

# The Trayvon Martin case: Lessons for education researchers

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The 2012 fatal shooting of black teenager Trayvon Martin by his Florida neighbor George Zimmerman sparked a fierce debate about racism and gun violence. Now, researchers are exploring what the controversial case says as well about sexism and violence against women.

Boston College Lynch School of Education Professor Ana M. Martinez Aleman spoke today at the American Educational Research Association annual conference in Philadelphia about the highly politicized debate surrounding the Martin case and the implications for researchers who probe issues at the intersection of race, [gender](#) and economic status.

AERA's Committee on Scholars and Advocates for Gender Equity in Education invited Martinez Aleman, a higher education expert whose research frequently looks at issues of race, culture and gender, and her fellow panelists to explore the issue.

"We in the [educational research](#) community don't often deal well with race and gender simultaneously," said Martinez Aleman, most recently the author of the book *Accountability, Pragmatic Aims, and the American University*. "We tend to deal with one or the other. But when we look at the Trayvon Martin case, I think there are lessons about how we can lose sight of gender and fail to think about the links between racism and sexism."

For instance, when an all-female jury was empaneled for Zimmerman's 2013 trial, commentary focused on whether the six [women](#) could judge

the case fairly despite their "maternal instincts," Martinez Aleman said. It was the kind of question no one would raise to an all-male jury, she added. Zimmerman, 30, was acquitted of second-degree murder.

As the case against Zimmerman, who is of Peruvian descent, played out, the national discussion focused on civil rights, racial profiling and the horrific toll of gun violence on black males, a debate that reached as far as the White House and President Obama.

But missing from that discussion was the similarly devastating impact of [gun violence](#) on black women, said Martinez Aleman. At 4.54 deaths per 100,000, the homicide rate for black women in America is more than three times the rate for white women, and more than double the rate for women of all races, according to the Violence Policy Center's recent review of 2011 homicide statistics.

"As horribly hurtful and shameful as the Martin case was, it's telling that we hear little about the many violent acts perpetuated on African American women, and don't seem rally around that injustice," said Martinez Aleman.

Martinez Aleman said she hopes the conference discussion will raise provocative questions within the research community, particularly among experts who study a range of issues connected to gender and equity, both inside and outside of the classroom.

"It's a call to researchers to really come to terms with the fact that race is not a stand-alone category," said Martinez Aleman. "Race and racial violence are informed by gender and many other issues. Unfortunately, we tend to pull back from those types of analyses. They are difficult and complex analyses to do. But these identities intersect and those intersections have serious implications for social policy—education included."

**More information:** The AERA session "Questions in Gender (In)Equity, Education and Trayvon Martin" takes place at 8 a.m. on Friday, April 4. For more information about the session, please visit this [link](#).

Provided by Boston College

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