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Artigo

Unpaid domestic labor exchange? An analysis of interracial unions in Brazil

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the role of unpaid domestic labor as an asset traded within heterosexual unions in Brazil, examining whether men and women differ in the number of weekly hours devoted to household chores across racial combinations of couples and their educational level. The analysis includes White, Brown, and Black individuals aged 20–34, using data from the 2015 Brazilian Household Survey (PNAD – Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios). For men and women separately, the paper estimates the effect of the couple's racial composition on the number of hours spent on unpaid domestic labor through linear regression models. Results indicate that darker partners tend to contribute more household labor. This pattern is especially evident for Black and Brown women partnered with White men and for Black women in unions with Brown men. Among men, however, the spouse's race does not significantly influence the amount of unpaid household work performed. Nonetheless, relevant patterns emerge when considering the interaction between an individual's race, education, and partner's race. The findings highlight that analyses of the domestic division of labor in Brazil must consider gender, racial dynamics, and educational inequalities as interconnected dimensions shaping the division of unpaid domestic labor among partners.

Keywords: Unpaid domestic labor. Gender. Race. Interracial unions. Brazil.

Troca de trabalho doméstico não remunerado? Uma Análise de Uniões Inter-Raciais no Brasil

Resumo

O artigo analisa o papel do trabalho doméstico não remunerado como um ativo negociado dentro das uniões heterossexuais no Brasil, examinando se homens e mulheres diferem no número de horas semanais dedicadas às tarefas domésticas, considerando as combinações raciais dos casais e seu nível de escolaridade. A análise inclui indivíduos brancos, pardos e pretos com idades entre 20 e 34 anos, utilizando dados da Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD) de 2015. Para homens e mulheres separadamente, o estudo estima o efeito da composição racial do casal sobre o número de horas dedicadas ao trabalho doméstico não remunerado, por meio de modelos de regressão linear. Os resultados indicam que parceiros de tonalidade de pele mais escura tendem a contribuir com mais trabalho doméstico. Esse padrão é especialmente evidente entre mulheres pretas e pardas em relacionamentos com homens brancos, bem como entre mulheres pretas em uniões com homens pardos. Entre os homens, entretanto, a raça da parceira não influencia significativamente a quantidade de trabalho doméstico não remunerado realizada. Ainda assim, surgem padrões relevantes ao considerar a interação entre raça, escolaridade e raça do parceiro. Os resultados ressaltam que as análises sobre a divisão do trabalho doméstico no Brasil devem considerar gênero, dinâmicas raciais e desigualdades educacionais como dimensões interconectadas que moldam a divisão do trabalho doméstico não remunerado entre os parceiros.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho doméstico não remunerado. Gênero. Raça. Uniões inter-raciais. Brasil.

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Race relations in Brazil are marked by relatively high levels of interracial unions compared to other countries (TELLES et al., 2023). However, endogamy remains the preferred pattern, and interracial unions are not random. They occur most frequently between Browns (*pardos*) and Whites (i.e.: LONGO, 2010; PETRUCCELLI, 2001; SILVA, 1987). The most common type of couple is the Brown–Brown union, followed by White–White couples, and then mixed unions between Whites and Browns (TOMÁS, 2025b). There is less resistance to unions between people of proximate color than to unions between Whites and Blacks (TELLES, 1993; 2004; RIBEIRO and SILVA, 2009). In an interracial union, White people are ten times more likely to marry a Brown spouse than a Black one (TELLES, 2004). Gender asymmetry is also an important characteristic of interracial union, with Brown and Black men more likely to marry a White spouse than Brown and Black women marrying a White spouse (TOMÁS, 2025b). This asymmetry is especially pronounced when comparing Black men and Black women, as Black women generally have a lower probability of marrying in general, regardless of spouse's race and educational attainment (BERQUÓ, 1987; SILVA, 1987; TELLES, 2004).

Although Brazil's relatively high rates of intermarriage have often been interpreted as evidence of reduced racism and more egalitarian racial relations, crossing racial boundaries through marriage does not eliminate racial hierarchies and stereotypes within families (HORDGE-FREEMAN, 2015; MARTELETO AND DONDERO, 2016; SCHUCMAN, 2018) or within

unions themselves (OSUJI, 2019; TOMÁS, 2025a). This apparent paradox makes it especially relevant to examine potential differences in the division of unpaid domestic labor.

We argue that the number of hours a partner devotes to domestic tasks offers a useful lens through which to analyze inequalities within interracial unions. While previous studies have often applied the status exchange framework—focusing on education as the main asset exchanged between partners—we propose that unpaid domestic labor can also be understood as an asset negotiated within unions. This perspective is particularly important in Brazil, given the country's enduring racial hierarchy, which historically positions Black individuals as a lower-status group compared to the higher social prestige attributed to Whites.

Black women, long marginalized in the marriage market (BERQUÓ, 1987), have been symbolically and materially associated with both paid and unpaid household labor to a greater extent than White women (STEEDMAN, 1987; REICHMANN, 1995; PERRY, 2016; BERNARDINO-COSTA, WEEKS, AND LIMA, 2024). During slavery, even the act of breastfeeding was often delegated to Black women (QUINTAS, 2009), reinforcing the racialized division of care and domestic work that continues to echo in contemporary gender and racial dynamics. In contrast, White women are more often associated with feminine forms of expression and better socioeconomic conditions, suggesting that they may have the means to delegate household tasks to other women (BERGER, 1972; WILLIAMSON, 1986; bell hooks, 1999), tasks that often fall to Black women.

In relation to men, on one hand, White men are associated with higher status and serve as the role model of a "good husband"—someone who is successful and earns enough to support a family. On the other hand, Black men are often perceived as having lower incomes and less stable occupations in the labor market. The lower earning capacity of Black men has been linked to a less favorable marriage market for Black women, as White men tend to prefer White women, and Black men, with their lower earnings and higher

job instability, may prefer to marry White women when economically able (LICHTER *et al.,* 1992; RALEY, 1996). It is also worth noting that even when White men have lower occupational status, they are still preferred (ALMEIDA, 2007). Moreover, a recent study indicates that men and women differ in their perceptions, practices, and experiences of gender inequality regarding domestic labor, with such differences varying by race (PICANÇO et al., 2021). Despite recent advances, important gaps remain in our understanding of how Black and White individuals perceive and report gender inequality in relation to unpaid domestic labor In this context, this article advances the discussion by adopting a relational approach that considers specific racial pairings and the role of education in the division of household tasks.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the role of unpaid domestic labor as an asset traded within heterosexual unions in Brazil, focusing on whether there are differences in the number of weekly hours spent on household chores between men and women, considering their education and the couple's racial composition. The analysis considers White, Brown, and Black men and women between 20 and 34 years old, using data from the Brazilian Household Survey (*PNAD – Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*) for the year 2015 and linear regression models.

1. Unions and Division of Unpaid Labor

The division of domestic labor is a crucial aspect to consider when analyzing marriage and intermarriage. According to the economic theory of marriage (BECKER, 1976, 1981), the traditional division of household labor drives partner choice and is a primary indicator of the gains from marriage. Men typically specialize in labor market activities, while women specialize in domestic activities. This gender-based division of labor is believed to benefit both spouses, as each one utilizes the other's specialized skills, maximizing the benefits from their partnership. In this context, a successful assortative process occurs when one partner has the potential for high income while the

other has a lower earning capacity. Positive assortative mating refers to couples with similar characteristics or complementary traits, while negative assortative mating refers to couples with opposing or substitutive characteristics.

Given this framework, we might expect interracial unions, particularly those between a White man and a Brown or Black woman—who are often associated with lower earning capacity and culturally linked to domestic labor—to be more gendered than other unions. When both spouses have similar characteristics, positive assortative mating occurs, which is better explained by sociological approaches focusing on social groups and their reproduction (HALLER, 1981; BOURDIEU, 1976). In this view, higher-status groups seek to maintain their privileges by marrying within their own social circle. Here, race serves as a status characteristic that influences partner choice by maintaining social status within society.

The status exchange theory (DAVIS, 1941; MERTON, 1941) is commonly used to explain intermarriage. According to this theory, a Brown or a Black person might marry a White spouse by exchanging a higher status characteristic, such as education, to compensate for their lower racial status. This approach has been widely used to explain intermarriage. Specifically in Brazil, Telles (2004) argues that Black women, unlike Brown women, typically have more education when they are in a relationship with a White man or a Brown husband. This indicates a lower status for Black women in the Brazilian marriage market, suggesting that they need to trade a higher social status (e.g., education) to compensate for their lower racial status (e.g., darker skin color). However, Silva (1987) cautions against generalizing the status exchange explanation, as there is no consistent pattern across all groups. For instance, not all couples with a darker-skinned spouse have higher education than his/her partner. It seems to work consistently for Black women in a relationship with White men.

Ribeiro and Silva (2009) also offer intriguing insights. They show that the effects of race and education in partner choice are additive, but there is no interaction between them. In other words, race does not significantly affect marriage choices when there is a significant educational disparity between partners. However, when educational levels are closer (e.g., within two or three educational barriers), race becomes a relevant factor. Ribeiro and Silva (2009) ultimately conclude that the educational and racial components of marriage operate independently of each other.

In this paper, we examine the role of unpaid domestic labor in the context of intermarriage and propose that the number of hours of unpaid domestic labor is crucial for understanding interracial unions in Brazil. Although the economic theory of marriage and the status exchange theory are often discussed separately, the concept of status exchange is closely related to the gains from marriage in Becker's framework, particularly when considering domestic labor as specialized work that increases marital gains. The status exchange framework has traditionally focused on education, but the trade could involve other characteristics like unpaid domestic labor or physical attractiveness (BURDICK, 1998). In this context, we apply both the marriage market and status exchange theories, as formulated by Grossbard-Shechtman (1981) in her General Theory of Marriage (GTM). This framework treats the exchange between spouses as a type of labor, with marriage and labor markets being interdependent. The value of a married woman's time, for instance, varies according to the number of single men and women in the marriage market.

Grossbard-Shechtman (1981) posits that within marriage, household labor is exchanged between spouses, including tasks like childcare, cooking, gardening, or counseling. This means each spouse demands domestic labor from the other, and people can spend their time in three ways: labor, household labor, and self-dedication. Both labor categories benefit others (employers and spouses) and provide direct utility or disutility to the

individual (worker), with non-pecuniary rewards varying across forms of labor, time devoted, and individual preferences (GROSSBARD-SHECHTMAN, 1984).

This perspective differs from earlier economic analyses by emphasizing the time spouses devote to each other's service. Changes in labor market factors can lead not only to income redistribution between spouses or marital breakup (as in BECKER, 1973, 1981) but also to new marital labor relations (GROSSBARD-SHECHTMAN, 1981). For example, a married woman who suddenly realizes that attractive labor market opportunities are available might renegotiate the spousal employment contract, reducing her household labor burden. This idea stems from the complementary nature of marital and labor markets.

A key difference between this and the sociological status exchange approach, as discussed by Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman (1988), is the concept of compensating differentials. This concept suggests that a Brown or Black spouse would materially compensate their White partner, leading to fewer hours of domestic work for Whites in these unions. Grossbard et al (2010) found that darker-skinned partners tend to devote more time to domestic labor, indicating that intra-household bargaining and marriage markets, operating through an implicit price mechanism, can result in a premium for individuals who perform chores, particularly if they have lighter skin than their partners. Conversely, darker-skinned individuals might need to pay a compensating differential.

The hypotheses about intermarriage following this approach are based on the extent to which group norms (in this case, racial preferences and social hierarchies) regarding intermarriage have been internalized by individuals. These internalized norms shape preferences for homogamy or heterogamy (GROSSBARD-SHECHTMAN, 1981) and, consequently, the amount of household labor each spouse contributes. Additionally, the amount of time dedicated to household chores is related to earning capacity. If Blacks and Browns expect to have (or actually have) lower incomes, they may

dedicate more time to household chores than Whites. Bruschini and Ricoldi (2012) also showed that strategies for balancing work and family vary significantly across groups due to differences in work schedules. This underscores the importance of considering the amount of paid work each individual performs and supports using this framework as a way to unify the analysis of how domestic and market labor are balanced within marital relationships.

According to traditional economic theory (BECKER, 1981), a successful assortative mating — one with higher expectations regarding marital gains—involves a partner with lower earning capacity and one with higher income potential. In this sense, marriages between White men and Black or Brown women would align with traditional gender roles, as previously discussed. If race serves as an indicator of potential earnings, Browns and Blacks in interracial marriages would tend to devote more time to domestic labor, especially since Blacks have the lowest earning capacity in the labor market (ABRAMO, 2006; CACCIAMALI AND HIRATA, 2005; CARVALHO, NÉRI, AND SILVA, 2006).

Given the importance of internalized social norms, in this analysis, we adopt an intersectional framework at the crossroads of race and gender. Following this approach, in all scenarios women devote more hours to unpaid domestic labor, race emerges as a second—though no less important—dimension that shapes these inequalities through women's racial identities and the racial composition of their partnerships. We also examine men's participation in household work, recognizing that their exchanges and domestic contributions may likewise be influenced by the racial configuration of the union. In this sense, we also emphasize the relational dimension of gender (MEDRADO, 1991), which underscores the importance of considering both men's and women's household hours to better understand how gender relations are constructed.

Empirical evidence shows that White women tend to display more egalitarian attitudes, which increase with higher education levels and decrease with the presence of children and a partner. In contrast, Black men are the least egalitarian, though this asymmetry diminishes with age and the number of children. Regarding the division of labor, Black men tend to be the most egalitarian, and their adherence to gender equality rises with education and with more egalitarian perceptions of gender roles, whereas Black women report less symmetrical relationships, even though symmetry also increases with education. Moreover, Black women are more likely than White women to report exhaustion from the tension between domestic and paid work (PICANÇO et al., 2021). Finally, income and, above all, education play a significant role in shaping participation in domestic work: while women's involvement decreases with higher educational attainment, men's participation increases (BRUSCHINI and RICOLDI, 2012).

Thus, we align with an intersectional perspective that contextualizes inequalities and examines how race, gender, and other socioeconomic markers (class, education, income) operate in the reproduction of oppression and in the maintenance of social roles attributed to women—especially to Black women (GARNEAU, 2017). We adopt intersectionality, as proposed by Collins (2020), as an analytical instrument and epistemological project that illuminates the structural foundations of these inequalities.

Furthermore, the historical and social distinctions between Whites, Blacks, and Browns may influence household labor divisions, regardless of spouses' actual or potential wages. To account for this and for considering the intersectionality, our analysis controls for income and education. Considering gender asymmetry, women would likely perform more household chores, so we also analyze models by sex, although our primary interest is in racial group comparisons.

From these discussions, we derive two hypotheses. The first considers race as a status indicator in the marriage market and states that the darker-skinned partner would do more household chores than lighter skin color

partners. This holds true even after controlling for other couple's characteristics. Moreover, it is important to consider other explanations for racial differences, which may stem from the historically constructed hierarchical social location that assigns the lowest status to Blacks and Browns, which can be considered part of the internalized social norms (GROSSBARD-SHECHTMAN, 1981). The differences observed in the amount of unpaid domestic labor challenge the notion that interracial union overcomes racial differences and offers an alternative to the education-focused status exchange approach. The second hypothesis draws on the common use of education as a measure of status exchange (see, for instance, GULLICKSON AND FU, 2010) and builds on studies of unpaid domestic labor that have shown significant differences by educational level (see, for example, BRUSCHINI AND RICOLDI, 2012; PICANÇO et al., 2021). Moreover, in this study, education also serves as a key dimension through which intersectionality is operationalized. Therefore, the second hypothesis posits that the individual's educational level may influence the amount of unpaid household labor each partner does, and it may interact with the couples' racial composition. From hypothesis one we get that a Black woman in a relationship with a White man would do more household labor, however the amount may vary by her level of education. Education would mediate the effect of race, even controlling by different controls.

2. Data and Methods

We used data from the 2015 Brazilian National Household Survey (*PNAD – Pesquisa Nacional de Amostra Domiciliar*)[1], focusing on couples, regardless of union type (marriage or cohabitation), where both partners were between 20 and 34 years old. This age range was chosen to approximate the sample to first marriages, given the absence of data on marriage order and marital history and the fact that the average age at divorce in Brazil is around

35 years. This restriction is particularly relevant, as previous research has shown that marital patterns vary by marriage order (MARE, 1991; CHOI AND TIENDA, 2017).

For this study, we considered individuals who self-identify as White, Brown, or Black. Interracial couples were defined as any combination of these three racial groups. We excluded Asian and Indigenous groups from the analysis because they comprised only 0.84% of the couples, and interracial unions involving Blacks and Asians, for example, are very rare. Representativeness of the racial combinations is central to the analysis. The sample is nationally representative.

The dependent variable is derived from the question: "How many weekly hours does the individual dedicate to household chores?" This question is answered only if the person responded “yes” to the previous one: “During the week of [reference period prior to the survey], did you engage in household chores?”. According to the interviewer’s manual, the definition of domestic chores used in the survey includes: (a) cleaning or tidying all or part of the dwelling; (b) cooking or preparing food, ironing clothes, doing laundry, or washing dishes, with or without the use of household appliances, for oneself or other household members; (c) supervising or directing domestic workers in performing household tasks; (d) taking care of children or other minors living in the household; or (e) cleaning the yard or grounds surrounding the residence (IBGE, 2015).

We used the total hours reported by each partner The testing variable is the couples’ racial composition and we add several controls. The variables included in the model are presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1 – Selected variables for the analysis

Variables		Measurement level
Explicativa	Number of hours weekly spent in domestic labor	Hours
Testing	Couples' racial composition (Male Race/ Female Race)	1 = White/White (reference) 2 = Black/ Black 3 = Brown/ Brown 4 = Brown/ White 5 = Brown/ Black 6 = White/ Brown 7 = White/ Black 8 = Black/ White 9 = Black/ Brown
Controls	Schooling	Years
	Age	Years
	Partner's age difference	Years
	Family size	Total number of people in the family
	Total family income	Logarithm of Family income
	Number of hours spent on paid work	1 = Don't work 2= Up to 20 hours/week 3 = From 21 up to 40 hours/week 4= Work 40 or more hours/week
	Urban/Rural	0= Rural (reference) 1 - Urban
	Region	1 = North (reference) 2 = Northeast 3 = Southeast 4 = South 5 = Midwest

We employed Linear Regression Models because the dependent variable, hours, is continuous. Although we initially considered Tobit Regressions, the results were largely similar, so we opted to use the simpler method[2]. We ran three different models for each racial group and sex: the first model includes only the dummy variables for the couples' racial composition, while the second model incorporates the schooling difference and the interaction terms between couples' racial composition and individual's education (for male's models we used men's education and for female's models we used women's education), and the third model adds all the control variables in the second model. We based our interpretation on predicted values from the third model, as this approach facilitates comparisons among all couples simultaneously, rather than limiting comparisons to a single reference category.

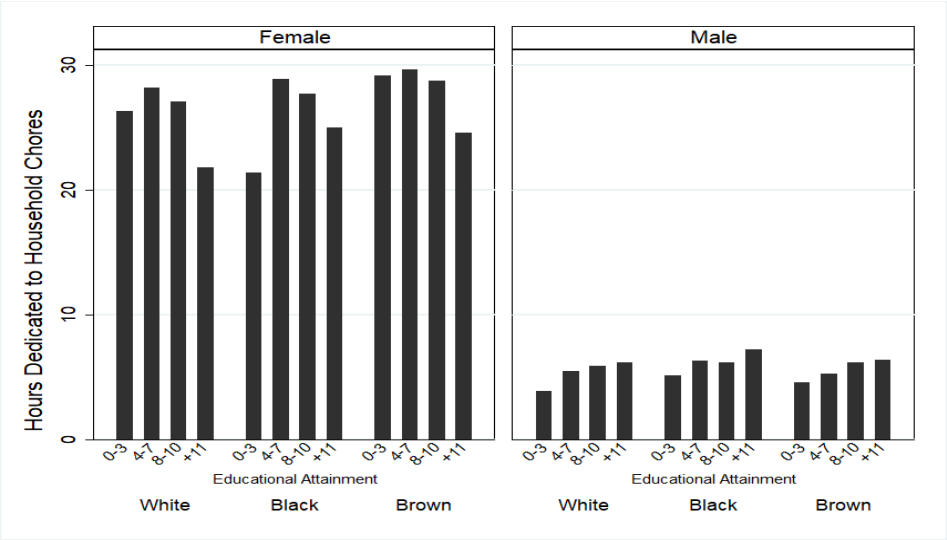
3. Results

3.1 Couples' characteristics and the division of unpaid domestic labor

The final sample comprises 13,833 couples aged 20 to 34 in 2015. Most couples (62.7%) are of the same race: 25% are both White, 4% are both Black, and 39% are both Brown (see Table 1A in the Appendix). The largest interracial group consists of Brown and White partners, representing 24% of the total. Regarding hours dedicated to unpaid household labor, women averaged 25.2 hours per week, while men averaged only 5.9 hours. Notably, women were responsible for 80.4% of the total hours devoted to unpaid domestic labor.

Graph 1 illustrates the distribution of average hours spent on unpaid housework by sex, race, and educational attainment. A substantial difference exists between women and men, with women consistently spending more time on housework, regardless of race or education. However, the correlation between education and time spent on housework varies by sex. For women, higher educational attainment is associated with less time devoted to unpaid housework, whereas for men, higher education correlates with more time spent on unpaid domestic chores, as the same as other studies have shown (BRUSCHINI AND RICOLDI, 2012). Analyzing by race, the average hours dedicated to unpaid domestic labor differ significantly among women, with Black and Brown women spending more time on housework than White women. Among men, however, there is no significant variation by race.

Graph 1 – Average number of hours dedicated to unpaid household labor by sex, race and educational attainment - Brazil 2015



Source: PNAD, 2015.

It is important to highlight the significant differences observed in the division of domestic labor based on the racial composition of couples. According to Table 1, White women in unions with White men dedicate the least amount of time to housework, averaging 22.8 hours per week. In contrast, Brown women in unions with Brown men spend, on average, 26.9 hours per week on unpaid domestic tasks. Among men, Black men in a union with White women and Black men in a union with Black women devote the most time to unpaid domestic labor, with averages of 7 and 6.9 hours per week, respectively. Conversely, White men in relationships with Brown women spend the least time on housework, averaging 5.3 hours per week. Notably, among Brown men, the amount of time spent on domestic work decreases when considering the race of their spouse. Brown men spend the most time on housework when paired with White women (6.5 hours) and the least when paired with Black women (5.5 hours). Although these differences are relatively small, they suggest that both one's own race and their partner's race may influence the division of domestic labor within the household.

Table 1 – Average number of hours dedicated to unpaid household chores by sex and race – Brazil, 2015

Women's Race	Weekly hours dedicated to Housework	Men's Race			Total
		White	Black	Brown	
White	Women's hours	22.8	24.7	23.9	23.3
	Men's hours	6.2	7.0	6.5	6.4
Black	Women's hours	26.8	25.4	26.2	26.0
	Men's hours	6.3	6.9	5.5	6.3
Brown	Women's hours	25.5	25.9	26.9	26.5
	Men's hours	5.3	6.1	5.8	5.7
Total	Women's hours	23.9	25.4	26.1	25.2
	Men's hours	5.9	6.6	5.9	6.0

Source: PNAD, 2015.

3.2 Explaining Unpaid Domestic Labor and the Role of Couples' Racial Composition

Figure 1 shows the predicted weekly time dedicated to unpaid housework by both women and men, accounting for their own race and their partner's race, with 95% confidence intervals, based on Model 3 (see Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix). The results for women, as displayed in the first column, provide mixed support for Hypothesis 1, making it difficult to offer a general explanation. However, two key groups demonstrate that the racial composition of the couple plays a significant role.

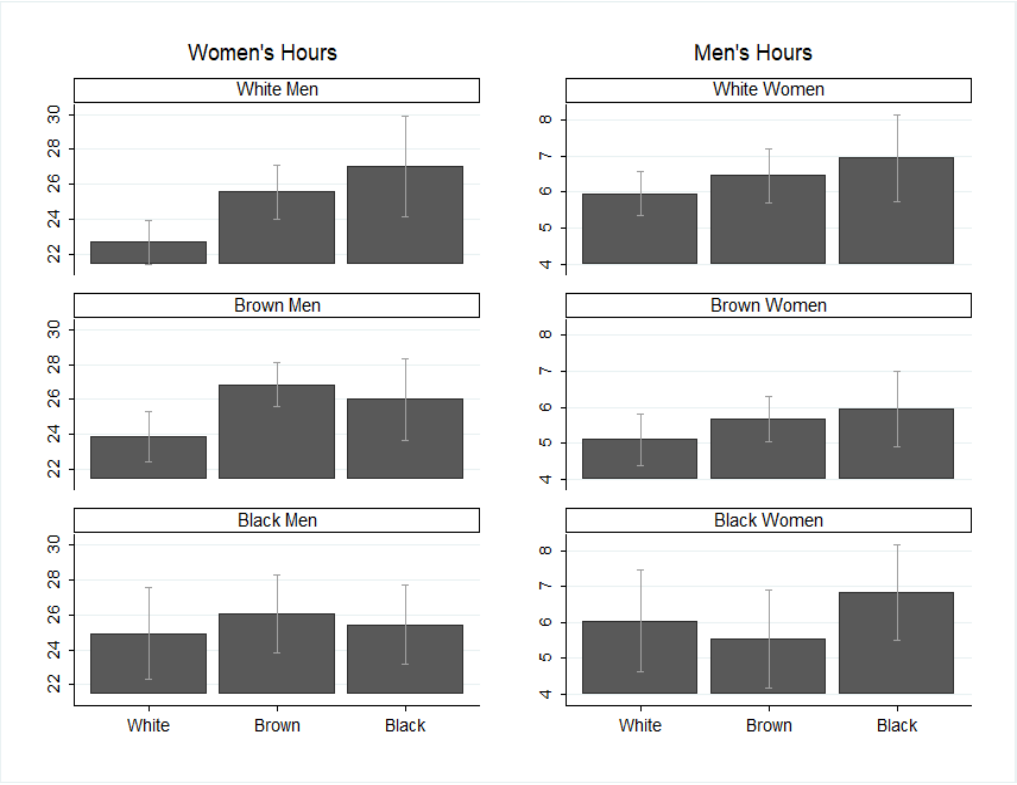
First, among women in relationships with White men, White women spend approximately 23 hours per week on unpaid housework, while Black and Brown women in unions with White men spend 27 and 26 hours, respectively. These differences are statistically significant. Second, among women in relationships with Brown men, White women average about 24 hours of domestic work per week, while Black and Brown women both spend around 27 hours per week, even after controlling for other factors. Notably, there is no significant difference between Black and Brown women in these cases.

According to Grossbard-Shechtman (1981, 1984), partners with lower status are expected to contribute more labor within the relationship. In this context, race can be understood as a status characteristic that may be exchanged within marriage, especially since the model controls for education,

labor market participation, and family income. While interracial unions might be expected to promote more egalitarian divisions of labor due to the crossing of racial boundaries, cultural norms and racial expectations continue to shape the distribution of domestic work. Moreover, it is noteworthy that White men are those who report the lowest levels of conflict and the greatest comfort within this arrangement, suggesting that they are the most advantaged in these relationships. In contrast, Black women are the ones who report the highest levels of fatigue (Picanço et al., 2021).

The second column of Figure 1 highlights that the differences in hours spent on unpaid housework among men are not statistically significant, in contrast to the significant differences observed for women. Black men consistently spend about one hour more on housework compared to White men, and approximately half an hour more than Brown men, depending on their spouse's race. However, these differences are not statistically significant, as indicated by the confidence intervals. Therefore, the racial composition of the couple does not appear to be a significant factor in explaining the amount of time men dedicate to unpaid housework. This result is also reflected in the model's R^2, which shows a lower explanatory power. This suggests that other characteristics may better account for men's participation in unpaid domestic tasks. Moreover, the limited variability among men – regardless of their race they dedicated mainly the same amount of hours to unpaid domestic tasks - may be better understood in light of cultural norms that place the primary responsibility for domestic work on women—particularly given that all men analyzed in this study are in unions. This contrasts with Picanço et al. (2021), whose analysis included both single and married men and women. One of their findings indicates that being in a partnership influences individuals' perceptions of gender roles.

Figure 1 – Predicted weekly hours dedicated to unpaid domestic labor by partners' race, based on model 3 – Brazil, 2015



Note: Confidence Interval at 95%.
Source: PNAD, 2015.

3.3 Relationship between Interracial Unions and Education for explaining Unpaid Domestic Labor

We included individual schooling and interaction terms between couples' racial composition and schooling in the model to test Hypothesis 2, which states that education serves as an important asset for bargaining power within marriage and may alter the relationship between spouses' race and the amount of unpaid household labor. Additionally, education plays a key role in understanding interracial marriage dynamics (RIBEIRO AND SILVA, 2009; GULLICKSON AND TORCHE, 2014) and it is an important characteristic to better understand the relationship between gender, race, and unpaid domestic labor.

The results, presented in Figure 2 (see also Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix), indicate a negative relationship between education and the number of weekly hours women spend on unpaid household labor, regardless of their own or their spouse's race, as already showed in the descriptive

analysis. However, important differences emerge when considering the couple's racial composition, which supports Hypothesis 2. For women in relationships with White men, at lower educational levels (up to around 7 years of schooling), the number of weekly hours spent on domestic labor is similar across racial groups. However, at higher levels of education, significant differences arise: White women do less housework, Black women do more, and Brown women fall in between. In this context, education makes a difference only at higher levels, and it proves to be a more effective bargaining asset for White women.

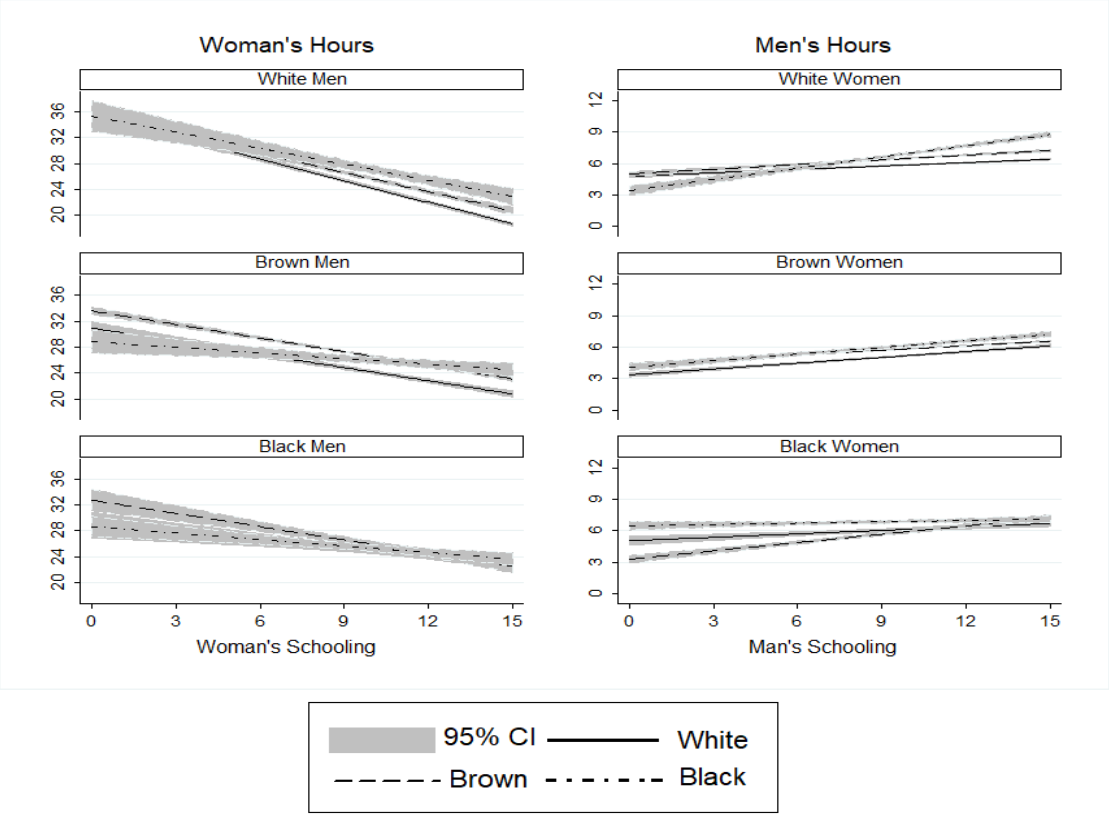
For Black women in relationships with Brown men, education does not significantly affect the amount of unpaid household labor they perform. However, for Brown and White women, education tends to decrease the time spent on housework. Up to about seven years of schooling, there is no significant difference in unpaid household labor between White and Black women, though Brown women tend to do more. At higher levels of education, the dynamics shift: there is no significant difference in housework between Brown and Black women, while White women do considerably less. Although Brown women experience a similar reduction in housework with increased education, they still dedicate more time to unpaid labor at higher education levels compared to White women, as they start out doing more from the outset. These results take together reinforce that Black women persist in a subaltern position even in contexts of upward mobility (GONZALEZ, 1984).

In the second column of Figure 2, the graphs depict the predicted weekly hours that men dedicate to unpaid housework. Contrary to the trend for women, increased education leads to more time spent on household chores by men, as outlined in the previous section and other studies. However, there are notable differences based on racial pairings. For men in relationships with White women, at lower levels of education (up to about seven years), Black men spend fewer hours on unpaid housework compared to White and Brown

men. However, at higher levels of education, White men dedicate fewer hours to unpaid domestic labor, while Black men spend more time than both White and Brown men.

When in relationships with Brown women, there is no significant difference in unpaid household labor between Black and Brown men across all educational levels, but White men consistently spend less time on these tasks. Among men in unions with Black women, at higher education levels (around 10 years of schooling), there is no significant difference in unpaid housework by race. However, at the lower end of the education spectrum, Black men dedicate the most time to unpaid labor, while Brown men contribute the least. It is important to note that, in this scenario, the number of hours that Black and White men devote to unpaid household tasks remains relatively unchanged across the educational distribution.

Figure 2 – Predicted weekly hours dedicated to unpaid domestic labor by partners' race and by schooling difference between partners, based on model 3 – Brazil, 2015



Note: Confidence Interval at 95%.
Source: PNAD, 2015.

Discussion and Conclusion

Interracial unions provide a compelling context for examining race relations and gender dynamics. The social construction of identities, such as being a Black woman or a White man, plays a crucial role in shaping domestic labor patterns within unions. In Brazil, often perceived as more racially tolerant compared to other countries, interracial unions are frequently viewed as a means to overcome prejudice and racial barriers. However, our findings suggest that racial tensions may persist within families, even after controlling for factors such as education, labor market participation, and family income.

Our main conclusion is that the division of domestic labor is influenced by not only gender but also by race and education. Specifically, the amount of time spent on unpaid household chores is affected by both an individual's race and education, as well as their spouse's race. The results indicate that darker partners tend to trade more household labor. This pattern is particularly evident for Black and Brown women in relationships with White men, as well as for Black women in unions with Brown men. For men, however, the spouse's race does not appear to influence the amount of unpaid household labor they perform. This comparison suggests that the models applied have lower explanatory power for men, indicating the need to explore other variables and modeling strategies to more effectively capture the determinants of men's participation in unpaid domestic labor. Addressing this gap represents a valuable avenue for future research.

Nevertheless, interesting findings emerge when considering the interaction between an individual's race, education, and their partner's race. In general, education is more effective in reducing the amount of housework for White individuals, who do less unpaid labor at higher levels of education. The exception is when they are partnered with a Black individual, in which situation there is no significant difference in housework by race. This

suggests that the interaction between education and race is crucial for fully understanding the relationship between a couple's racial composition and the amount of unpaid domestic labor each partner contributes.

These results can be interpreted through the lens of compensating differentials, as proposed by Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman (1988). The underlying explanation—shaped by individual preferences—likely lies in each partner's social positioning within the racial hierarchy, mediated by other status characteristics such as education. Persistent forms of discrimination mean that interracial unions may continue to serve as spaces where racial tensions emerge, whether among family members, social networks, or even between partners themselves (Osuji, 2019; Tomás, 2025a). Consequently, Black and Brown individuals may devote more time to domestic chores, even at higher education levels, due to the historical association of their racial groups with domestic labor and their lower position within the racial hierarchy. These findings should therefore be interpreted within the broader cultural context that shapes preferences and exchanges in the marriage market. Moreover, considering the intersections of gender, race, and education is essential for operationalizing an intersectional perspective. The results indicate that Black women, even when highly educated, remain penalized by enduring historical and cultural structures, while White men occupy a comparatively advantaged position relative to both Black and Brown men.

As Silva (1987) cautioned against generalizing the status exchange hypothesis in Brazil, similar caution is needed when interpreting the relationship between interracial unions and domestic labor. There is no clear pattern suggesting that the darker-skinned partner in an interracial union will always perform more household labor than the lighter-skinned or same-race partner. However, there does seem to be a consistent pattern in which White partners perform less housework. Further research is needed to refine these explanations. Addressing this gap represents a valuable avenue for future research. Future studies should also consider limitations such as the

categorization of domestic labor activities, distinctions between marriage and cohabitation, and the presence of children and/or elderly household members. Other explanatory variables may likewise prove important, including the presence of paid domestic workers, the number of working hours of each partner, and the availability of external support networks. Furthermore, the use of longitudinal data would provide important insights into how the division of unpaid domestic labor evolves over time and in response to changes in household composition, employment, and life course transitions. Incorporating these factors would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how social, economic, and relational contexts shape the division of unpaid domestic labor.

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Appendix

Table 1A – Additional subsample descriptive data – Brazil, 2015.

Individual's characteristics	**Women**	**Men**
Distribution (%)		
White	40.5	39.2
Black	9.5	11.2
Brown	50.0	49.6
Average		
Schooling (years)	10.2	9.5
Age	27.1	28.9
Worked hours	20.3	38.8
Couples' characteristics	**Distribution (%)**	
Interracial unions	37.3	
White-white couples	25.06	
Black-black couples	3.76	
Brown-brown couples	33.85	
Brown men – White women	12.42	
Brown men – Black women	3.32	
White men – Brown women	11.69	
White men – Black women	2.47	
Black men – White women	2.97	
Black men – Brown women	4.47	
Urban	88.4	
North	14.9	
Northeast	29.9	
Southeast	27.2	
South	16.5	
Central-West	11.4	
	Average	
Family size	2.1	
LN Family income	7.2	
N	**13,334**	

Data Source: PNAD, 2015.

Table 2A – Regression Results for Women– Brazil, 2015.

VARIABLES	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3
White-White couples	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Black-Black couples	2.711***	-7.003**	-6.726**
	(0.889)	(3.077)	(2.856)
Brown-Brown couples	4.406***	-1.842	-2.242
	(0.434)	(1.513)	(1.421)
Brown men–White women couples	1.152**	-4.928***	-4.494**
	(0.519)	(1.846)	(1.775)
Brown men-Black women couples	3.445***	-7.102**	-7.811***
	(0.864)	(3.028)	(3.018)
White men-Brown women couples	2.935***	0.0749	-0.455
	(0.569)	(1.917)	(1.792)
White men-Black women couples	4.561***	0.435	0.180

	(1.181)	(4.346)	(4.074)
Black men-White women couples	2.281**	-6.055*	-4.934
	(1.017)	(3.630)	(3.385)
Black men-Brown women couples	3.597***	-2.760	-1.166
	(0.830)	(3.092)	(2.969)
Black-Black couples*schooling		-1.133***	-0.714***
		(0.103)	(0.0972)
Brown-Brown couples*schooling		0.797***	0.769***
		(0.294)	(0.271)
Brown men–White women couples*schooling		0.432***	0.431***
		(0.134)	(0.125)
Brown men-Black women couples*schooling		0.474***	0.456***
		(0.160)	(0.153)
White men-Brown women couples*schooling		0.888***	0.855***
		(0.291)	(0.293)
White men-Black women couples*schooling		0.134	0.151
		(0.171)	(0.158)
Black men-White women couples*schooling		0.265	0.236
		(0.423)	(0.394)
Black men-Brown women couples*schooling		0.687**	0.556*
		(0.338)	(0.321)
Women's schooling years		0.450	0.275
		(0.302)	(0.285)
Age			0.315***
			(0.0416)
Partner's age difference			1.613***
			(0.333)
Family size			-2.963***
			(0.362)
Ln Family income			0.146**
			(0.0735)
No work			Ref.
Work until 20 hours/week			-5.975***
			(0.554)
Work from 21 up to 40 hours/week			-8.424***
			(0.532)
Work 40 or more hours/week			-12.38***
			(0.363)
Rural			Ref.
Urban			-1.116**
			(0.520)
North			Ref.
Northeast			3.334***
			(0.543)
Southeast			3.448***
			(0.536)
South			2.834***
			(0.603)
Midwest			1.929***
			(0.687)
Constant	22.90***	35.80***	31.35***
	(0.334)	(1.254)	(1.986)

Observations	13,334	13,334	13,334
R-squared	0.013	0.038	0.159

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3A – Regression Results for Men– Brazil, 2015.

VARIABLES	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3
White-White couples	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Black-Black couples	0.894*	1.648	2.130
	(0.486)	(1.443)	(1.410)
Brown-Brown couples	-0.277	-0.355	0.294
	(0.197)	(0.589)	(0.601)
Brown men–White women couples	0.530**	0.319	0.636
	(0.256)	(0.739)	(0.727)
Brown men-Black women couples	-0.398	-1.472	-0.733
	(0.461)	(1.398)	(1.362)
White men-Brown women couples	-0.800***	-1.369**	-0.924
	(0.236)	(0.666)	(0.699)
White men-Black women couples	0.161	0.241	0.740
	(0.585)	(1.237)	(1.197)
Black men-White women couples	1.050**	-1.282	-0.970
	(0.478)	(1.288)	(1.306)
Black men-Brown women couples	0.00638	-0.689	-0.296
	(0.395)	(0.951)	(0.955)
Black-Black couples*schooling		-0.0589	-0.0822
		(0.149)	(0.145)
Brown-Brown couples*schooling		0.0380	0.0227
		(0.0584)	(0.0583)
Brown men–White women couples*schooling		0.0367	0.0292
		(0.0684)	(0.0673)
Brown men-Black women couples*schooling		0.160	0.119
		(0.168)	(0.162)
White men-Brown women couples*schooling		0.0795	0.0714
		(0.0641)	(0.0657)
White men-Black women couples*schooling		0.0126	-0.00957
		(0.138)	(0.133)
Black men-White women couples*schooling		0.246*	0.227*
		(0.131)	(0.133)
Black men-Brown women couples*schooling		0.105	0.0879
		(0.105)	(0.104)
Men's schooling years		0.112**	0.0970**
		(0.0441)	(0.0443)
Age			0.0267
			(0.0231)
Partner's age difference			-0.0383
			(0.164)
Family size			-0.914***
			(0.175)
Ln Family income			0.138***

			(0.0413)
No work			Ref
Work until 20 hours/week			-3.835***
			(0.526)
Work from 21 up to 40 hours/week			-3.632***
			(0.450)
Work 40 or more hours/week			-4.607***
			(0.397)
Rural			Ref.
Urban			0.935***
			(0.224)
North			Ref.
Northeast			-0.330
			(0.268)
Southeast			0.428
			(0.273)
South			0.995***
			(0.309)
Midwest			-0.392
			(0.329)
Constant	5.953***	4.745***	7.900***
	(0.149)	(0.494)	(1.023)
Observations	13,334	13,334	13,334
R-squared	0.003	0.008	0.039

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Data Source: PNAD, 2015.

Notas

[1] This study is part of a project that tracks and compares unpaid domestic activities among intra- and interracial couples from 2002 to 2015, which is the last year of the PNAD in its previous format. For this article, we decided to present only the results for 2015, since there are no significant differences over the period. After 2015, methodological changes were introduced, which require greater caution when making comparisons. An important limitation of the Continuous PNAD compared to the previous annual PNAD concerns the measurement of marital status, since the Continuous PNAD does not include questions about individuals' marital or conjugal status (Garcia, 2021). Moreover, Jesus (2018) and Veiga (2019) highlight that information on men's domestic work may be overestimated and women's domestic work underestimated due to methodological changes, particularly the interaction between the survey questions

[2] Tobit regression is suggested When data is constrained on one or on both sides of the distribution. Our data is constrained on the left side, especially because 41.3% of men has zero hours devoted household chores (for women the percentage of "zero hours" is only 4%). However, the results are similar using Tobit or Ordinary Least Square.