth century. In *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, a four-volume work published over the last thirty years of his life, Tomkins developed an ambitious theory of affect steeped in cybernetics and systems theory as well as in psychoanalysis, ethology, and neuroscience. The implications of his conceptually daring and phenomenologically suggestive theory are only now—in the context of postmodernism—beginning to be understood. With *Shame and Its Sisters*, editors Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank make available for the first time an engaging and accessible selection of Tomkins's work.

Featuring intensive examination of several key affects, particularly shame and anger, this volume contains many of Tomkins's most haunting, diagnostically incisive, and theoretically challenging discussions. An introductory essay by the editors places Tomkins's work in the context of postwar information technologies and will prompt a reexamination of some of the underlying assumptions of recent critical work in cultural studies and other areas of the humanities. The text is also accompanied by a biographical sketch of Tomkins by noted psychologist Irving E. Alexander, Tomkins's longtime friend and collaborator.

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## Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #501341 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duke University Press Books
- Published on: 1995-10-16
- Released on: 1995-10-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .70" w x 6.00" l, 1.03 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 280 pages

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"*Shame and Its Sisters* will have a major impact on the study of culture in the coming years, and on several fronts. It is a significant contribution to the current rethinking of emotion and affect that promises to explore the limits of Freudian and dialectical models of the self, its pleasures, desires, and projects."—W. J. T. Mitchell, Editor, *Critical Inquiry*

"A fascinating, timely, and richly 'awry' contribution to recent work on problems of agency, affect, and the nature/culture debate generally. The introduction is superb, exact, and incisive. *Shame and Its Sisters* will be of real interest to a wide range of readers in the humanities, including history, literature, psychoanalytic theory, work on the problem of the body and the 'subject,' systems theory, and more."—Mark Seltzer, Cornell University

### From the Back Cover

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### About the Author

At the time of her death in 2009, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was Distinguished Professor of English, CUNY Graduate Center. Her many publications include *A Dialogue On Love* (Beacon, 1999); *Fat Art/Thin Art* (Duke, 1994); *Tendencies* (Duke, 1993); and *Epistemology of the Closet* (California, 1990).

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