

ACC/ACU Gender and Sexuality Project
Oral History Release Form

Date/location of Interview: September 19, 2021. Abilene, TX

Narrator/ Interviewee: Lee Anne Blankenship

Interviewee Address:

Interviewee date of birth: August 19, 1960

Recorder/ Interviewer: Sarah Blankenship

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Name (please print): Lee Anne Blankenship

Signature: *Lee Anne Blankenship*

Date: 9-19-21

Interviewer's signature:

Date: 9/19/21

Sarah Blankenship

Restrictions: N/A

BLANKENSHIP, Lee Anne

Keywords: social club, student/teacher relationship, dating culture, businesswomen, commuter, abortion, race, Christianity

Interview by Sarah Blankenship conducted on September 19, 2021

Lee Anne Blankenship (Sanders '80) attended Abilene Christian University between Spring 1978 and Fall 1980 and received a B.B.A in Marketing and Management. ACU is a Church of Christ affiliated liberal arts university which strives to provide its students with a Christian education in a Christ-like environment. Mrs. Blankenship recounts her time at ACU from a Methodist perspective and as someone who did not live in a dormitory. She recounts her time in the business department along with a relationship she observed between her professor and a student. She also discusses the pressure put on women in social clubs and recounts the story of a female student faced with an abortion.

This interview provides primary source information on ACU's classroom and community culture in regards to gender, sexuality, and race as seen through a non-traditional student's viewpoint during the late-70s to early-80s.

0:00:00 - 0:00:20

SB: This is an oral history interview conducted on September 19, 2021 in Abilene, TX. The interviewee is Lee Anne Blankenship who attended Abilene Christian University from spring 1978 to fall 1980. The interviewer is Sarah Blankenship.

0:00:21 - 0:00:29

SB: So, what do you feel was expected of the "ideal" ACU woman or the "ideal" ACU man during your time at school?

0:00:31 - 0:02:24

LAB: Well, I don't really know what the expectation was um as you know I went to ACU specifically for the education. Um, I had planned on being a kindergarten teacher, and ACU at the time was the only university in town that offered that. So, I begin my college years at ACU, and it was a huge learning experience for me because I was not raised in the Church of Christ denomination. I was raised in the methodist denomination. So, and then also starting in a spring semester I had kinda missed out on all that early um the Wildcat Weeks and the things like that that they may have done to onboard kids at the time. So, it was very different, and I just kind of feel like that after I started there I got up to speed. I think that the expectation was that you be a good student, be a Christian student, and got heavily indoctrinated into the ways of the Church of Christ denomination at ACU. But I came from high school, wore the same type clothes, you know, jeans, t-shirts, sometimes little bit dressier clothes sometimes dresses. Pretty much everybody on campus did the same thing from what I can remember, and, you know, a lot of people were encouraged to get into the social clubs and, of course, athletics was always huge on campus, and I did not participate in a social club.

0:02:24 - 0:02:33

SB: Do you know was there an ideal social club that was expected for the girls to go into or an ideal sport that everyone was supposed to play?

0:02:33 - 0:04:18

LAB: Well, you know, of course, here in Texas, football is king of everything and so that was always a big deal. Um, not but if I were honest, high school was certainly much bigger than it was at ACU, during that time of course. So I'd come from a huge background in high school athletics, but that was not quite the same from an attendance and, you know, participation and things like that at ACU. Nothing against it. It was just a different experience. My recollection is, of course, the big clubs at the time were always the Kojis and Siggies um the Delta Theta was a big one then as well, and, you know, I watched I didn't really know what they were doing. I saw them during their pledge time. You know, the guys I remember the Frater Sodalis, Galaxy, and Sub-T. They had all of them from my recollection was that they were big clubs as well. I don't know honestly if there were pressure among the girls to get in certain clubs, or the guys to get in certain clubs. I don't know. I know that, you know, that they did participate in it, and I was able to attend some of the socials, and, you know, some of those. I mean whether, you know, the people at ACU knew or not, but there was some pressure to possibly uh to partake in um alcoholic beverages and not everybody was comfortable doing that, but you had some that you

know really wanted that and others that didn't, but that probably goes on anyway. Um, but that's kinda what I remember about the clubs.

0:04:19 - 0:04:24

SB: And just for clarification on something you said earlier, did you attend Abilene High School?

0:04:25 - 0:04:27

LAB: I did, yes, Abilene High School.

0:04:28 - 0:04:39

SB: Great. And then, so after all that you've said, can you think of anyone who intentionally ignored or defied the expectations or just kinda what you knew at ACU?

0:04:41 - 0:05:49

LAB: So, one of the things that I remember during the time there was I- I was a business major, and I actually had a business professor, during the time, who had a romantic relationship with a student. And that was, you know, for me anyway and just with my background pretty shocking to see that that would go on, and you would even see them in public in their, you know, car and things and, you know, sadly, he was a, I thought one of the better professors at the time. I enjoyed his class um taught marketing, learned a lot from a real world experience, but sadly, of course, because of the relationship, he had to leave and was no longer a professor there at ACU. And I do re-, you know, I remember that going on I- I do not know what happened with the student. I don't know if she remained on campus, or if she went someplace else, but I do remember that happening.

0:05:50 - 0:05:58

SB: Do you remember was she looked down upon or was like that professor looked down upon? Like what were attitudes towards them when this kinda came out?

0:05:59 - 0:06:47

LAB: Well, I don't know whether they uh- I dunno whether to say looked down upon or not. I think people just thought it was certainly not something that happened on a regular basis and especially at a Christian, you know, University. Of course, looking back now, and we know how as people grow in adulthood, these things happen and affairs happen. But sadly, normally it should not happen between a professor and a student and it did. Um I like I said, I don't know what happened to them and the relationship as they moved forward or anything, but it was just very shocking at the time um, you know, for someone to see this when they're, you know, 18/19 years old.

0:06:47 - 0:06:50

SB: I don't think that's changed much today. Do you?

0:06:51 - 0:07:08

LAB: No, it's still pretty shocking to see this and, you know, but it's something I certainly don't understand why an older person feels, you know, um I mean there's an attraction, but why they capitalize on that, I guess.

0:07:09 - 0:07:21

SB: And then, do you remember was there any other professors that might've made advances, like he did, or did you ever see that or experience that at all?

0:07:22 - 0:07:36

LAB: I personally did not experience it, and I do not know of any other professors that did. Could it'd of happen? Possibly. Um, but I was not aware of it. This is just one that I know was um we did know about.

0:07:37 - 0:07:43

SB: Alright, is there anything else you'd like to add about that? We're about to kinda switch gears.

0:07:43

LAB: Nope.

0:07:45 *at the same time*

SB: OK

LAB: I think that's good

0:07:46 - 0:07:54

SB: OK, um so when you were a student, did you feel pressure or expectations to date or marry anybody?

0:07:55 - 0:08:34

LAB: Um, if there was any pressure to date or to get married it was self-imposed. I did not feel that from the university at the time. Um because everybody likes to at that - that time everybody likes to go out and, you know, go to dinner and movies and, you know, have fun and um but I did not feel that from the university at all. It was more self-imposed. And I didn't feel, you know, that I had to be with a certain person or, you know, er anything like that. So, no.

0:08:34 - 0:08:39

SB: And when you say the university, do you mean staff, board of trustees, or do you mean student body?

0:08:41 - 0:09:29

LAB: I guess all of them. I had no interaction with the board of trustees at the time, and I didn't feel any kinda pressure from the staff to, you know, have to date someone. Like I said, it was more self-imposed. I do know that, you know, that uh sometimes for the people when they were doing their club activities there was pressure put on the members that they must bring a date to

their socials. And so, I got to go on some of those dates, you know, to go to some of the grubs and the socials and, you know, thoroughly enjoyed them and had a good time. I, but, you know, I know that they felt pressure to try to find some, you know, find someone to go on their - to go to their socials.

0:09:30 - 0:10:19

SB: Just from my experience, with my sorority, I can tell you that has not changed whatsoever. We still have events where it is expected you bring a date, and it is expected you bring a male date. Um so, we've talked about this in our class but kinda the 'ring by spring' culture we feel has been perpetrated on social media a lot recently. Do you think kinda how people feel now at ACU that it is an expectation that you be engaged by the end of your time here and or be married? Do you think that has kinda - I guess social media has really influenced that and if, you know. Do you understand what I'm saying? I can't really.

0:10:19 - 0:11:28

LAB: I understand what you're saying, and I would certainly hope not. I hope that no one feels pressure to, you know, before they graduate that they have to be engaged and have to be married by a certain time. I think the most important thing is to have a very stable, solid relationship, and it not be based on some kind of a preconceived timeline. If that was going on during my tenure, I'm not aware of it because like I said I'm not the type of person that that would've played into my part that I have to be married by a certain, certain time or anything like that. But I know, bu-but back in the days when I was there, people went to school. They either got married right out of high school, or they got married around, you know, their college years. That was just kinda the way it is. The world has changed. Women are more in the workforce now. Delaying some things because um, you know, and I think a lot of people do not feel the need to have to get married so quickly, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

0:11:29 - 0:11:42

SB: Good. And then, how did religious culture influence gender roles at ACU during your time there? Whether that was like in the classroom, chapel, at your church, or just like relationships overall?

0:11:45 - 0:11:47

LAB: How did the re- I'm sorry could you...

0:11:48 - 0:11:56

SB: Like what sorta roles were women and men kinda expected to play at ACU? Like who'd you say spoke up more in class or had more leadership roles?

0:11:57 - 0:12:58

LAB: Oh OK, I would say my best recollection would be certainly the men probably had more of the leadership roles. I really don't remember having very many female professors, if any. And then from a student government standpoint, I do remember more guys running for those offices and, you know, having those roles. And, uh, being in the business classes there were definitely

more men there, at the time, but yet, you know, we were always asked to speak up in class, and I never felt like what I had to say was not um looked down upon or anything like that, but there were definitely more men, and so, logically and just based on the way things were in the past uh probably looked at the men first.

0:11:59 - 0:13:07

SB: Would you say in your business classrooms it was like 50/50 boys and girls or was it like 75/25? Like what would you say?

0:13:07 - 0:13:40

LAB: Mm. Hard to remember. Probably 65, 70 percent probably male at the time, female. But I do remember I mean just because they were men, you know, students are students. Sometimes they did incredibly well in their classrooms, and sometimes, you know, the guys struggled. Um, you know, having to do their course work or their small group work or, you know, even the Bible classes and things like that, you know, so um kids are kids.

0:13:41 - 0:14:09

SB: And just kinda still on the topic of your business classes, would you say when people would talk about what they wanted to do after ACU, did the women still seem to have as high or higher goals than men? Like for example, did the men say 'I want to go be a CEO' and the women only said 'Oh, I only aspire to be a secretary' or were they also saying 'I also would like to be a CEO'?

0:14:10 - 0:14:53

LAB: I would think a lot of them were headed off to Arthur Andersen. They were going to become CPAs, and so a lot of them were headed in that direction, and it was always about getting on with one of the Big 5s or the Big 10s CPA firms. So, that's pretty much where a lot of the men, that I recall, that's where they were headed. And the women, some of them were going to become CPAs as well. Probably went in the same direction, maybe not as vocal. And then yes, especially during that timeline, more started off as assistants or secretaries. Um may not necessarily said 'I'mma be the CEO of anything.'

0:14:54 - 0:15:13

SB: And do you think that was more of like the religious background saying 'Well look at women in the Bible. They had lower roles like you should also take on this' or do you think that was societal pressures kinda coming out? Um or do you think it was a combination of both?

0:15:13 - 0:16:26

LAB: It could've been a combination because, as I said earlier, I did not grow up in the Church of Christ denomination, and so therefore, yes, I understand and had a lot of friends, of course, that grew up in the denomination where women were silent in church. They were probably louder at home but more definitely silent in church, and that may have been, you know, the way moving forward when they were in school. That may have been maybe a little bit of the pressure, if some of the girls felt like what they had to do was to find a strong man, and they

would just become the wife and have kids. That could've been a little bit of pressure from the Church of Christ, at the time, or just their own religious upbringing, but it's also a little bit of what was going on in society. The women's movement was beginning to take hold to where their voices were being heard. It was still a long ways away before you saw women um really and truly getting into higher levels of corporate leadership, corporate management, and definitely long before you saw them in any kinda CEO capacity.

0:16:27 - 0:16:44

SB: And you said you didn't grow up in the Church of Christ background. Do you think that kinda influenced you as well? In your goal as 'I'm not going to ACU to find a man. I'm going to ACU for my education.'

0:16:44 - 0:17:40

LAB: Yeah, I mean because I was raised in a home where your education did not stop until after you, you know, got a college degree. My parents were very strong in their thoughts of making sure that we were all had a strong education. And my mom and dad both went to a college and were both very successful. And so, yes, I went to ACU to further my education. My dad had died when I was in high school, so I actually graduated from high school early and then graduated from college in three years because, at the time, I had to drive to be able to sustain myself to move forward. So, I wanted to go ahead and start a career, and I needed to get an education to do that.

0:17:41 - 0:17:51

SB: And would you say, at your time at ACU, was it common for men and women to have part-time jobs outside of school? Or was that not common? Or one more than the other at all?

0:17:52 - 0:18:13

LAB: I think a lot of them had some jobs. I mean definitely to help pay for their, maybe their education, but also their food and their clothing and their going out and having fun and some gas and things like that. I had a part-time job, and I do think a lot of people did. Some were on campus and some were off of campus.

0:18:18 - 0:18:34

SB: Alright. And then, do you remember any conversations about gender and sexuality taking place in an ACU environment when you were there? Whether that was like mentions in class or talks in chapel or just like amongst your friends. Do you remember anything?

0:18:35 - 0:19:46

LAB: I honestly do not remember anything about um like homosexuality or anything like that. Not to say that there were not kids or even maybe professors, something there that, you know, were homosexual. I did not see it, and I do not remember having conversations around it. I do know one of the biggest things was that, and it was sad at the time, but I certainly, you know, understood. I did have - There was a couple that, you know, they were dating at the time, and she got pregnant, and, of course, they had to go find a place, or at least they felt that that what

they had to do was to go and get an abortion. And not many people knew that. That was something that was kept very, very silent certainly because of, you know, the- well just because of the nature of it and, of course, coming from a Christian school and everything, it wasn't something that most people would have wanted to, you know, have published.

0:19:52 - 0:20:16

SB: Alright, and then, so I'm assuming, and I could be wrong, but your friend's, or the girl you knew, professors had to know 'cause she was probably gone for a little bit maybe. If you know that was for sure, was she treated any differently by them? Like if you saw or did you hear like when she came back at all?

0:20:16 - 0:21:00

LAB: Honestly, I don't know. I don't even recall 'em being gone that long, so probably could've been hidden by just a common illness or something. That was just something that I had never, you know, had experience with, you know, knowing someone having to go through something like that, and so, I don't know. And since I did not live on campus, and I wasn't in dorms or any of the other homes, I'm not exactly sure what all went on, and, you know, it happened and then they were back in school.

0:21:02 - 0:21:19

SB: Do you know did ACU, like higher ups, ever find out? Did they ever do maybe like a chapel on like 'Hey we don't endorse this' or anything? Just something very subtle where the student body wouldn't know all about this girl's business.

0:21:20 - 0:22:02

LAB: I don't remember anything like that, and, if they did, I don't recall, and so, I don't know honestly. Back then, I think if that had been something they found out about I do not think they would've been back on campus. That's typically how things were handled back then, you know, if kids were caught drinking or if they were out at one of the local clubs or something like that, there was a lot of pressure that they would have to leave campus because it had broken some kind of rule, and so I am going to say that they probably never knew that it had happened.

0:22:03 - 0:22:19

SB: And do you know, kinda going off of that, how was sexual assault and rape treated on campus? Was it discussed? Was there like safety lectures going on or was it very taboo we never heard anything about that?

0:22:21 - 0:22:49

LAB: I honestly do not remember. I don't think it would've... I don't think it was taboo. Definitely, I always felt safe on campus, even when I was up there at night at the library. So, you know, I had to travel up there and travel back to my home. I always felt safe, so I don't remember anything about that.

0:22:50 - 0:23:11

SB: Alright, and then the last question I have is, so ACU has always prided itself on giving students a Christian education. Like as you perceived it, how did the Christian aspect of your education kinda interact with gender? Like what message was ACU pushing during that time?

0:23:13 - 0:25:14

LAB: Uh, definitely, you need to be in church. You need to go to church as often as you can. I just remember not even realizing that when I went to school there that I would be required to go to chapel every single day, and, you know, to get in trouble if you did not go every single day. You know, and so, that was something very different for me. It was very different for me to go to a science class, my very first class on campus, and like I said, I started in the spring semester, and they started class with a prayer. And it was just a lot of things my very first semester I was not expecting, but as time went on you do get to appreciate the messages that, you know, were shared. You know, just like today they would do a month of African American history. I do not recall spending time on the Hispanic history or Asian cultures or I do not, you know, recall, you know, certainly, there was not any kind of gay pride month or anything like that during my time, but I do recall always having a month of African American history. And so, for that, you know, that was kinda some of the first stuff that I, you know, gotten into. I always appreciated the singing. It definitely - there was inspiration there, was always led by men. It was just a continuation of the teachings from Church of Christ, and I do feel like there were some really, and still are some, really good professors there. Very good and strong intentions of continuing to grow Christians in their faith and to offer up an excellent education.

0:25:16 - 0:26:00

SB: You know, today on campus we have a large focus on uplifting minority voices now. We've got VOICE, which is a community chapel for the LGBTQ community, and oh, I think it's pronounced Hispanos Unidos, for people of the Latino/Latina culture, and we've also got the Black Students Association. Do you think, was there any talk from the minorities you mentioned like you said they only had African American history month and no one else was really mentioned. Did you ever hear of people trying to push for advancements of the other minorities on campus?

0:26:01 - 0:28:04

LAB: I do not remember any of them. But even when you look at it through society, it has just taken a little bit longer for those groups for their heritage to find their voice, and as the numbers have grown and as their comfort level has grown in expressing the need to make sure their history is remembered in that they are not to be um minimalized. That diversity and inclusion in society, in school, in businesses, in religion, everything just makes us to be a much better society and world. And so, it was not my recollection back during my time back then, there was not that much other than the, like I said my recollection was, the African American history. So, I'm glad to hear that ACU is actually spending time with the other cultures because I have to also say I was always amazed at students that came to Abilene, Texas from so far away. I'm like 'Really you're here from Pennsylvania? What would bring you to Abilene?' And, you know, then

you start looking around and, you know, every state there were students from every state that would come to Abilene, Texas and then from other countries as well. You know, and so, of course, we recruited heavily for the track team. The track team is always been a very very good, strong team, and so a lot of different cultures, but they really weren't highlighted, and I'm happy to hear that ACU is spending more time with the various cultures.

0:28:04 - 0:28:29

SB: Yeah, it's really cool. VOICE was just - it's been happening for a while, that was the LGBT community, and the university this semester just finally recognized it as an official organization. So lastly, is there anything that you would like to say to future Wildcats, current Wildcats? Just about anything at ACU. Does it get better? Does it not?

0:28:30 - 0:30:40

LAB: Well, I can just say speaking as someone who's lived their entire life in Abilene, Texas and one who had the choice to go to, at the time, three different universities, I did choose to go to ACU. I did take classes at McMurry, and I also took classes at Hardin-Simmons, but I got my degree at ACU, and I have watched this university grow over the years. It is a beautiful campus. Have had a lot of friends whose- and because my work takes me across the gl- well not the globe, the U.S. I should say. I've had a lot of friends who've sent their student, their children, here. It's widely recognized. It's a phenomenal university to get a degree, to make friends, and although I did not participate in a lot of the extracurricular activities through social clubs and things like that, I met a lot of people, lot good friends, friends that I still have today, and, of course, then my two daughters have gone to ACU and have lifelong friends as well. And so, the campus is really growing. I think it's growing in a great direction. Um the Christian atmosphere is still there, and definitely have seen it change. And there's no longer the big tent that they used to have when I - never forget when they used to have lectureship, and the greatest thing about lectureship was you got to skip a lot of classes, and, of course, as I said, I did not come from the background I didn't even know what lectureship was, and I literally thought the circus had come to town and had pitched a tent on, you know, campus. And even that, you know, they've changed it up, but it was, it is still an event that draws a lot of people. And so, it's a great school. I highly recommend it, and anyway, I thank you for the opportunity today to tell you a little bit about my experiences at Abilene Christian.

0:30:40

SB: Yes, thank you for being willing to share them.