Lily Khadjavi wins the AWM Mary & Alfie Gray Award for Social Justice

The Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM) will present the inaugural AWM Mary & Alfie Gray Award for Social Justice to Lily Khadjavi, Professor of Mathematics at Loyola Marymount University, at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in Boston, MA in January 2023. The Award recognizes Khadjavi as a mathematician whose career has been defined by the multi-faceted, vigorous, and imaginative pursuit of social justice in her state, classrooms, profession, and beyond. Khadjavi’s work has empowered and inspired, changing public policy around racism in policing, equipping students and educators to seek social justice in and beyond the classroom with mathematics, and leading efforts to make mathematics more inclusive and equitable.

Citation
Dr Lily Khadjavi’s vigorous and imaginative work for social justice as a mathematician, educator, and activist has made a concrete and significant difference for multiple communities and has played a major role in shaping how mathematicians approach social justice today. Khadjavi’s creative and insightful applications of mathematics to social justice have demonstrated how mathematics can serve the causes of justice and equality in our wider societies and how a concern for these values can profoundly enrich mathematics classrooms and the mathematical community.

In 2006, long predating the recent surge in work on data and statistics for racial justice, Khadjavi’s article “Driving While Black in the City of Angels” showed the power of carefully and critically examining the right questions with the right data and right mathematical tools. Tellingly, the article starts with the lived experiences of minoritized people, commonly referred to as “driving while black” to describe racially biased policing. The piece demonstrates how to combine mathematical methods of data analysis with rich and nuanced engagement with law, sociology, politics, and the varieties of human experience to give a compelling account of an injustice.

Khadjavi’s innovative uses of public data related to social justice have been at the core of her long-running interventions in mathematics education. In her own teaching practice, in training educators through Project NExT, and in the rich collections of resources she has made available (including two co-edited books), Khadjavi has helped move project-based social justice mathematics toward the center of the curriculum in many more universities than her own. This has helped to make mathematics more inclusive and relevant, making lessons meaningful to students who might not have seen themselves in mathematics and making all mathematicians students aware of how the skills they are learning matter for understanding and improving the world around them.

From her own student days to the present, Khadjavi has been an active contributor and leader in programs and organizations that support minoritized mathematics students and researchers. She was one of the founders of Spectra, an organization that has greatly increased the visibility and inclusion of LGBTQ+ mathematicians, and has had pivotal roles for the Infinite Possibilities Conferences and other activities to support and promote mathematicians of color. These efforts have affirmed the essential connection between mathematics for social justice and justice within the mathematics community. 

Established in 2022, the Mary and Alfie Gray Award for Social Justice recognizes the vigorous and imaginative application of the mathematical sciences to advancing the cause of social justice, defined as promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity. Social justice exists when all people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources. The Joint Mathematics Meetings are scheduled for January 4-7, 2023 in Boston, MA.