

Strader, Patsy

Regulations on students based on gender and expectations of women at Abilene Christian University in the late 40's early 50's.

**Key Terms: dorms, chapel, classes, dress code, curfew, marriage**

Interview by Nina Anzualda, September 26, 2019

Patsy Strader attended Abilene Christian College in Abilene, Texas from 1948-1951 and received a B.A. in Music from the College. Abilene Christian College/University prides itself on giving students a Christian education, as well as instilling them with the word of God through required Bible classes. Abilene Christian College/University has a reputation that women only attended ACU to find a husband, and this is very much true during the time Mrs. Strader attended the college. She explains how many women only had one goal at college and it was not to graduate. But even if one did obtain a degree the options were slim and so were the choices of jobs after. Mrs. Strader also addresses the difference in clothing. And how women had stricter rules when it came to dress code and curfew. She also mentions how women were not allowed in positions of leadership over men and how they were only allowed to be in charge of certain jobs within their campus clubs. Mrs. Strader mentions how this was simply the way it was during this time. Many women, including herself, simply went with the rules placed on them because they did not know any different.

This interview provides primary source information on Abilene Christian College's student life, gendered social and cultural expectations as expressed in student cultural practices and university residence life regulations, and demonstrates a religious influence over education and career outcomes.

Interviewee: Patsy Strader    Interviewer: Nina Anzualda

Nina Anzualda: What time frame did you attend ACU?

Patsy Strader: I was there from 1948-1951.

Nina Anzualda: What did you feel was expected of an “ideal ACU woman” or an “ideal ACU man” during your time at the school?

Patsy Strader: To follow the rules, be good. For the men, it would be to do something towards a job, or a degree.  
For the girls not so much. I went and I didn't plan on doing anything, but getting married.  
Really, some girls got degrees in education to be teachers, or they used to come to ACU to be nurses. But that was a job that girls had at that time. And secretaries, I took those kinds of classes, because I had worked in an office while I was in high school.  
I would say our aims were very different than what the boys did and what we did, the girls did.

Nina Anzualda: Would you say that majority of the women who attended ACU during that time were only there to find husbands?

Patsy Strader: Well, no not necessarily, I don't know. I was there also to get a degree, because my Daddy thought I needed a degree, because I could always teach. And so, I needed to do that. That was one of my goals was to get a degree, but it was not necessarily to go farther up in the job world or anything. But getting a husband was pretty much the big thing.

Nina Anzualda: The big thing, yes.  
Did you feel that you met these expectations?

Patsy Strader: Well, I guess, yeah. I got a husband while I was there, and I am still married to him sixty somewhat years later.

Nina Anzualda: Can you think of anyone who intentionally ignored or defied these expectations?

Patsy Strader: Well there were kids who broke the rules, I guess that would be defying. It was a lot easier doing what was right. You didn't have all the temptations of what's going on and seeing it all around and everything.  
But there were kids who got kicked out of school for one thing or another. I would think mainly probably for like drinking. I mainly knew the good kids. I was kind of protected I feel like.

Nina Anzualda: How did religious culture influence gender roles at ACU during your time here?  
In the classroom, chapel, relationships?

What were the major differences besides you can be a teacher you can be a secretary. What other divisions were there?

Patsy Strader: Well, as far as the religious things, girls couldn't speak in chapel. In bible classes we could talk, but it was pretty much a man's world. But I didn't resent that because that was the way it was.

Nina Anzualda: How you were raised.

Patsy Strader: The way I was raised.  
So, it was fine with me for the men to take over.

Nina Anzualda: In a classroom setting, if someone asked a question where you allowed to answer or did you kind of hold back and let somebody else answer?

Patsy Strader: I feel like, I think we had plenty of opportunity to be heard by the teacher and the other students.

Nina Anzualda: Today, how has the degree of changes that the roles have had in comparison, I mean, how big are the changes today than they were during your time?

Patsy Strader: They are very big. The dress is totally different. We couldn't, when I was in school

during those years, girls could not wear pants. They had to wear a skirt and on Sunday we had to wear hose, you couldn't even go out onto campus, on Sunday, without putting hose on. That was very different. Probably clothes, is one of the big things for gender differences.

And the fact that the girls just, girls were officers in some of the clubs, and they could be an officer in their class. But the girl never was president or vice president, they could be the secretary or maybe the treasurer, I don't remember if any of the girls were treasurers or not.

Another thing that was very different was our transportation. Which isn't gender related, but most of the people I knew didn't have cars. We didn't have cars, I had a cousin who was in school at the same time, who had an old car that he would let us borrow sometimes. But we would walk or go on the bus to town. The boys didn't have cars much either, it just, economically it didn't work.

Nina Anzualda: What were some of the dormitory regulations for women and men at ACU during your time?

Patsy Strader: Well, we had to be in by ten o' clock. I think even on weekends, but to be out, you could only be certain places. You could go to the library and you had to check out. You checked in and out of the dorm when you left after classes, or after school was out. And you could check out and go to the library and there was an area in the basement of the library that you could play ping-pong or cards or something, so you could socialize.

And we had quiet hour where we had to be in our rooms and study. Study time. We had lights out and I don't remember, but it was probably 10 or 10:30, maybe. There were living rooms in the dormitories, and we could have a boy come and visit us in the living room. One thing was kind of funny to me, Jerry (husband) and I started dating when we were sophomores. And our dorm, they called it the dorm mother or whatever you call them, the one that ran the dorm. She had a rule we could not hold hands, because we were dating. Now you could hold hands with a guy that was just your buddy walking around, but once she knew you were dating you could not hold his hand. That's kind of different.

Nina Anzualda: That is different.

Patsy Strader: But I guess that was, the checking in and out of the dorm was a big one. And if we wanted to go home, we had to have permits from our parents. If we wanted to go home for the weekend. My parents gave me a yearlong written permit that I could come home whenever I wanted to. A lot of people had to just get it every week. It depended on probably how much your parents trusted you.

Nina Anzualda: Let's say if you were out closer to curfew, did you have to be escorted back to the dorm or could you walk by yourself?

Patsy Strader: I don't remember, I guess from the library we could probably walk by ourselves. And that was about the only place we went on campus. You know we would go to church on Wednesday night, and they had buses that would take us to churches if we didn't go to one here, if it was close. They had people to come pick us up and take us, because we didn't have cars.

Nina Anzualda: Do you remember conversations about gender roles coming up in class or chapel? Did they ever put emphasis on women are supposed to do this and men are supposed to do this?

Patsy Strader: I don't remember them particularly telling us. It was just kind of understood, but surely, they must have told us at some point, otherwise we wouldn't have understood. But there were just certain things that boys could do, and certain things girls could do. But I don't think we had a lesson or a certain speaker.

Nina Anzualda: How much pressure, or how many expectations did you have to date or marry either in college or after?

Patsy Strader: I guess the only pressure I had was from myself, but that's what I wanted to do. But no, no, the other girls, is that what you mean, the other people would put pressure on me in dating? Not much.

Nina Anzualda: Some of the mentors or role models you had while at ACU, were these role models more male or female?

Patsy Strader: I would say female, probably. Upperclassmen and the women that ran the dorm. I lived in two different dorms when I was in school, at different times. And those women were very good women who you could look up to and ask lots of questions if you had them. But, my friends and the upperclassmen.

Nina Anzualda: ACU has always prided itself on giving students a Christian education. As you perceived it, how did the Christian aspect of your education interact with your gender?

Patsy Strader: I don't know that gender made a difference. We were all required to take certain amounts of Bible. We all were required to live a certain kind of life. And I don't think it was gender ruled. I think it was just for everybody the same.

Nina Anzualda: So, there weren't stricter rules? I know you said that there were definitely differences between the rules that women and men had to follow.

Patsy Strader: I would imagine, I can't remember for sure, but the boys didn't have as strict rules about being in at night. I don't remember Jerry (husband) ever having to leave early. I mean he would take me and then we would leave, because they couldn't stay after ten o' clock.  
If there were differences in rules, I don't know what rules would be different except their being able to get out more. And move around more, they probably did not have to check in all the time with the head of their dorm. Or whoever ran it, we didn't have RA's, but what would now be an RA.

Nina Anzualda: Do you think that, I know you said that the clothing had changed overtime, but do you think that the Christian roles, and behavior, and expectations have changed over time as well?

Patsy Strader: I don't really know the rules really well right now, but when you go by campus and see girls dressed in very skimpy shorts and stuff, you know that things have changed. And while they try to, I know that for many years or a while at least, they tried to have a rule about how long you could have skirts or shorts, but they finally, just gave up on that. That is my impression, they may still have those rules, but as far as I know they just let you dress however you want to, I guess.

Nina Anzualda: What would you want to say to a current ACU student about their education and about how gender over time has shaped their college experience?

Patsy Strader: I think gender has given a lot more opportunity to girls now. Being a girl, you can go into any field you want. Like when I was in school no girl would have ever done ministry or Bible as a major. Because they couldn't preach, they couldn't do anything with ministry except be a better person. If they knew the rules, but they could use it for their job or anything. So, I think that's one of the main things they have the opportunity now. To major in whatever field they want to, and to go farther because they do have that basic education, would be the main thing.

Probably the job world is the main thing that gender has helped, or made broader. I don't know that it's always helpful, but broader. Girls have more opportunities than they did.

Nina Anzualda: Going back to getting married, would you say the majority of the people who attended ACU during the time you were there were married?

Patsy Strader: No, but most of them have plans to be married. Maybe as soon as they graduate, or as soon as they got out of school. There were people that married while I was in school, but not a huge amount. But that was their aim. They already were engaged or they were ready to get married as soon as they graduated, if they wanted that behind them first.

Nina Anzualda: Is there anything else that you can kind of just remember being like oh that was definitely a difference in men and women other than just the majors and expectations and curfew?

Patsy Strader: Not really, I mean like there was some as far as the leadership. Girls could be leaders in the clubs that just had girls in it. But if it was a club that had boys in it also, the boys always were the main leader. As far as I know, that's probably not true today. I would guess that girls have just as much leaders as the boys. You know like in the chapel service, student boys, if students participate it was the boys it was never the girls. I was a music major and so one of our requirements before we graduated was to direct the choir, direct the band and orchestra, and so girls could do that, it wasn't just the boys that got to do it, it was one of our requirements too. That may have been one of the requirements in the other majors too or something like that. Mainly the boys did the leadership.

Nina Anzualda: Do you have children?

Patsy Strader: In school? When I was in school?  
No. I didn't marry until after I graduated.

Nina Anzualda: Did your children attend ACU?

Patsy Strader: Some of them did. Three of them, I have four children. Three of them did one, of them is Bob, Mary Beth's (my advisor) husband. And then two of my girls went to ACU. Both graduated, both have their Masters.

Nina Anzualda: Did you think that they would come to experience some of the same things you did, or do you think that by the time they reached ACU it was already different than what you had experienced?

Patsy Strader: Probably for the youngest daughter, it was different in the things that she got to

do. I can't think of anything. I was just thinking she was a free soul. But I don't think they had the time requirements about curfew and things like that. They lived in the dorms and they lived at home some and our youngest daughter even lived in an apartment. That didn't happen when I was in school, everyone lived in the dorm. But she her junior and senior year I think lived in an apartment. And of course, you make your own rules I guess when you live in an apartment. I don't know if they have to be approved, I don't remember us having to do anything except find the apartment for her to rent. So that was different the living situation. I don't know for the boys if it was different or not.

Nina Anzualda: Did they have more options for degrees than you did?

Patsy Strader: Well, ACU didn't even have master's degree when I was in school, I don't think. I could be wrong, but we didn't consider getting them there. But both my girls have master's degrees from ACU. And they were in school in I guess the 70's, they could go ahead and get a master's degree.

Nina Anzualda: So, jumping back to your time at ACU, can you remember some of the things that were going on in the world during that time?

Patsy Strader: Well the Korean War started during that time, and my husband left to go to war was one thing. I go back to World War II, my memories do, so I kind of get mixed up between the two. The Korean War was going on while we were at school. And the draft, the boys, not the girls, were afraid they would get drafted and miss out on school. And my husband went ahead and enlisted, it was like in March and they gave him the rest of the semester. His teachers gave him the credit for the rest of that semester. For the students, it was a thing, as far as their education they couldn't put a stop to it and then it's hard to go back once you get out and live a totally different life for a while. And then to go back and go to school again.

Nina Anzualda: At that point you have pretty much grown up.

Patsy Strader: Yeah, and he was out in the Army, and had a job, and made a living, and we had gotten married and he did come back, he went until '55 and graduated. You know that works. But anyway, that was one of the big things going on in the world at that time, was the Korean War and how that affected us.

Nina Anzualda: What career did you end up pursuing?

Patsy Strader: I did not.  
Being a mother.

Nina Anzualda: I love it. That is a career, I would consider that a career.

Patsy Strader: I've worked several times, as a teacher, as a substitute teacher mainly. And I've

worked in offices doing secretarial work, but I never did. It was never a career. I just started having children and there I was. But we moved around a lot and having the education I think helped me get jobs. Like I worked at Kansas State College for a while as a secretary in one of their offices, I worked in Korea as a secretary in the Army office. Just having the career was an advantage. But to be able to do substitute teaching, it helped me in that way. But since I didn't go for a career, and most of my friends didn't. I'm trying to think of some of them that did. The ones that did from my day were mostly teachers, and while they may have gone up in the teaching field, my oldest daughter is still a third-grade teacher. And she's been doing that, she is 63 years old. So, her degree absolutely helped her as far as her life was concerned. That's what she did.

Nina Anzualda: Do you look back and wish you had some of the same opportunities your kids did when they attended ACU?

Patsy Strader: I don't really. I've had just about a perfect life. I really have been blessed for years and years, I wouldn't want anything different. I maybe could have done more if I had more education, but what I've had has served me well. But in a way, I think that's unusual to be as satisfied with what's gone on in your life. At least I've heard people complain a lot about their lives, and they wished they had done something different. I've just had a ball all my life really, it's been good. For me personally, I can't say I look back and say I wish I had done that.

Nina Anzualda: Well that's good.

Patsy Strader: It is good. I've been really blessed.

While I found a husband at ACU, my girls did not. One of them found him at a rodeo, one of them found him in town, and the other one found him in high school, he did go to ACU some, but she really found him in high school. If I had had more conflict in my life it would help you more.

Nina Anzualda: But this is good, everybody is different. I like getting the different perspectives.  
That's it.

Patsy Strader: Well I hope I've been helpful. That you can do something with it.

Nina Anzualda: Yes, I'm sure I can.

*\* She jumped back into the conversation saying she had pictures to show me.*

Patsy Strader: Out of the annuals (yearbooks pictures), which shows the clothes we wore. And the cheerleaders. My husband was a cheerleader. What do you call them now? Are they still cheerleaders?

Mary Beth Strader (my advisor): Yes, but I think guys we might say yell leaders. I don't know.



Nina Anzualda: I don't know for sure either.

Patsy Strader: Do they have guys now?

Mary Beth Strader: Do we have any? I don't think we have any.

Patsy Strader: You did a few years ago.

Nina Anzualda: I want to say we have like one or two.

Mary Beth Strader: Yeah, maybe.

Patsy Strader: I don't know, anyway.

Nina Anzualda: So how was that, I mean, I know that now it's a stereotype that girls are cheerleaders?

Patsy Strader: Well, it was a totally different way of cheering. They yelled, they had yells that they did, but they didn't do any of the acrobatics. Or any of the stuff you know jumping around or climbing up or any of that, they just stood in front of the whole crowd and encouraged them to yell. And I was telling Mary Beth, we had what was called the Kitten Klub. Which was a group of girls, any girl could be in it if they wanted to, that would cheer for the teams. And I guess Kitten Klub because they were the wildcats. I don't know because it was already established when I came. There were probably 50-100 of us and we went to all the games, home games, and the cheerleader's kind of stood down on the field in front of us and we all yelled. But that was a big deal to get to be in the Kitten Klub, and to yell for the team. Now they don't have an organized, I don't guess they do, have an organized cheering team. I guess that's what you would call it, a cheering team. But it was a big deal, it was one of our big clubs on campus. Cheer for the team.

Nina Anzualda: That is cool though.  
I really appreciate you.

Patsy Strader: Well, you're welcome.

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