

Tom Weidlinger, dir.. *Radical Adjustments: The Life and Times of Marilyn Reed Lucia*. Berkeley: Moira Productions, 2013. DVD, 56 mins.

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Radical Adjustments: The Life and Times of Marilyn Reed Lucia offers the biography of a woman who, as the opening narration tells us, “went to medical school when few women did and raised four children while doing it.” Lucia’s career and personal life intertwined, with each shaping the other in interesting ways. The film is mostly built around footage of interviews with Lucia and her children, as well as clips from the copious home movie footage her family produced. At only an hour long, it is not as in-depth as it could be, but nevertheless should be of interest to historians of medicine, psychology, and disability in particular. (I will refer to the subject of the film as “Lucia” throughout this review although she married and changed her name several times in her life, and the film refers to her as “Marilyn.”)

The main thrust of the film focuses on Lucia’s life as a working mother, pursuing both family and a medical career. She graduated high school in 1944 in Boston, but after a false start at Wellesley moved to California where most of the rest of her career would take place. Her first marriage, to navy pilot and Silver Star recipient Alfred Roberts, produced a daughter but ended when Roberts opposed Lucia’s desire to continue her premedical studies. She then married a second husband during her junior year: Walter Dickey, a law student. Dickey proved to be supportive, mov-

ing their family to Philadelphia when Lucia was accepted to the women’s medical college there. However, although Lucia’s status as a married woman was apparently not enough to prevent her enrollment, the fact that she was eight months pregnant did, and the family returned to California. Lucia then enrolled at the University of California at San Francisco, but like so many medical-school marriages, hers ended shortly after graduation. Lucia then married her professor and mentor, Salvatore Lucia; the marriage lasted until his death. The film positions Lucia’s life as a story of a woman pursuing self-fulfillment and professional success despite the stigma of divorce and resistance to women in the medical profession.

As a story about a pioneering professional woman, the film raises more questions than it answers. On the whole, the film contrasts Lucia’s choices with a relatively undefined set of “conventions” despite the suggestions in Lucia’s own story that times were changing. It is mentioned in passing, for instance, that Lucia’s mother was a lawyer who practiced from their front room. The fact that her mother took in lodgers had a much deeper impression on the daughter. Lucia’s strong determination to pursue medicine is never explicitly explained although it seems clear that she was motivated by the ambition to gain or regain a higher social status. Nevertheless, the fact that her

mother was a professional woman who insisted her children go to school every day if only so she would have more time to work goes almost entirely uncommented upon, either as an influence on the daughter or as a sign of the larger context of women's history in which this story takes place.

Moreover, Lucia sought psychoanalysis when she was contemplating both of her divorces, an experience that the film tells us led her to pursue psychiatry rather than neurology but is otherwise passed over. The film stresses that psychiatrists in the 1950s tried to convince women to stay in unhappy marriages, but how did psychoanalysis fit into this landscape? We are told that "in those days" a woman who went to a psychiatrist because she wanted to leave her husband for professional training "would have been diagnosed as neurotic if not downright delusional"; but in fact Lucia is counseled by her analyst to go ahead with her first divorce, and apparently came to a similar conclusion with regard to her second husband. There is no mention of the sexual revolution, divorce reform, or feminism either positively or negatively in the film, but there is here a suggestion that new ideas about the self and happiness were in the air, at least in California.

Indeed, the psychiatric thread in the documentary is the most interesting. After Lucia's fourth child was born with severe facial deformities, she found herself advocating as a psychiatrist and as a mother for greater caution in the use of surgical techniques on children. Although new methods in facial reconstruction seemed to offer her son a more "normal" appearance, Lucia resisted, arguing that "it always seemed unreasonable to me that a child be subjected to the danger of surgical procedures so that other people would feel more comfortable looking at them." Lucia decided to allow her son to make his own decision when he became an adult, and assembled a team of psychiatrists who would meet with potential surgical patients to help them navigate the emotions surrounding this choice. Her emphasis on

caution led to frustration from surgeons who felt that a "normal" appearance was an obviously desirable outcome. This part of Lucia's life story raises interesting and important issues around the history of medical science and social assumptions about what is best for people with disabilities or other defects.

On the whole, this documentary would be most useful to those interested in disability studies and the history of medicine and psychiatry; it is brief enough to use in a classroom setting, particularly if only the second half were shown, and would give students plenty to discuss. Those interested in the history of emotion will find much to think about in Lucia's account of how understanding and managing emotion informed her medical career. The film's approach to women's history lacks nuance but offers an example of a professional woman in mid-century America that could also prove fruitful in classroom discussion. Its portrayal of marriage and divorce seems particularly important, although there is little concrete discussion of any opposition or censure she may have faced for her choices. Finally, as I was asked to review this documentary for H-War, I should say that the film only touches briefly on Lucia's marriage to a war hero; there is little here for those interested in the lives of military wives and families, although Lucia appears to have kept extensive documentation of her life and may be a useful example to consider in future research.

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