Steven: Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Inequality Podcast. I'm Steven Durlauf. Today, I'm delighted to introduce Caterina Calsamiglia as our guest. Caterina is a research professor at the Catalan Institute for Research and Advanced Studies and is the group leader of the Computational Social Science and Humanities Unit at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center. Beyond giving you titles, what I really want to say is that Caterina is one of the deep and broad thinkers in economics and really in social science in terms of the ability to bring together tools from economic theory, from state-of-the-art econometrics to thinking about incredibly complicated data sets, to working on the computer science social science interface. And so, Caterina is really a delight to have you join us.

Caterina: Thank you so, so much, Steven.

Steven: So I thought that we would start with your work on school choice, which is, of course, a visible and controversial policy in the United States and one that's integral to thinking about education and educational inequality. And so I thought before talking about your work in particular, might you just give any sketch of what you think are the main social science issues in the study of school choice?

Caterina: I think one of the biggest problems or challenges is that we tend to focus on choice very much. And we ignore the fact that maybe there's not enough good options for people. So I think school choice is something that makes a lot of sense when, for example, there's just heterogeneity and what people want, but all options are very good. That's where school choice really can improve things a lot because you can improve the match quality. If different schools serve differently, different people and people know that, schools know that. It's good to let them match this way. But I think what happens is that, unfortunately, there's a bunch of schools that nobody's really interested in attending. So it's more of a lottery on who gets to go to those, and people are trying to avoid those more than actually choosing what you really want.

Another important issue is that, theoretically, it's very difficult to think about implementing choice when people have preferences over who they want to go to school with. And the fact that it's theoretically very challenging doesn't mean we shouldn't be thinking hard about how to improve what we're doing now. So, choice is very much framed as an individual problem. For many families it's about being able to coordinate with neighbors so that they can go together, even if it's a bit further, even if it's a school that has more heterogeneity, I would be okay if I'm together with other people that are in the same neighborhood with me or with friends that I already know that I know we can coordinate on. And we don't make that easy for families to do. It actually may be counterproductive to have somebody apply to the same school because you may be competing with each other. And then

another thing is that we see economists thinking about school choice in this way, and then governments telling us their word about segregation. And we're trying to put that in into, like I said, an additional layer, being as like, okay, so let's do quotas on top of that.

But ultimately, I think what the administrations are telling us is there's other concerns that they have in their heads, like segregation, but mobility also, like, we have people who have to move around the city. This may be problematic social capital that may be an issue. So there's all these other issues that administrations care about that are very complex for us to incorporate, and which we don't because it's hard. And so I think also we need to try and do a better job in thinking about the problem as a mechanism design problem where we have a welfare function that has a lot more than making parents happy in it. And I think incorporating all of that is something that we're going to have to face if we really want to be more useful for the actual implementation of policies.

Steven: Much of the study of the choice of arguments in its favor are based on a thought experiment, in which you fix the schools and then ask what the assignment ought to be with respect to who goes where. But the number of your arguments really comes down to saying that we have to think about changing the option set, in other words, the nature of the schools themselves. And so one dimension of that will be the conventional measures of quality. I guess I also wanted to emphasize something you brought up, which is the location of the schools. Mary Ann Leverdi at Boston College has a very interesting paper about Boston, where she found that the school choice mechanisms are actually not helping African American families that much, simply because the better schools, the ones that meet the quality criteria, are distant. And so they're differences in travel costs, and it's just not a monetary cost. It's time. It's the complexity of dealing with that which really are inhibiting.

So I think an important theme in your work is that, in thinking about school choice as a policy that benefits children, it can have social benefits. One has to relax the assumption that the schools themselves are invariant objects that we just match people to, which seems to be very important. And so in terms of your own papers, your own research, you know, what are the main conclusions are?

Caterina: There's two things that happen when you have bad schools: affluent families that get assigned to those relatively worse schools, that's not going to work. They will complain enough, or they will leave the public system, which would be a problem in terms of the political economy of how schools are financed. So what ends up happening is that in most places, you have neighborhood priority to make sure that those who are in the neighborhood get an advantage if there's over demand. Okay. What a vast number of papers with

different, you know, theory and more reduced form and so on show is that if you have that basically in this Boston mechanism, which is this immediate acceptance that is used in 80% of the countries. You have that families will focus on applying for what is safe, and what is safe is your neighborhood school. And so that's true for everybody that has a neighborhood school that is fairly decent, and then the only ones that are there to risk it are two collectives, that it's pretty fascinating. One is the ones that have private school outside options.

So they get to risk it because if it doesn't work, then they can go out and so they can risk to apply for the best schools, and actually get the best schools because they're the only ones who can afford to risk it. And the ones who have a neighborhood school that is so bad that it's not so bad, but it just never fills up. So you can risk applying for something else because if you don't get it, then you can still go to your neighborhood school. But literature has been saying that the Boston mechanism was bad because it was inducing families to be strategic, but actually, they're being strategic in a very particular way. So, most of them are being strategic by just playing it safe, and then only the poor ones get to risk it, which, in some sense, can be rather good. But then the other thing that we also show is that there's this alternative mechanism, which is the Gilles Chaplin, where if you have both that people agree on what is bad and then you have neighborhood priorities, then actually even though families can tell the truth, what ends up happening is that they're still assigned just their neighborhood. And I can tell you the argument, but basically what happens is that it's actually worse than what happens with the Boston mechanism because people are truthful, but there's always blockings happening because of people in the bad schools wanting to flee. They're also trying to get the same seeds that the others are trying to get, and basically, what ends up happening, in the end, is that they still just get assigned to their neighborhood.

So basically all of the mechanisms that we are thinking about politically, if you have neighborhood priority, which is something that you will have to do half if you want to solve the political economy problem of affluent families being decently happy about this. And you have some bad schools, then basically none of the mechanisms are going to really do the job.

Steven: So much of your work uses data from Barcelona. So maybe the audience would like to know something about what makes the school system in Barcelona unique. And how does that affect generalizability to obviously the American case?

Caterina: So to me, there were not big differences. This is something that we've learned over time. Let's say, when he initially worked on this, we thought maybe it would be very different. Maybe the schools

would be less heterogeneous than in the US. We would have less bad schools, but it turns out that it's actually that there's still this thing about the bottom being very correlated. So even though they're not that bad, there's still this gap. There's also a little bit of a detail about the mechanism that the priority you get for the second choice is the same as the one you get on the first, so that gives you extra incentives of applying for the first one in a different way. But at the end of the day, there's no actual difference in terms of what ends up happening because here and in other cities where they've done studies afterward, they always find that the fraction of families that get their first choice is super high, which is what happens in Barcelona.

So, how things are resolved in future rounds doesn't make a big difference. And I think something that is true in Barcelona and also has turned out to be true in most cities is that most of the schools get filled up in the first round. So it's really about this first draw and who gets lucky in this first round. And there, so we did what they do in Barcelona, the simulation of seeing, so Barcelona has the Boston mechanism, and basically worldwide, the mechanism had not been worldwide, but anywhere where academics had an influence. We had changed the mechanism, in particular, in the UK, which was banned everywhere. Our results show that actually changing from the Boston to the Gilleschappi would have been bad, and it would have been particularly bad for disadvantaged families, which is something that now a study done by Parag Pathak and Camille Terrier studying the UK case, they find exactly the same for the whole of the UK. So I think, although initially people were a bit suspicious that maybe Spain and Barcelona were a special case, they were actually not that different from worldwide.

Steven: In terms, of kind, of the big picture questions about education based on the research that you've done, you know, what are your views now on school choice? If you were to become the minister of education, what are the policies you would prioritize? School choice and then moving beyond that, more broadly.

Caterina: You know, it's funny because I was actually having a policy discussion. What you just asked me, somebody in the audience asked me, and I said neighborhood priorities are something that doesn't make a lot of sense, and families were really surprised. Because they said, "Look, it's you're close by. You do want to promote that this is something that is done like that. That people get to, you know, invest in the social capital," and all these good things about being close. And I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I fully agree with you. And it should be like that. If all schools are like that are good enough, people will want that and will stay in their neighborhood because everybody appreciates that.

But if somebody lives in a neighborhood that is not getting that, and

is willing to travel far. To actually get the benefits of some other neighborhood school, I really cannot argue that that person has less of a right than the person who lives in the neighborhood." So we really should work on as a society to make sure that nobody wants to take my seat close by. And so I have to work on your school to make sure that that doesn't happen. Right. So I think if we frame it as a social problem, we just have to be more pedagogical about why we're doing it like that. And I think another thing that is more ambitious and one has to think very carefully about how to do that is trying to do this thing about trying to allow families to coordinate. And making it easy for them to coordinate if they're willing to desegregate schools. We've had a very large increase in the population of immigrants.

So some schools have 99% of kids who are, you know, immigrants, first-generation immigrants. So they just there are 9,000 kids coming in in the middle of the year, and they tend to be kids who struggle and have a situation, and they tend to go to the same schools. Right. And so families that see that they don't necessarily want to take their kids to those schools, but we always ask them individually. So I wonder if you asked, you know, 10 parents from the same neighborhood, just walk a couple of blocks more, and you all get to go to the same school. And then you make it if you give priority to those kids. So I think that may enable us to convince both parents and reduce segregation. So we just, I think we just have to be more creative and think of ways of doing that.

Steven: So I thought we might turn to a second area where you've done considerable research, which is high-stakes testing. And so could you talk about the main issues you focused on and what your main findings are?

Caterina: So, high-stakes exams are used worldwide a lot. When I say high stakes, it's a standardized exam that we use for transparency and to improve equity, very often, right? And the goal is to share standards, make sure everybody's evaluated using the same criteria, and so on and so forth. And this has two important problems. One is we're trying to capture skill with one observation, and any statistician would tell you that's problematic. So, getting just one observation of an individual to try to assess something that is complex sounds like a bad idea. It's a noisy measure of that thing. So that's one thing.

But then there's another thing, which is the fact that is measured this one time, and it has such big implications for your future outcomes. Because in Spain, you do it once a year, and if you don't do it well, you have to wait another year, right? In Korea, they even stop the city on the day of the exam; everything stops until the kids have finished the exam. So it's a huge thing in many countries, right? So the circumstances under which and the consequences that this

performance has during that day have huge implications, and not everybody reacts the same way to that pressure. So part of the work that we've been doing, we've been focusing a lot on gender differences, but also the same applies for minorities and others. So it's basically the same kind of things we haven't been able to show enough because we didn't have enough accurate data. But I think many of the arguments apply to it.

So we have this study where we show that females do better throughout, but then when this, so we had this panel of females and males over time, and we saw that as the stakes increased, the gap between girls and boys reduced. So girls tend to do better overall, but then they do worse when the stakes are increased. Some people were saying, well, in schools, it's because teachers are biased and so on. But in this particular setup, we actually had it so that it always was the same teachers grading all the exams. So it was really just changes in the size of the stakes. We then tried to see whether that was something that was affecting who was getting where in college because this is an exam that is used for college entrance. So in our context, entrance to college is determined by a weighted average of the DBA in school, and there's an average in this entrance exam. And then there was a policy change changing those weights, and it was giving a higher weight to this.

It's like height 6, this one-shot thing. And part of the reason was actually pretty good, which was they wanted to give higher weight to specific subjects that were going to be important for the college degree that you're going to study. So they basically added two extra grades that would count. So those grades used to be from 0 to 10, and they added them to be from 0 to 14, and these four extra points were derived from giving you two more points for the grades that were more relevant for what you wanted to study. So we exploit the fact that, basically, some exams are even higher stakes to see that actually females do worse and that they enter worse colleges because of that. And we also see that in terms of the predicted performance, we don't select better people into college if we compare the gender composition. So within genders, this policy change does allow us to incorporate better-prepared females and males, and it's because we're selecting based on the performance of these particular subjects that are relevant for college. So that's a good thing.

But there was this across gender aspect, which was bad, which is that the girls who were left out were actually girls who would be better performers than the males we get in. Okay. More broadly, I think this just makes me think, you know, if this happens with gender, the same thing is going to happen with different subgroups that have different expectations and so on. And so it's just to say that the fact that we have these objective measures doesn't mean that people have the same capacities to react and to cope with these different measures. So that they don't necessarily measure the same thing. They may measure your

ability plus your ability to cope under stress. And it's not clear that those things are things that you want to select for.

Steven: So I think the work you've done is really quite important, and understanding the informational content of test scores. There's a literature in the United States about the so-called "stereotype threat", which has argued that because of historical prejudices against African Americans in particular. The reaction to taking things like IQ tests as a response, therefore, it degrades performance. The literature in the States, I think it's a fair statement to say is controversial. In other words, there's very deep disagreements on the magnitudes of the effects and on the strength of the evidence overall, which is not to say that the proposition is false. And so I really want to highlight that I think the work you're doing is really quite important in that regard. And of course, all of this calls into question the mission's meritocratic policies, so on and so forth.

Caterina: So, another thing that we actually looked at that we had the opportunity to look at, and that speaks to what you're saying, was that when COVID hit, we had the problem that this high-stakes exam could not be run because it was exactly when COVID was there. So we could just not run those. So one of the questions was, what do we do, do we wait until we actually can do it or do we use some kind of what do we do? What we tried to do is simulate, so this is not something that they actually did, but we did at home, trying to think of solutions to propose for policymakers, is a prediction model that tries to see, well, these kids have done everything until March. We know their grades until March. If this test is just a prediction, it is just a proxy for their ability; we should be able to predict it. Right. So we use historical data and we try to predict.

I tried to do the exercise of saying whether we could predict what happened last year. So two interesting things come about, one is that there's a lot of air. So you have a hard time when you do the prediction. It's not very accurate. So that's something that already speaks to what I first mentioned, which is we're using one observation right to proxy for ability. So that's one thing. The other thing is that when I was looking at the variables that were predicting that performance in this high-stakes exam, there were all these different grades in school that were in the input there. And I was super surprised to see this one subject score being very, very relevant for the aggregate.

English is the most predictive in Spain. English is something you actually don't learn in school. There are a lot of parents that take their kids, you know, to extracurricular English because the teaching in school is pretty bad. So I would say it's the one subject that you don't learn in school, but that's capturing the investment that parents make in you, that has nothing to do with schools, because you don't learn that in schools. So even though we control for the

socioeconomics of the parents, we still see that that variable counts like three times more than any other, which is selling you that what makes this kid succeed is not their own effort only. Right or their own ability, but there's this background parent support that is greatly impacting the grades of these kids. Know that this is Europe, where you would think you know pressure is a lot lower and things are more laid back, but no. So I can only imagine what would happen in the US.

Steven: An additional piece of work you've done in some ways is complementary to asking the question about stress and test scores, which is about the role of mentoring. In other words, the capacity, you know, the nature of teaching, the nature of broader mentoring interactions to promote individual outcomes. Might you discuss your work there?

Caterina: We did this study. We got this European next generation money to try and find ways of promoting the life path of families that were disadvantaged, particularly hit by COVID, but just in general, trying to close the gap in many ways. And we did a bunch of RCTs, and then one of them was we're trying to think about policies that would improve the capacity of kids to succeed in college. So we did this mentoring program where you take kids at the end of high school and you match them with a volunteer from the university who will accompany you throughout the path. Actually, the role was to like just help you make your decision. You maybe you wouldn't want to even want to go to college. It was more like vocational training versus college. We need to match that with administrative records, and we haven't fully gotten the picture of what's happening there, but something that we did find, and I think it's very interesting and compelling, is that when we asked all the kids whether they would be interested in having a mentor.

And a minority said they were more interested than the rest, but they were interested in having somebody like them. So immigrants were interested in having somebody from their original country, and people living in certain circumstances wanted people who lived in those circumstances. So we're looking for something like them. And then they didn't sign up. And I was like, oh, why didn't they sign up if they wanted it? Right. And then we looked at the set of mentors, and we said, "Oh", because we just don't have what they're looking for. They already anticipated that we would not have many people as mentors with those characteristics.

They didn't know, like we didn't show them who the mentors would be, but they basically already, you know, that's what life has told them. So I'm always surprised by how we think people don't take up because of this and that and that. And many of them, very often, it's just they're it's not going to be useful for them. So they don't take it up because it's not going to be useful for them. I don't need somebody

telling me what I should be doing without having any idea of what I'm going through and what my actual constraints are. We just need more mentors coming out of the realities that we want to help, which also brings me to we also need people thinking about policies and so on that come from those worlds because that's what's going to basically facilitate that we incorporate the elements that are really barriers and that are really what make these kids be able to thrive.

Steven: So much of your work, in my judgment, both directly and indirectly speaks to issues surrounding meritocracy. So I wonder what lessons you would take in terms of meritocracy, both as a positive and a normative ideal.

Caterina: I think the most important learning for me is that we're never going to be happy about how well we do. So I think it's very hard to accomplish that goal to be really meritocratic. I think it's very complicated. So the goal has to be to improve, not to achieve that goal, because otherwise we're going to give up. I just think it's very hard. I think all the things we do to try are never perfect, and then they become even less perfect the longer we have them. So I think all that we need to rethink continuously about how we measure things, how we capture merit, how we you know if you do standardized exams, and some people become experts in teaching others on how to do these standardized exams. But maybe if we change them completely, we change the curriculum and everything very often, then there wouldn't be an ability to adapt to that, and we wouldn't be able to give an advantage to certain people.

It just seems like whatever we do to try to make things more and more meritocratic. There's always some people slipping in that we wouldn't want to be there and some people slipping out. But I think the work has to be to fine-tune and keep rethinking how to improve. And I just think it's good to think about where we were so many years ago, and where maybe a hundred years ago, and where we are now. And just I think it's very important to acknowledge that we're not more geographic, so that those who make it are very clear that they're there not because of merit but because of many circumstances. But I do think our job is to actually fine-tune the procedures to make sure you know that we make that better.

Steven: So I was hoping you could talk about your new work, this really large-scale data collection you're doing, and associated with your pentabilities methodology.

Caterina: So it's really a big shift in many dimensions, you may think, but to me it connects very well to this, aiming to find ways of both capturing what we care about so that we're more meritocratic and thereby also offering tools for people to work on the things that will be useful for them. So I think when we're designing measures that we aim to be meritocratic, we also have to worry about those measures

being useful as something to work on. Something that to me was quite impressive is the literature saying that these non-cognitive skills, social emotional skills, being so relevant and then us having very limited measures of them. But the more dramatic thing for me was we're not it's not only that we're not selecting for them and they and if they're so important, then maybe we should focus more on them when we're selecting people to be doctors to be teachers, maybe those skills should be more relevant if they are really important to be taught to others and to make their job better and so on. But also in terms of a formative tool, so whatever you use to measure is also a tool to also train people to become better at that. So, classrooms have become less and less engaging. It seems like the ultimate goal is to get you to do this exam, which happens at a certain point. And then we've basically moved away from putting attention to the process of learning.

This creates stress for teachers, and that makes it not very attractive for students, like what it is for me in this class, just to wait and hopefully get the questions right. And that's it, and then, not surprisingly, we have a huge problem with class requirements. I think the work we did with pantables is try to find a way of creating a shared understanding of what good learning behavior looks like. Okay, so what is expected of you as a person while you're learning? What are the things that we would like to see, and what are the things that may block you from learning? So if you get super upset when you make a mistake that's going to be problematic because when I ask you something and you make a mistake, you're not going to want to tell me you're going to pretend that maybe whatever you would distracted when I asked the question because you don't want to accept that you did a mistake. But if instead I tell you actually the way you react to making a mistake is a huge makes a huge difference in your learning process and I embrace that and I facilitate that kids feel comfortable telling me what they don't know and why they didn't get it right and they try to connect how what I didn't understand is the same as what the other student doesn't understand. Then maybe the teacher will understand also what the problem is and will be able to promote the learning better.

But if we don't clear out what is what, what are the things that we could expect children to be doing in a classroom that can facilitate learning, then it becomes a very frustrating task. So what we did invent abilities was basically to say what are easy behaviors to be targeting in classrooms. So we worked together with a group of teachers and psychologists, and we constructed 35 behaviors that are very simple, very easy to connect to and to observe, that we can relate to a bunch of frameworks like the CASEL, and there are all these CD frameworks for socioemotional skills. And it's very easy things like how you react to making mistakes, whether you incorporate others' ideas, whether you facilitate that others participate, and 35 behaviors that we basically trained teachers to focus on. So we told

them in today's class, of these 35 behaviors, pick two or three that you think will be relevant for today's class, and share them with the students. And after the class finishes, they're going to take this app, which is just the behaviors that you've listed, and that they should focus on, and you're going to ask them to evaluate their peers and themselves based on those behaviors, based on what happened this hour. Okay, so doing that in the context of physics, math, language, any subject matter that you're teaching is suddenly creating an expectation of "What am I supposed to be doing as a student?" I also have to be aware of what others are doing because I will have to evaluate my peers, and suddenly, you're making everybody participate in this thing. And then this is, by the way, very much for adolescence, not for primary school.

But basically, we trained teachers to use those behaviors to guide what was expected in the classroom and then collect evidence from the students about themselves and others. And then there was like the app produces this report for you that basically facilitates that you use this very specific evidence that you've collected, in like, say, every week in the classroom. And then there's a conversation about who you are, what is inhibiting your capacity to progress and to learn in the different subject matters, maybe in math, you behave certain way in another subject you don't you use that evidence to sort of get deeper into what's happening and what is inhibiting your learning or what is promoting it so that you can set yourself some goals and so on. So this is something that we had been working on, and it was very much derived from the fact that I was frustrated with the way we were capturing what was going on in schools, which was also influencing what teachers were able to work on. And then we basically started from okay, let's just help promote this in the classroom, and we run an RCT. So we trained over 120 teachers to integrate that, and there were very diverse teachers, they were teaching between 12 and 16 years old, and it was all kinds of subject matters. The training was fairly short, and then there was somebody who would come into the classroom and give you feedback on how you're implementing it, which was again very useful because the first time that somebody went into the classroom, nothing really had changed. And the second time things had changed, so having somebody see you and you being able to discuss your problems with your classroom when you're there with somebody that proved to be like something that facilitated change.

And one, we're still very much in the process of analyzing what happened, but we see a huge impact on teacher time use on discipline. They spent 30% less time managing the classroom than they were before, and they don't report there being extra time or needs on more administrative or you know other things, so we've just made the process more efficient. So the students like their teachers more, and they work more autonomously, so the teacher is less responsible for managing what's going on in the classroom because you've given this ownership to the students. So this was evaluating a teacher program,

right, but then behind it is we're going to look at all this evidence that their the students have collected about each other and about what teachers know about the students. To look at all kinds of what people think about each other what minorities think about others and so on and so there's going to be we're going to be able to look at all those things but also see how those behaviors relate to test outcomes and to future outcomes later on to try to see whether those are behaviors that are really connected to future outcomes.

Steven: It's a very exciting project, and in some way, it's an analogy to precision medicine; you're developing ways to think about precision education. As such, it's really an example of how disciplinary barriers are breaking down because the work is combining big data ideas from leaders, science ideas from social science. So your own research trajectories are really quite remarkable because of the combination of economics, philosophy, market design, and computer science. Might you say something about how you evolved and what the trajectories have been for you?

Caterina: One of the reasons I chose Yale as a grant program was because John Romer was part of the program, and he had a joint appointment with economics and political science, and that meant that I could take some courses with him. I was always very interested in policy design, and I thought that this perspective of thinking of the goals was crucial. But then it was also true that I thought that those goals were being non-applicable to policy because it was too like your thinking of this social planner who's going to look at the final outcomes. But then, if you look at how we make this operational, there's all these little institutions like hospitals, education like colleges, and all these different people that are making decisions that are going to affect your life outcomes. So there doesn't seem to be like even in places like Europe, there's a lot of non coordination about that. So I started doing a lot of theory just because that was the first thing that I could contribute, given what my first reaction was to the learning I was doing. So I really followed that, and I think after that, basically, I've been trying to use whatever methods and learn about the methods I needed to respond to the things I wanted to respond to. So I started with theory, but then with school choice, basically I needed to make the case empirically about many of the things, and I had never opened a data set.

So I had to look for co-authors, and I initially did a lot of reduced form in very weird ways, like people were saying I don't know what this specification looks like because I was looking at things from a very different perspective. And then, you actually married me to Tao, who was the greatest co-authorship I've ever had. I'm sorry for everybody else, but that's where I learned an enormous amount of econometrics, structural econometrics, and many of the things one can do with that. So that was a great way of combining my theoretical background. And then just from there, I basically felt like I think

one of the great things about grad school is that you learn you can learn. And whenever I needed new methods, I felt like I could use them, and computer science just has come in very recently because basically, they're designing algorithms all the time. School choices and algorithms have great problems that they don't think about when they're designing their algorithms. So in school choice, for example, if you look at the performance of the algorithm, it does great with the boss and mechanism because everybody gets their first choice.

You would never just look at the aggregate data without thinking of the problem. You would say it's an excellent mechanism, period. You wouldn't think of anything else. So in my role, there is more like bringing in the context, looking at things from an economics perspective, and trying to understand that these algorithms are providing incentives for things. They're creating all kinds of biases, depending on how the data is collected and so on. So bringing in how all these features about the context and incentives that they're generating is so important for the design of algorithms because that's today what is going to influence policy most. And that's why I'm basically now working a lot with this computational family, just because I have a lot to bring, but also a lot to learn.

Steven: Well, Catarina, thank you. What a wonderful conversation. It's always delightful to talk.

Caterina: Thank you so much. Steven, this is great.

Steven: The Inequality Podcast is a production of the Stone Center for Research on Wealth Inequality and Mobility at the University of Chicago. I want to end the podcast with thanks to the people who really make it happen. First, I want to thank our producer and engineer, Shane McKeon. Second, I'd like to thank our assistant director Gerardo Espinal Franco for the production oversight and for doing everything that is required to bring the podcast to fruition. And finally, I'd like to thank our executive director Grace Kolavo for her support, not just for the podcast, but for every activity at the Stone Center. You may get in touch with us at stonecenter.uchicago.edu. Thank you so much for listening.

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