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**R.47. Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present, and Future of Feminism**

Interview R-0872  
Soledad Antelada  
August 19, 2016

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## **ABSTRACT – Soledad Antelada**

Interviewee: Soledad Antelada

Interviewer: Rachel F. Seidman

Interview Date: 19 August 2016

Location: Interviewee's home in the Mission District of San Francisco

Length: Approximately 45 minutes

Soledad Antelada is an expert in cybersecurity who founded and runs an initiative called Girls Can Hack. Born in Argentina and raised in Spain, Antelada moved to San Francisco in her early thirties to pursue a career in cybersecurity. She discusses the impact on her sense of self from her Sephardic Jewish mother's decision to move back to Spain during the dictatorship in Argentina, gender dynamics in her family and the role her stepfather played in her life, the difficulty she had in school compared to her success in the workplace, and her decision to start Girls Can Hack. Antelada describes gender discrimination and the obstacles women face in her field, as well as her belief that women make particularly good cyber security professionals. She also expresses the belief that Hillary Clinton's election to the presidency would have a major impact on gender relationships in the work place. This interview was collected as part of Rachel F. Seidman's research for her book *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*.

## **FIELD NOTES – SOLEDAD ANTELADA**

(compiled August 19, 2016)

Interviewee: Soledad Antelada

Interviewer: Rachel F. Seidman

Interview Date: August 19, 2016

Location: The interviewee's home, a rented room in a duplex in the Mission District of San Francisco.

THE INTERVIEWEE. Soledad Antelada is an expert in cybersecurity who founded and runs an initiative called Girls Can Hack. She was 39 years old at the time of this interview. She was born in Argentina and raised in Spain before moving to San Francisco in her thirties.

THE INTERVIEWER. Rachel F. Seidman is an historian and the associate director of the Southern Oral History Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. This interview was completed as part of Seidman's research for her book *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement* (UNC Press 2019). Seidman was introduced to Antelada because she lived with Seidman's cousin in San Francisco. They met when Seidman was staying there and doing other interviews in the area. Because the interview had not been pre-planned, there was less preparation and background knowledge on the part of the interviewer, and the interviewee seemed eager to share her story but also less forthcoming about certain topics concerning her family and the specifics of other parts of her life.

### NOTE ON RECORDING.

Recorded on a digital Zoom recorder.



## **TRANSCRIPT – Soledad Antelada**

Interviewee: Soledad Antelada

Interviewer: Rachel Seidman

Date: August 19, 2016

Location: San Francisco, California

Length: 45:24.3

### **START OF INTERVIEW**

RACHEL SEIDMAN: This is Rachel Seidman. I'm here in San Francisco, California. Today is August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and I'm here with Soledad Antelada. We are doing an oral history interview for a project called #Feminism: Speaking Up and Talking Back in the Digital Age. So Sole, will you just start by telling me about your grandparents and where they lived, what did they do? Did you know them?

SOLEDAD ANTELADA: I knew, yeah, well, I knew some of them. So my grandparents from my mom's part of the family, they were born in Argentina as me. But their parents were like from Spain. So it was like immigration from Spain, then three generations of Argentinians, and then we got back to Spain. And then I had a great grandparent that was from Turkey and, but also like immigrants from Spain like back in the days. Like they were all Jewish. That's the part of my mom, and the other part of the family, I don't know that much. So I know I have a great grandmother that was Irish for example. So it's a lot of mix.

RS: On your dad's side.

SA: Yeah, on my dad's side. So I have a lot of blood from everywhere, which is good.

RS: You were born in Argentina. And how old were you when you moved to Spain?

SA: So I was born in Argentina in 1977, and I moved to Spain in 1981. I was four. So my parents were very young. So I was born when my mom was fifteen.

RS: Oh wow.

SA: And my father was seventeen. And then my mom's family, they moved to Spain because that was like a very bad time in Argentina where we were in the middle of a dictatorship. So when my parents separated, my mom and I went to Spain where our family was already. And I was four.

RS: Okay. So your dad did not go.

SA: No, my dad stayed in Argentina.

RS: Okay, and what did your mom, did your mom work?

SA: Yeah.

RS: What did she do?

SA: All kinds of stuff.

RS: Like?

SA: Very hard worker. And then when I was eight, so we moved to Spain to different places for a couple years like we stayed in Zaragoza for a little bit and then Madrid. And we ended up in Marbella, which is very nice place in the south by the sea.

RS: How do you spell that?

SA: M-A-R-B-E-L-L-A. And we spend, I spend there the most part of my life there. So I grew up there. And there when I was eight, my stepfather came into my life.

So he raised me, and he ended up like the father figure and which was great for me because I grew up with a father actually so--.

RS: Yeah. Yeah. And what how would you describe yourself as a young girl or as a kid? What were you like?

SA: Well, I don't know. I think I always felt I was different.

RS: What do you mean?

SA: Like something was missing maybe because I came from another culture and also I grew up in Spain where I was very integrated, but my whole family was from Argentina. So it was a different culture at home and outside. And also a big part of my family was in Argentina, and I lost contact with them. So I don't know. I felt something was missing maybe or I don't think it's that strange because I think there's other people that feel that. And I always felt that there was something else I had to do or I had to go or I don't know. Zero conformist.

RS: Um hmm. A non-conformist.

SA: Yeah.

RS: Yeah. So what did you learn? What did you see about gender roles with your parents? What did you, what lessons do you think you took from them?

SA: That's a very strange situation because I think my family was very like male dominated like patriarch, and as a Latin kind of family that's how it is. But at the same time I had a lot of support from my stepfather. So I was an only child too. So I don't know. So maybe if I go had a brother it would have been different. But yeah, pretty chauvinistic although my mom was working and the same, they were doing the same thing. They were working together and everything was pretty equal but male domination.

But I think I had a lot of support from my stepfather actually in a way of at the end of the day you need somebody that tells you you can do this. Go for it. And that happened to me. That when I decided, for example when I decided to come to the United States, he really supported me and pushed me and that really helped me to move forward. So I was doing great in Spain, but as I told you like something was missing. And I always wanted to try to come here. So I said one day I said look, I think that I will lose time. This is what I need to do. I feel like stuck in my life in a way, and I feel like I need to move to San Francisco. Well, that's—it's a long story. But that's the short story. So I have those words like stop losing time. Go for it. And that really helped me.

RS: How old were you when you said that?

SA: Thirty-one.

RS: Thirty-one. So did you, you went to high school and college in Spain?

SA: Yeah, in Madrid.

RS: Were you a math and numbers person all along?

SA: Totally. I'm still very bad with words and that part, art. I think that part of my brain is not functioning correctly.

RS: But you were good with—

SA: I was very good with math, and I was very science-oriented. And I have a sense of curiosity that goes beyond anything that is a very strong in me for everything I do in life. I think that's a part of the good scientist and researchers.

RS: So do you remember how you got interested in all of that?

SA: No, I think it was natural. I mean I was in school, and I was doing good with those courses. It's like, it came natural to me. I was always struggling in another fields



like history for example or literature, languages. But math and biology or those kinds, physics, I did very well. They came easy to me.

RS: And did you get support as a girl doing those things from your teachers? Do you remember teachers who supported you or--?

SA: I have to say no especially in college. But what is funny is that I didn't realize back then. So I didn't realize like when I was older, isn't that, yeah. Some situations that have been made me look back and say well that was because I was a girl. But I think when you are young and you are just going and you're struggling like growing up and you're focusing your minds on other things, you don't get that. But then when you're like older and you are really in the world and working, you realize that there were a lot of careers only for being a woman, especially in Spain.

RS: Looking back do you have an example of one of those things that now you realize?

SA: Well, for example I remember one story that was, it didn't happen to me. It happened to my roommate at that time. She was studying computer science with me. And she was turning in a project and it was almost perfect. So she turned in the project and the professor, the first thing the professor said to her was like you didn't do this alone. So I think you copied it or somebody helped you. And in that time I remember she came home and told me the story and was like, wow, that's not right. And that doesn't sound like, but the story was that. We forgot about it. But that got stuck in my brain. And I think that was, that was part of a bias against women.

RS: And what did you—huh?

SA: I have another example.

RS: Yeah, okay good. More.

SA: Probably have more, but that's from the top of my mind. I had a course that it was called IA here, artificial intelligence, and I didn't pass one test. So in Spain we had, I guess here too, those like you can go and talk to your teacher after the exam and go over the test to see what did you fail. So I got in one of those evaluations. And there were two teachers. And they were laughing at me all the time because I don't think it was on purpose, but they thought I was funny and that (            ). But I don't think that's the right context to laugh about a student. And yeah, that bothered me a lot. That bothered, and actually undermined me a lot like for continuing like studying that course actually.

RS: Did you keep on?

SA: Yeah.

RS: Yeah. And so you majored in computer science. That was your--. How many other girls or women were doing that?

SA: Very few. Very few. In the class of maybe one hundred people we were I don't know, maybe five girls.

RS: And did the five of you sort of stick together. Did you, were you friends?

SA: Well, now that I think about it, kind of. Yeah. Yeah. I was living with three of them for example. So I think yeah. We stuck, we got stuck and stayed together.

RS: Then after you graduated what happened?

SA: I didn't graduate, I mean I got an internship.

RS: Internship.

SA: Very early in my career. So I started working like second year in college or something, third year. And the college back then was like six years. It wasn't like here

that it was four. And I started working very early. Like working a lot and doing very good and better and better every year. So yeah, I think back then of my time in Spain I was doing much better than any other of my colleagues like from school actually. And that was very good for me because I didn't have a great time when I was in college because I thought that wasn't for me. And when I started working I realized I was very good at that. And I think that's part of why I did so well like on the workforce.

RS: So you were kind of, is this right? You were sort of losing confidence.

SA: Totally.

RS: In college but in the ( ).

SA: Yeah, but that was a huge difference. That was a huge difference. Once I started working the way I was learning fast and advancing in my career was very different from me starting at college. It was very different.

RS: And so then you worked in Spain? Where, what kind of place were you working?

SA: I was working in a company that was a contractor for the government for the health care system, and I was a programmer there.

RS: And did you feel treated equally as a woman there?

SA: Well, I was starting my career. So what I realized in, so I was starting my career so, and I was learning as much as I could, but I realized that was going to be like a limit of growth. It was going to be like well the way I was seeing like management like behaving wasn't a way that a woman can fit in for example.

RS: What do you mean?

SA: Well, the way they were doing business was very not for women, let's say that.

RS: Because it was—

SA: Well, it was, there was a lot of meetings at bars or going out at night, having drinks. So I don't think I would have fit in that kind of situation.

RS: So then you decided—

SA: To move here.

RS: Is that when you came here?

SA: I came here first like in 1999 when I was in college to visit a friend that was living here from Spain. And I came with my boyfriend at the time, and we were computer science students, and we decided, okay, after college we're going to live there because it's San Francisco. And so technology make us. So and then we, I got back here, and ten years passed and I didn't do it. So at a point of my life that I was talking before like I talked to my father and I was thinking that it was time to do that. But it always, it had always been in my head, and I was already thirty-one. So I wasn't going to do it like when I was forty. That's for sure. So I was I felt like I was in the limit of doing it for my age.

RS: The boyfriend was not in the picture anymore?

SA: Anymore, no, no.

RS: Yeah. So then you just moved here?

SA: Yeah, I moved here alone. So my friend that I visited like then, I visited ten years ago was still here after ten years. And I came here to try for one year. So I got enrolled in a program at City College of San Francisco in network security. And after a

year I got an internship—that's the story of my life repeating again. I got an internship at Lawrence-Berkeley National Laboratory where I still am. So and then after the internship they hired me. So I stayed here and I'm currently working there.

RS: Say it again it's Lawrence—

SA: Lawrence-Berkeley National Laboratory.

RS: And so you work in security, network security there.

SA: Yeah. Cyber security.

RS: Cyber security. And how did you decide that that was the field that you wanted to go into?

SA: The same way I decided to study computer science because it was the most difficult thing to do. So when I started my career in computer science, I didn't even have a computer. But I was sure I wasn't going to be a math teacher or a science teacher. So I wanted to do something else and something that was challenging to me. And I said oh computer science. Well, I have no idea what is that. That's why I'm going to do it. And then for security it was the same. I was tired of being a programmer because I think a developer that wasn't for me in a way. That is very static and I needed a little bit of, more dynamic job. Securities like you don't stop. You don't stop learning, and there is no one day that is the same as the other days. So it's perfect, and also I thought it was the most difficult thing to do to like ( ) and started studying and realized I could do it. So yeah, that's why I decided to go through that.

RS: And when you like went to that program for network security, were there other women in that program?

SA: Maybe one more or two that I remember. Yeah. Not much, not many women.

RS: And so—

SA: I mean in technology we are a minority as you know, but in cyber technology, cyber security field is the worst for diversity. It's the worst. There's a lot more developers, women develop, ( ) probably now than before and user designers or web developers, that kind of stuff, but in cyber it's, there's no women at all.

RS: So how did it feel to you to be one of the first women going through?

SA: It was hard. It was hard. I was used to the fact that I am the only woman in the room. But definitely was harder than ever because the stereotypes of a person working in security are very strong. And I'm the opposite to that like on the outside.

RS: So I don't, I'm so far away from it I don't even know what the stereotypes are. So what's the stereotype of the cyber security?

SA: Well, first of all to be a man. And then something that is, might be a little bit obsessed with computers and spending nights like without sleeping and going through stuff or studying or trying to hack into systems, maybe not very healthy, not interested in social life. I think that's the stereotype. It's changing though. It's changing and I hope I'm contributing to that.

RS: So how did these guys, like do you work in a big room with lots of these guys? I mean what's your day like—

SA: No, I work in an office so everyone has their offices. So cybersecurity is a very collaborative work. So you have to work alone but with the rest of the team because it's part of the job. So everybody collaborates with, I mean we have system

administrators, people that specialize in networks. I do penetration testing. But we need to know about the other of the fields. So we have a specialization, but we need to know about the other too.

RS: So can you describe, I mean was there actual resistance to you being there or it was just—

SA: I think there wasn't a resistance but a sense of really do you want to be here, why? Yeah. Um yeah. I noticed that a lot. Like are you sure you want to be a computer and cyber security engineer? And I was pretty sure.

RS: Yeah. Do you, I mean looking back, it takes a lot of hutzpah to be a woman who go into computer science in the [19]90s was it, when you were in college and then—

SA: That's my generation.

RS: Right and then to pursue this and all the way up to cybersecurity. And for you it was driven by this desire to do the hardest thing. Do you think that, did you see yourself connected in any way to feminism or to like the women's movement? Was that, did you see yourself benefiting from that or affected by that at all? Did you think of yourself as kind of part of the women's movement or feminism or was this just an independent decision you were making?

SA: Um I think it was an independent decision. I never thought of myself as a feminist when I was young. But again it's like, I said before when you are younger you are don't realize actually what is going on. It's like you're building it your life and your character. So what I always, I can tell you this. I was always like admire but strong women that they will go out in the world and do their thing and succeed in their careers or whatever they were doing as women especially the ones that didn't have much help,

like they weren't coming up from rich families or they didn't have like support. I was always an admirer.

RS: Do you remember specific women that you admired?

SA: Like yeah, you're going to laugh at me. But I always liked it, looked up at Madonna for example. Yeah. I thought that she was great, I mean I think about, I think that way now and I think that way when I was ten years old. I don't know if that means something. I always admired that strength in woman like taking the world like and doing it whatever.

RS: So—

SA: And I also always missed those kind of role models. I mean there were not much that I could look up to. Like not even in my family or in my environment or in the newspaper. It's like now I think especially in the last few years you can see that a lot more, which is awesome. But back in the day you couldn't so--

RS: So when did you start to get this idea about starting an organization called Girls Can Hack or an initiative called that?

SA: I, that started like a few years ago. I started Girls Can Hack two years ago. I always felt that I had to do something because I was the only—I always had this thought. If I don't do it who's going to do it because I'm the only one here. I don't see anyone around like any other woman. So that's why I decided to do that. And I was, well I don't have much time, but I'm going to try to do something at least. And I put together a group that is called Girls Can Hack and is trying to support women that want to go in the technology field especially in cybersecurity.



RS: I mean not everyone would say that they needed to do something for other women. They might just follow their own career and make their own path and say other people can follow me if they want. So why do you think you felt the need to make it, to support other people?

SA: Because who's going to do it? And I also, I miss that like when I was like growing up as a computer scientist. I hope I had that, my life will have been much more, much easier. And I don't know I have a sense of duty to do it in a way. Yeah. And I know that it's very beneficial to have role models and people to look up to and to have a sense of belonging in this life. So and this field and this career that's very difficult to achieve for a woman. So I mean I'm just only hoping that I can do something for it to change in the next generation can have like a more, a smooth path like to choose this as a career.

RS: So what does the group actually do?

SA: They do different things, time permitting. So I did a couple meetings where I talk, and I try to bring the cybersecurity world down to earth so people, so women see that it's not actually that difficult and especially if I can do it, they can do it. It's just go ahead and do it and study and work. And so I do meetings that talk to women about that, how is it to be a woman in the field, that especially I put an emphasis on the fact that there's a lot of jobs right now for, there's a lot of demand, and women are missing out on it. It's like there's a goldmine over here. Come get it. And then I go to panels, and I represent Girls Can Hack, and I'm very happy this past year the last couple panels I've been in there were a lot more women there. So-

RS: So you think this is changing?

SA: Yeah.

RS: You're noticing changes.

SA: Yeah. I have noticed in the last couple years, especially the last year. In cybersecurity first of all it's like a sexy field now because it's all over the news. And people are more and more curious, and they want to get into the field. So there's more women because of that. Second of all there's a lot of women doing great things for women. What, I don't think I have seen that in my life before like in the media. So that's a lot of support for all kinds of movements about women. So I think that it's making a difference. The fact that Hillary Clinton is like a presidential candidate, I think that's having a lot of weight like on the world focusing more on women and noticing us and like taking us into account. I really have felt that way this last year.

RS: Can you give me an example of where you've noticed that or where you've seen that playing out?

SA: I have noticed that, I work for the government and I think there's a shift towards women that I haven't seen before. I think there's a lot more of support, and I really feel that it's a great time to be a woman right now.

RS: So what does that look like? What is the government doing that's different?

SA: Supporting more diversity I think. And it's a feeling. So those when you are a woman working in a man's world, you can tell like examples of things that happened because everything's very settled. So it's not, yes, I came to my work place today and this happened. It's like feelings and ways of treating people and ways of doing procedures at work, protocols and stuff. So I think some of those in search engines and they've been more open to a women culture than before.

RS: So what are your hopes for Girls Can Hack? What are you hoping—

SA: Well, the first thing I hope is my organization grows and somebody take over. So and I put a lot to keep it going enough so it takes over. It takes off and gets its own life as an entity. And I don't know. What I feel is that I would love to get more and more women interested in what I am doing and actually because it's a great career. And I really, really believe that women are great for that because cyber security is you have to have a lot of technical skills, but there's a lot of intuition in it too, and you have to apply your smarts in a way that sometimes women that they like do it very well. So I think it's women are great cyberengineers.

RS: Have you, now that you've started doing this, are there other women like I've seen organizations I think there's Girls Can Code or something like that or Black Girls Code and other organizations. Do you have connections with them? Are you sort of part of a bigger network of those kinds of organizations?

SA: Not really. I mean, they are doing their thing and I'm doing my thing. And I think it's complementary. As I told you for cybersecurity is a field in science and technology. So you have to have a set of, I mean if you go and code, you can be a developer. But if you want to be a cyber security you have to go and code and if you want to and have system administration and skill and you have to know that networks. So I think that complements the work I'm doing. I think it's awesome and it's great. I mean I wouldn't cover the whole thing. And there, there's a lot of movements about women supporting another women and technology. Yeah I've seen them like in events, I get to lots of events and I get to know a lot of people and some of them are working for those organizations. Some of them are supporting and some are affiliating. And also the Bay,

we're all in the Bay Area. So it's pretty small. So I think we kind of know everybody here.

RS: Is there anything that I should ask you about that we haven't talked about or that you want to talk about?

SA: Um no. I don't know.

RS: I'm trying to think. If Hillary Clinton wins, what do you think will, do you think that that will make a big difference in the world of cybersecurity or your, or women in cybersecurity?

SA: Yes.

RS: What do you think?

SA: I think it's going to be, I think it's going to make a big difference in women in general. Yeah, I mean yeah I have talked to people and not everybody thinks that's going to be the case. But I really believe it. I have a sense, I have an intuition about it very strong. I think it's already happened. And yeah, she's going to be a lot of power but the conception that we have about a woman. It's not because she's going to be a president because there's a lot of female presidents in the world right not or there have been. But she's given support, she's like talking about women a lot. And she didn't have to. I mean there's been a lot of presidential campaigns of women that they didn't do that. And I think Hillary Clinton is playing that part very often which is great. I think it's a great thing for us. So I think she's going to continue in that direction. And I think things are going to change for us, and finally we'll get some of the stuff done about what we deserve like equality and some things like pay, salaries.

RS: Do you see pay inequity in your field? Is that something--?

SA: Yeah, there's statistics about it. So yeah, there's a lot. There's some misconceptions in technology that a woman is not going to do as, the same job or it's not going to do it like that good. I don't know. So yeah, there's a tendency to pay less to women or women, they don't get like promotions that easily for example. And I hope that change. But yes, definitely I say that. I say it. It takes us like longer to get things and sometimes we have to work like three times more and stay in the same level because you cannot like get away with a good career if you don't do that. I also have seen women that they have to work so hard that they became like pretty hard, pretty tough. And people are kind of scared of them. And they call them names I'm not going to reveal, but you know what I mean. And I've seen those but I'm, I don't mind really because I know what it takes to get to a high profile management job for example. And it's pretty hard. So there's ways of defending yourself for example. So I don't know. I tried to be the same person all the time and not to change much. But there's some other people that cannot do it. That means like it's pretty hard for us.

RS: Okay. Well, how many, when you have a Girls Can Hack meeting now about how many people will come?

SA: Well, to start like maybe at the beginning were like fifteen or twenty. And the last one I did there were a hundred and something, but there were men and women. Yeah. We were talking about cybersecurity and I got to the place and I thought there were going to be like ten people, and then I saw those many people and organization started to pull out chairs from other places because people were standing up. And I was happy. And there were a lot of women in the room. So yeah, I think it's changing. But when I started like I think the first meeting, we were like ten people. Yeah.

RS: And these were women who were already in the field or they were just learning, they were interested in going into the field.

SA: Mostly it's students, or yeah some of them they were already in the, in technology but in entry levels trying to decide what to do with their lives and their careers and trying to see if they were interested in cyber. But there were a lot of students like in computer science that they were trying to decide whether to go look for a job after graduation.

RS: When I hear girls Can Hack I always think of that, those novels, what was it, *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and did you read those?

SA: Yeah, and that's funny that you mentioned that because in my first meeting I think on my slides, one of the slides was the picture of that girl from the movie.

RS: From the movie.

SA: And the first, I think what was my first slide or my last, I don't remember, and I was saying something like well if you're a girl or women that is working in cybersecurity, remember you don't have to look at this. [laughs]

RS: That's great.

SA: Because this was that kind of dark character like very troubled and traumatized and with a lot of tattoos all over the place and I don't know. That's not the image that I want to show them.

RS: Right.

SA: So I was like this is a movie; I am the reality okay. Yeah. That was funny, yeah. That was in my, in the ( ) slides that I have. Yeah.

RS: Well, thank you so much. That was great.

SA: Well, thank you for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by LM Altizer, October 24, 2016