

Minority Stress Theory &

Strength/Resilience

Berzon grew up in California during World War II causing her to have anxiety around many facets of her identity, including her sexuality. This continued to follow her deep into her life up until she met Terry, her life partner, which allowed her to realize being gay was not a bad thing after all. Throughout her career as a psychotherapist and work as an activist Betty Berzon showed incredible strength and resilience against societal norms and those who were against equal rights for the LGBTQIAP+ community.

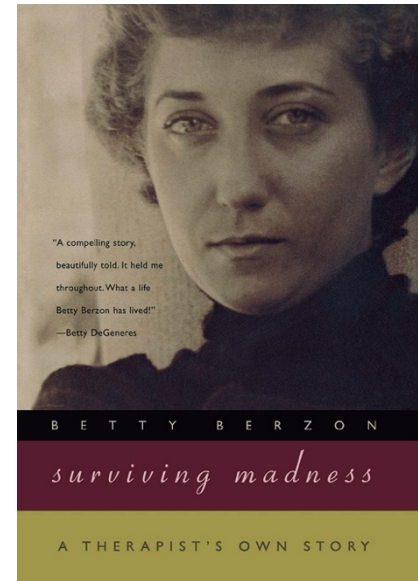


Citation



“I learned not to be afraid of my emerging self but to welcome change, to accept desire, to allow passion.”

Berzon, B. (2002). *Surviving madness: a therapists own story*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.



Surviving Madness

Betty Berzon

By: Sydney Inger

Honors Project Supervised by

Professor Karen Myers

Summary

Betty Berzon was an intelligent, caring, sophisticated woman. She was a psychotherapist and a LGBTQIAP+ rights activist. Throughout her life, Berzon struggled significantly with her identity and finding her place in the world. As she grew, both as a professional and activist, she began to realize that her sexuality was only a small facet of her identity. Additionally, Berzon lost many friends to AIDS throughout her lifetime, however, she persevered and continued advocating for the LGBTQIAP+ community in their honor. Until the day of her passing, Berzon's partner Terry was extremely supportive and by her side every step of the way. Together they experienced Betty trying to accept her sexual orientation and whatever life threw at them.

Themes that Emerge in

Finding Self-Acceptance

Through the duration of Betty Berzon's life she faced many hardships that made her question her sexual orientation. One of her first memorable experiences with a woman was Luce. This relationship sent Betty to her breaking point of self-loathing leading her to check herself into Westerly Sanitarium. Later in life, Betty learned, with the help of therapy and her partner Terry, that she could begin to accept her sexual orientation. As her life progresses, Betty finds herself comfortable with who she is and focuses on helping others in the LGBTQIAP+ community to do the same.

Cultural Humility:

Respectful Partnerships & Institutional Accountability

Throughout Berzon's work as a psychotherapist, especially at the Westerly Sanitarium, she forged lasting respectful relationships with her clients. Furthermore, Berzon consistently ensured that her patients felt the environment that they were meeting was safe, even if that meant making house, hospital, or hospice calls due to illness. In respect to Berzon's partnerships in her advocacy work, she always ensured open lines of communication between her and the rest of the board of directors. Betty's pioneering of treating LGBTQIAP+ patients with compassion and validity changed the way the American Psychological Association saw the LGBTQIAP+ community forever. Additionally, Berzon's hard work contributed to an increase in institutional accountability directly related to the treatment of LGBTQIAP+ patients across the country.