

# A Review of *Eros/Power: Love in the Spirit of Inquiry*



by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

**“What one sees depends on one’s worldview”**

**I’m at a loss. Struggling actually. I keep going back to the book trying to hopefully find some keyword or phrase, some vignette that will give me the story-starter I desperately need. I typically read books and thoughts leap onto the page. Not so today. After reading *Eros/Power: Love in the Spirit of Inquiry*, I am at a loss.**

**I’m sitting with a sense of having read** an intensely intimate portrait of people’s lives dosed with a strong sense of really? Did they really not only live that but then write about it? Perhaps I’m too cloistered, too unexperienced, too naïve. Reading about their experimentation, the polyamory, the mission to create non-possessive adult friendships—open love and sex, non-possessive erotic friendships, and so forth felt beyond my vision.

**I understood the reasoning for writing** their autobiographies with their intimate relationships front and center—they offer fodder for reflection on how to look at sexuality and intimacy in their lives, at love in their lives, as well as power and how they unconsciously created it, dealt with a sense of powerlessness and so forth (though Bill admits at the end that he’s been accused on living with blinders on regarding some of his power).

# “How can you cultivate more mutual, more balanced, more loving, more supportive, more erotic, more inquiring friendships?”

**And as I write this review, I slowly** understand more of the whole experience rather than being able to write about the parts. Perhaps that’s the reason why this review is so difficult, why it’s more about my experience reading this book than the book itself. I tend to write about the pieces while this book feels all inclusive. It feels systemic, as if my entire being has to be immersed in order to experience a shift within myself. Their stories prompted reflection of my own, their questions triggered older memories recessed neatly away, left for another lifetime’s pondering perhaps. I see myself in their reflections— noticing how I dress, how I behave, how I engage with male friends (no partner in my life at this time so can’t go there) and what I expect perhaps, the underside of my actions and their reactions are more in my conscious view than before. My awareness of me carries a different perspective now, tinged by their light shined on self and other, male and female, friend and lover.

**I think part of my difficulty also rests** in the use of language specific to a particular process that I’m unfamiliar with— not knowing left me hanging until the end of the book where I felt it start to come together. Although, I’m still not quite sure what Alchemical action-logic means, I do understand the use of the word Alchemist as used in the context of Alchemist Workparty because they clearly defined the word: “alchemist refers to the intent of conducting mutual social alchemy, within oneself and with others, to creatively marry opposites (spirit/matter, man/woman, elder/younger, theory/practice) rather than treating them as inherently alienated from

one another or warring enemies” (pg. 149) as well as references a leadership action-logic that Bill found through his lifetime of work to be effective at “encouraging personal and organizational transformation” (pg. 149). The term “Workparty” in this instance references the reconciliation of two more opposites—work and play; people gather with a mutually agreed upon intention—an inquiry process that allows for mutual transformation.

**I understood the powerful ways** one can use this book when the authors ask: “How can you cultivate more mutual, more balanced, more loving, more supportive, more erotic, more inquiring friendships?” (140).

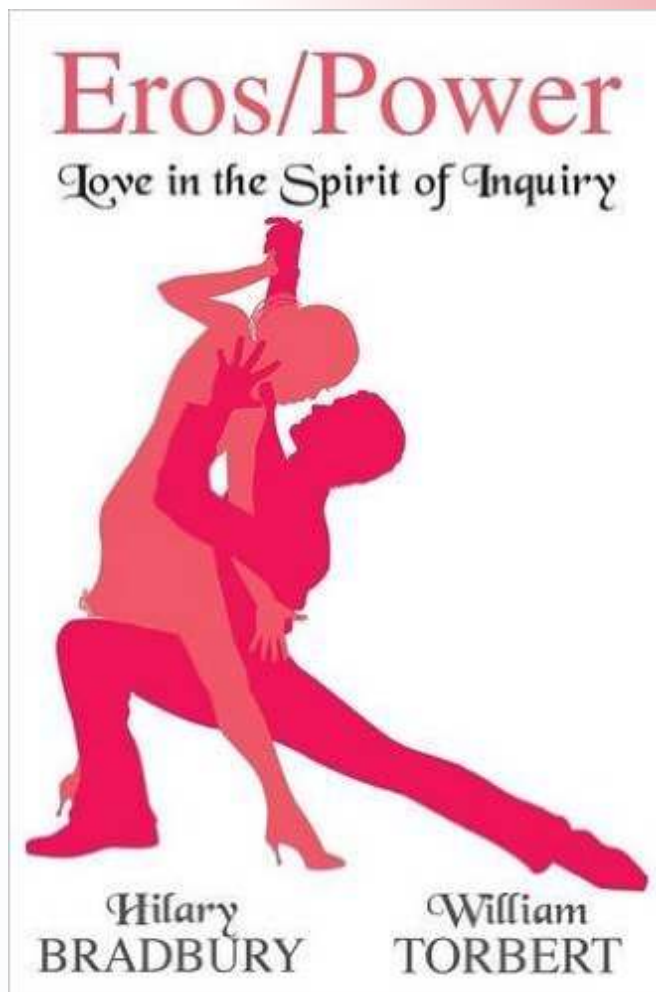
**Their response to this question** helped as well: learn how to listen to other people and hear into them while sensing into yourself (notice your body’s sensations); make time to cultivate Eros/Power between you and your partner (friends, community) so you can transform your partnership’s darkness into light together and liberate the shadow parts easily triggered in relationships; and set up appointments to actually practice listening and hearing and communicating with an air of inquiry— invite the other to share relevant materials, images or stories from their childhood that are associated with the emotions and reactions they are experiencing today and weave back and forth until both partners feel a sense of completion. I appreciated the reminder to pause and breathe and the clarity in terms of the relationship . . . if there’s a physical connection consider holding hands, if there’s a sexual intimacy

communication (but only once practiced in the art of verbal action inquiry).

**Bill and Hilary now belong** to a Community of Inquiry—they have a committed group of men and women, all ages, who meet regularly and practice this process. They note that transforming both the self and a partner and/or partnership is process oriented as well as goal oriented. As such, relationships can offer mutually transforming power. This book is an introduction to their process. It offers a framework for readers to (a) learn about it and (b) engage in this process. As well, they have information on Hilary's website: [www.integratingcatalysts.com/erospower/](http://www.integratingcatalysts.com/erospower/) with meetings and workshops to learn more.

**They state that the purpose for writing** this book came from Hilary's self-reflection— "an exercise aimed at deeper understanding of personal development" (p.195). The book became a vehicle for both Bill and Hilary's exploration and transformation in relating to men and women (and each other). Hilary writes: "I feel that the key in my sense of transformation in relating to men has been in bringing the receptive feminine part of myself, the part most easily objectified by the masculine, to a more active self-sharing." The inquiry that became this book started when Hilary's partner facilitated a deeper conversation between she and Bill about their early relationship as professor and student (she got drunk at his home, stayed the night in his room, he way older than she, he with the power, she the student—yet later in life she as the professor had an affair with a student—twice actually, with one young man moving in).

**The book is a mix of memoir** and analysis with an invitation for personal growth. A man and a woman explore their Eros—guised at times within erotic charm and sexuality—and the power that comes with it, how one views one Self and the Other, especially when gender differences exist. The stories are first-person present



with a knower's insight that comes from having been there and seeing it now from a distance. The language is engaging, the tone vulnerable yet not self-indulgent. There's deep self-analysis in the story telling, the replication of moments in life where they reached out or hid within. There's an interplay between Bill and Hilary as they respond to one another's writing—examining the themes, the potentials, the outcomes from the behaviors, the choices made.

**They also offer further reflection** using what they call "developmental analysis." For instance, someone writes (a third person voice steps in): "In previous chapters, we see Hilary and Bill begin to exercise Redefining action-logic and visioning power." Though I have no clue what redefining action-logic is I can grasp the meaning of visioning power. "We see the beginnings of this in Hilary's commitment to Zen in Japan—to 'Redefining' herself

through the power of committing to a vision. Visioning power entails the use of one's imaginative, artistic, mutual-trust-building facilities and disciplines . . . ." (pg.117). So as a reader, I read their stories and then am guided into their professional exploration—how they see their life experiences' impacting them then, and now. And on the back end, I gain some understanding of the terminology they use.

**Each section comes with an invitation:**

"Our aim with the book is to encourage depth of inquiry into the trickster domains of eros and power—of love under the sign of inquiry—with the hope that Eros/Power can flow more in all our lives," which is followed by questions or invitations to do written assignments such as sketch the details of your own autobiography, letting relationships come to the forefront, and examine the feelings of eros and power, presence and absence, hurts and loves. And there are two interludes that offer extensive ideas for practice and learning relational action inquiry. They also offer breathing space from the intensity of the stories and the analysis.

**At this point,** having completed the book, I am left wanting. I want to join a community where people are so aware and self-reflective they can co-create friendships that are mutually intimate and fulfilling (not necessarily sexual), where a man and a woman can be friends at the deepest level of Self without mishaps left in the corner to create tension and distance, without miscommunications that stir up old stories scattering their toxic waste on the present tense with no recourse but to sit in the goopy mess, alone, lonely, a connection where one feels free to dress provocatively, flirt, skitter and dance as if young and carefree and the other can appreciate the feminine without seeing seduction at the root of the playfulness but rather self-expression.

**And I'm left with Bill's questioning:**

What would it mean to love myself, not in thought but in sensation in the body?

Reference

Bradbury, H., & Torbert, W. (2016). *Eros/power: Love in the spirit of inquiry*. Tucson, AZ: Integral Publishers, LLC.



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