

## SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

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## From Prohibition to Excellence: A Retrospective Study About Learning Situations of Expert Brazilian Women Judo Coaches

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### Abstract

**Background.** Several factors including gender, influence the development of expert coaches. The developmental trajectory of women coaches may present specific issues compared with those of men, such as: the few opportunities offered to women coaches, the predominance of men in management positions, and lower salaries. In the Brazilian context from 1941-1979, women were initially discouraged and then officially forbidden to participate in competitive judo. Since that time, female coaches in competitive judo have been a rarity.

**Problem and aim.** As such, the aim of this study was to investigate three expert brazilian judo female coaches' learning across their careers.

**Methods.** Each coach participated in a semi-structured interview. A deductive-inductive approach to content analysis was adopted. **Results.** Supporting the literature, our results showed that personal characteristics, formal, informal and non-formal learning situations, and the support of family and friends were important to these coaches' development. Other subcategories not previously reported emerged from the inductive analysis: teamwork and scientific information. **Conclusions.** The investigated career pathways showed that the Brazilian judo coaches were able to cope with career barriers through a combination of extensive formal and non-formal education, as well as support from family and friends. Notwithstanding such support, the women coaches were responsible for motherhood and housekeeping tasks.

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## Introduction

In the sports environment, coaches' roles and tasks can be complex and vary according to the sporting context [Lyle 2002; ICCE, ASOIF 2013]. In a high-performance sport context, a coach is usually responsible for planning and conducting training sessions [Nash, Sproule 2009] to optimize athletes' competitive performance [Cote, Gilbert 2009]. In addition, these coaches have other important roles, such as talent identification [Voigt, Hohmann 2016] and the management of athletes and staff [Brasil *et al.* 2017]. Thus, the functions of high-performance sport coaches are highly dynamic and complex [Cushion *et al.* 2003], requiring considerable skills and knowledge to achieve desired results.

The developmental career paths of expert coaches have been investigated by several authors [Abraham, Collins 1998; Gilbert, Trudel 2002; Wiman *et al.* 2010; Nash, Sproule 2009; Wright *et al.* 2007]. Although the concept of an expert coach is not well-defined in the literature [Wiman *et al.* 2010], some characteristics can be used as criteria to define the expert coaches as: (a) having at least 10 years of coaching experience, (b) having coached international and/or national athletes, and (c) being recognized by their peers and the national association/confederation as a coach who develops elite athletes [Nash, Sproule 2009; Nash *et al.* 2012; Vallee, Bloom 2007; Brasil *et al.* 2017; Wiman *et al.* 2010]. Thus, as expert coaches have an important role in the development of athletes and consequently of the sport, understanding their career development can contribute to the development of new coaches, as well as improve the sport and the athletes who compete in them [Saury, Durand 1998; Abraham *et al.* 2006].

In summary, Expert coaches' career development may be influenced by several factors, such as formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts [Nelson *et al.* 2006; Mallett *et al.* 2009], personal characteristics [Wiman *et al.* 2010; Nash, Sproule 2009], and family and friends' support [Nash, Sproule 2009]. Moreover, socio-cultural aspects can influence the coaches' development process. For example in Brazil, sports coaching is legally recognized as a profession; according to the 9696 Brazilian law from 1998, it is mandatory for coaches to have a bachelor's degree in Physical Education [Galatti *et al.* 2016; Brasil 1998]. While some sports exempt coaches from this national requirement (e.g. football and some martial arts), judo is no exception and all coaches working in this context must hold at least a bachelor's degree.

Other factors beyond educational requirements may also influence coaches' development (e.g., gender). In Brazil, as in some other countries, female coaches are a statistical minority in nearly all sports and at all levels [LaVoi, Dutove 2012; Kilty 2006]. For example, in the United Kingdom in 2009, the number of female coaches represented 31% of 1.1 million national coaches [Vinson *et al.* 2016]. In Brazil, Ferreira and colleagues

[2013] investigated 259 sports federations of twenty-two Brazilian sports, including Judo, found that only 7% of coaches are female. Additionally, the proportion of women coaches notably decreases at higher levels of competition [LaVoi, Dutove 2012]. In sum, the participation of women as coaches, especially in higher levels of competition, is under-represented worldwide and an important factor that should be considered in the expert coach development literature.

In Brazilian combat sports, the under-representation of women as coaches may be worse in comparison to some other sports. As explained by Giglio and colleagues [2018], in the 20th century, practicing sports was legally restricted. In 1941, a decree-law established the policy for the sport organizations across the country and stated: “Women will not be allowed to play sports that are incompatible with the conditions of their nature, and, to this end, the National Sports Council must issue the necessary instructions for the sports authorities of the country” [Brasil 1941]. In 1965, a new resolution made this restriction more specific: “2. It is not permitted [for women] to practice fights of any nature, soccer, indoor soccer, beach soccer, water polo, polo, rugby, weightlifting and baseball” [Brasil 1965]. On December 21st 1979, the National Sports Council (CND), in alignment with international sport organization leaders, lifted the legal restriction on women in sport, finally allowing women to participate in sport legally. However, as sport practices for women in sports such as judo had been illegal for so long, official competitions and other Sporting related opportunities were limited for women. Thus, the slow revival of women's participation in sport, when compared with male participation, created a prolonged delay in the sport's development, but it also hindered women's opportunities to pursue excellence at the competitive level [Barreira *et al.* 2018; Giglio *et al.* 2018].

The Japanese martial art judo was founded by Professor Jigoro Kano. It was the first Asian martial art to become an Olympic sport when it was added to the Games for the Munich Olympics in 1972 in Munich Olympic Games. At the time, only men's competition was held, and it was not until 1992 in the Barcelona Olympic Games where females were invited to compete [Torres-Luque *et al.* 2016]. Since its inclusion in the Games, judo is a popular (according to the large number of the practitioners) and winningest (by the number of medals in Olympic Games) sport in Brazil for both men and women [Albuquerque *et al.* 2015].

In the Olympic Games, women Brazilian judo athletes have won five medals: two gold medals (one by Sarah Menezes in London 2012; one Rafaela Silva in Rio 2016), one bronze medal (by Ketleyn Quadros, the first Brazilian woman to win an Olympic medal in an individual sport, in Beijing 2008) and two bronze medals (by Mayra Aguiar, the first and only Brazilian woman to win Olympic medals in two Games; London 2012

and Rio 2016). Moreover, the Brazilian Women's Judo team has achieved significant results, especially in the last few years, in international competitions such as the Pan American Games and World Championships. Thus, despite the long-term legal barriers that remained until the late 1970s, female Brazilian judo athletes have been pioneers in Olympic achievements for the country. While these achievements have increased the relevance of female athletes in the sport, demonstrated excellence in the performance setting, and that the head coach of the Brazilian Men's Judo Team is a woman (*sensei* Yuko Fujii), the number of female judo coaches is relatively scarce even in the women's sport.

Given the aforementioned Brazilian Women's Judo Team results of late, the Brazilian social context, and the low number of female coaches in judo, an investigation into the development of the expert Brazilian women judo coaches is relevant. This research on the development of expert coaches could contribute to the development of new women coaches by identifying factors that may contribute to the quality of their development. Thus, the aim of this study was to investigate the expert Brazilian women judo coaches' learning situations across their career.

## Method

A qualitative, retrospective study of cases through interview research design was followed

### Participants

Based on the characteristics of expert coaches found in the literature [Nash, Sproule 2009; Nash *et al.* 2012; Vallee, Bloom 2007; Brasil *et al.* 2017], four selection criteria were used for the recruitment of the female coach participants. Coaches met the criteria for participation if they: i) had 10 or more years of uninterrupted experience as a judo coach; ii) had trained athletes of national and international levels; iii) were a current or former coach of the Brazilian National Judo Team; and iv) were recognized by other judo coaches as an expert judo coach. Only five female Brazilian expert judo coaches met the criteria of this study, three of whom were contacted due to their geographical proximity for in-person interviews. Thus, our sample was composed of three Brazilian women who were expert judo coaches (see Table 1). All three had been also athletes of the highest competitive level having competed at the World Championships.

### Data Collection

First, the coaches were contacted by phone or through a message application (WhatsApp) and were informed of the purpose of the study and the procedures. After accepting the invitation and consenting to be part of the study, each coach participated in one semi-structured

interview. The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on other studies within the domain of coach development [Wiman *et al.* 2010; Wright *et al.* 2007; Nash, Sproule 2009; Nelson *et al.* 2006]. Ten topics with three to five questions were identified in these interview studies i) personal characteristics (e.g. what personal characteristics do you believe may have contributed to your development as a coach?); ii) experience as an athlete/practitioner (e.g. did the fact that you were an athlete contribute to your career as a coach?); iii) formal education (e.g. how formal education contributed to your career as a coach?); iv) continuing education (did you attend of coaching conferences, seminars, workshops, and clinics?); v) interactions with other coaches (e.g., did you interact with other coaches?); vi) mentoring/tutoring (e.g., did you have a more experienced coach who helped you effectively in your development as a coach?); vii) the coach's dedication (e.g., how much time do you dedicate as a coach?); viii) opportunities (e.g., what opportunities/experiences would you highlight as being important for your career as a coach?); ix) interactions with athletes (e.g., what is the contribution of the athletes who worked with you in your career as a coach?); x) family and friends (e.g., do your family and friends contribute to your career as a coach?). In addition, the semi-structured interview format allowed the interviewer to probe by asking additional questions of relevance to the research and general inquiry [Louise Barriball, While 1994].

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Brazilian expert female Judo coach participants.

Women Coach	Age (years)	Coaching (years)	Belt/ Judo Graduation	Employment Type	Educational Qualification
WC1	44	10	Black Belt/ 3 <sup>rd</sup> Dan	National Team; Club	Postgraduate
WC2	40	11	Black Belt/ 4 <sup>th</sup> Dan	National Team; Club	Postgraduate
WC3	48	18	Black Belt/ 6 <sup>th</sup> Dan	National Team; Club	Postgraduate

At the start of each interview, questions were posed to explore demographic details about the coaches' career and athletic experiences. Subsequently, the semi-structured interview began with a general question: "How did you develop as an expert coach in judo?". Subsequently, questions were asked to address the ten aforementioned topics that were pre-established in the semi-structured interview guide. At the end of the interview, a final question was asked to identify other issues that were not discussed during the interview, but which the coach might consider important for her development: "Is there anything else that has not been commented on that you believe contributed to your trajectory as an expert coach?".

**Table 2.** Main categories and sub-categories related to the career development of the expert Brazilian female Judo coaches.

Main Category	Sub-category	<i>n</i> = coaches mentioning category	MU's	Total MU's
Personal Characteristics	Dedication/Commitment	3	14	31
	Open-Mindedness	3	5	
	Passion	2	2	
	English Language*	3	10	
Formal Learning Situations	University Graduate	3	6	9
	University Postgraduate	3	3	
Non-formal Learning Situations	Workshops/Seminars/Clinics	3	8	8
Informal Learning Situations	Experience as an Athlete	3	11	79
	Interpersonal Relationship Opportunities	3	10	
	Mentoring	3	8	
	Interactions with other Coaches	3	9	
	Interactions with High Level Athletes	3	7	
	Experience as a Coach	2	2	
	Books	3	11	
	Internet/Videos	3	10	
	Teamwork*	1	2	
	Scientific Information*	1	1	
Family and Friends	Positive Support	3	8	8

\*Emerging Category.

The first author of the present manuscript conducted all interviews in person. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent. After all the interviews were verbatim transcribed, each transcript was e-mailed to the coach who was asked to approve the it or suggest any changes. All coaches responded that no changes were needed. Once all interviews were approved, we conduct data analysis. The primary investigator identified each interview's Meaning Units (MU's) (see below), and all other researcher checked the interpretations and categorizations of MU's.

#### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a deductive content analysis [Elo, Kyngas 2008]. Based on the findings of the literature review that was used in the preparation of the semi-structured interview, a matrix of deductive analysis was developed [Wiman *et al.* 2010; Wright *et al.* 2007; Nash, Sproule 2009; Nelson *et al.* 2006]. Specifically, we divided the text from each interview into text segments called “Meaning Units (MU's).” These MU's were segments of text that contained one or more idea, episode, or piece of information that corresponded to the topics from the semi-structured interview guide [Graneheim, Lundman 2004]. In addition to the categories defined in this deductive approach, new categories emerged inductively based on what information and/or experiences the expert Brazilian women judo coaches deemed as relevant to their career development. The analysis was conducted in NVivo 11 Pro software.

#### Results

In total, the three interviews lasted 150 minutes ( $M = 50$  minutes per coach), and the interview transcripts resulted in 58 pages of single-spaced text. The total number of MU's identified from the transcription of interviews was 135.

In addition to the categories and subcategories defined by the deductive analysis, four inductive sub-categories emerged from the analysis: i) teamwork; ii) language; and iii) scientific information. Each of the categories was mentioned by at least one coach.

Table 2 illustrates the categories and subcategories mentioned by the coaches, indicates the number of coaches who mentioned the subcategory, and presents the number of MU's identified in each category. The results are presented in the order of the interview questions, according to the following categories: personal characteristics, formal learning, non-formal learning, informal learning, and family and friends.

#### Personal Characteristics

Thirty-one MU's were identified in the personal characteristics' category: “dedication/commitment”, “open mindedness”, “passion” (deductive subcategories); and, and “English language”.

These expert Brazilian women judo coaches considered the “dedication/commitment” category as fundamental to their development of expertise, as pointed by WC1:

(...) I have always been very dedicated, very hardworking since my time as an athlete; I think that I have this personality too as a coach: committed. I think that this is fundamental (...) all of the responsibility that I had as an athlete ... I am still responsible for today, for the commitment that I have to the team, and I think that these are essential characteristics for getting to and continuing to work at this level. (WC1)

“Open mindedness” can be understood as the coach being open to other opinions about her work and the decisions involved [Wiman *et al.* 2010]. Although the coaches aim to be open to other people’s opinions (specifically staff and athletes), the opinion of the athletes seems to be taken into account only on occasion, as demonstrated by WC2 in the MU below:

Sometimes yes, depending on a lot on the situation, I think that there are situations that we can be flexible, then I ask for their opinion, but there are situations that I do not (...). (WC2)

Two of the three women coaches commented on the “passion” of the professional activity as an important characteristic for the development of their coaching expertise. WC1 evidenced this as follows:

I love what I do, meaning when we work with pleasure, it makes it all easy, so it turns out that for us it is not a job... it is fun, so doing what we like makes all the difference. (WC1)

An interesting result that makes sense within the Brazilian cultural context is that all three of the women coaches recognized the importance of being fluent in the English language. This fluency provided new experiences at the international level, allowing interactions with other coaches and affording opportunities to coach at international competitions, as summed up by WC2:

(...) the more languages you speak, the more you broaden your network of options, even for sharing ideas with other coaches, but nowadays, the majority of even the Japanese coaches speak English, so I think that English is cardinal, is essential; if you don’t have the basics, you can hardly communicate... exchanging a lot of experience internationally and even reading. (WC2).

#### *Formal Learning Situations*

All three coaches recognized the contribution of formal learning situations to their development. The female coaches in the present study affirmed that they hold a Bachelor’s degree in Physical Education and they discussed how this educational experience contributed to their development as a coach. For example, WC2 stated:

Oh it contributed a lot, all of the scientific parts of planning the training, load, volume, method... I apply all of these parts to the training, so I think that it was

not enough to just be an athlete in the sport, we have to explore... being a coach is another... another thing right? It is not only reproducing what you have done but studying on top of it so you can, bring both together; the technical knowledge with all of the scientific basis behind sports training.... (WC2)

In addition to the Bachelor’s degree in Physical Education, all three women coaches have a postgraduate degree, named *lato sensu* or specialization, which is a course in Brazil which mostly addresses professional practice<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the undergraduate degree and this specialization course (in judo or related areas) appears to be an important learning situation, as commented by WC3:

I have a specialization degree in high-performance judo training (...) so it was very cool at the time that I took the course in college that I understood scientifically, didactically, and physiologically what happened to me as an athlete; it was a very cool discovery.(WC3)

#### *Non-formal Learning Situations*

Participation in coaching conferences, seminars, workshops, and clinics were reported by the coaches as playing an important role in their development. All of the coaches commented on the contribution of non-formal learning situations, with 8 MU’s being identified. WC1 said:

Yes, whenever it is possible, that there is something different, we are participating. We participate a lot in judo seminars to learn what is new, (...) but we participate in all of the lectures and seminars available. (WC1)

#### *Informal Learning Situations*

We identified 79 MU’s related to this category. All informal learning subcategories reported in the literature and present in the deductive matrix approach were mentioned by coaches as part of their development. In addition, in the inductive analysis, another subcategory emerged called “scientific information”, largely consisting of what was learned through reading journals and listening to podcasts.

Experience as a high-level athlete was reported by all coaches as an important factor in their development. All of the women coaches participating in the study were previously international level athletes, representing the Brazilian National Team in world championships. In addition, two of the coaches were Brazilian Olympians. In short, this experience as a high-level athlete provided sport experience and accumulating knowledge about Judo, as reported by WC2:

Oh, it contributed a lot, I think that the knowhow of having experienced the sport is... it opens many doors

<sup>1</sup> This degree is a 360-hour program similar to a professional masters’.

and... knowledge itself, I think that experiencing it is... it contributes hugely in my job. (WC2)

A strong relationship with athletes was mentioned by all three of the coaches as an important component in effective coaching. Having a good relationship with the athletes can provide a productive work environment. Thus, being able to develop a relationship with athletes seems to be an important characteristic for coaches to have in order to work effectively with their athletes. WC3 reported on why this relationship is important and how she starts to develop it with a new athlete:

So I have been with them for many years, so by the way they walk you can identify if there is something wrong by looking, so it is that look that familiarity provides you. So my relationship is more close because of that, I have been with them for many years and when a new athlete comes in, I conduct an analysis, I set up a meeting... actually it is a chat in my room and then I ask some things to facilitate the relationship... questions that are really relevant to the competition. (WC3)

Opportunities were considered important to all coaches. Their experiences as high-level athletes on the Brazilian National Team provided these women with the opportunity to start as coaches with the national team once their athletic careers had ended. As WC1 reports:

(...) the National Federation was seeking coaches, of... the gender... the female gender, to work with the women's team, and then an opportunity came up; actually, the technical director (N) invited me... as I was at the end of my career, having already stopped competing at the international level, he invited me to be part of the technical staff (...). (WC1)

Moreover, as high-performance athletes, the women coaches commented on how they were guided by experienced and recognized judo coaches, who provided important knowledge in their coach developmental process. This interaction with their coaches may have served as a mentoring process. WC1 commented on some of the key contributions from her mentors:

(...) I carried their professionalism as a mirror, so that the thing that I admired in them ended up directing me to do the same... acting like them. So I had mirrors; I had good coaches as references (...). (WC1)

In addition to the related subcategories of the deductive approach, other inductive subcategories in the "informal learning situations" category appeared to be important for the career development of the coaches. Among these subcategories, "teamwork" seemed to be an important characteristic in the development of expert coaches, as reported by WC2:

The work is very well integrated, we have great communication, so I can say that it is even perfect... our

trio of coaches. In the national team as well, I get along with all of the coaches,... one thing that happens in the youth team that is nice to work with is that there is no ego. So, we share a lot of experiences, exchange many ideas, plans together; we talk a lot (...). (WC2)

The three women coaches reported that they often shared information with other coaches. For example, WC3 reported a common situation where information was shared with other coaches in the Brazilian team:

Before watching the videos with the athletes, we watch the videos with the coaches, and then each one has an opinion, a different look. Sometimes you are watching a fight and do not notice something... (WC3)

The experience these women gained coaching high-performance athletes was also mentioned by the coaches as relevant to their development. Working with high-performance athletes on a day-to-day basis boosted the coaches' learning and improved their coaching practice. WC2 reports:

(...) we also learn a lot of things from the athletes... I think that each experience that you have with the athletes makes you think, makes you better, each in their one way, each one has a story. I think that the athletes contribute a lot, mainly in my personal growth, and that reflects on the professional side as well. (WC2)

Two coaches discussed the contribution of coaching experience. Through experience as a coach, it is possible to recognize patterns (technical and tactical) of combat with greater ease and to notice differences and limitations between athletes, as mentioned by WC3:

So, I have experiences that I consider to be good to pass on, to have experience of what to do and what not to do with the team today, and I always try to build on these experiences (...). (WC1)

All three of the coaches reported that they used books as a source of information in their development as women coaches, despite the difficulty in finding specific judo books.

Judo is very hard, it is very hard to find; it is not common. Today, there are more than before; during the time that I did my final studies in college I had to get books, buy books from Japan. I bought books so that I could translate them. So before it was much harder, but today there are more... still not many, but there are some. (WC1)

The use of the Internet was considered fundamental to the coaches' development. The three coaches interviewed stated that they use the Internet mainly to search for videos about athletes and competitions with the purpose of analyzing (the performance) of future opponents. In addition, the Internet was used to search for articles and courses. For instance:

Regarding videos... I think it contributed a lot in every aspect. Today we can easily analyze videos, search for papers, even courses.... (WC2)

Finally, among the sources of information consulted by the coaches, one of the coaches cited scientific information in the form of articles as material to be consulted when necessary. WC1 commented on the use of these articles:

(...) when I need some knowledge I search for, for that material that I specifically need, today we have many papers, so we search directly ... for the scientific papers. (WC1)

### Family and Friends

The support of family and friends was listed as an important factor that helped develop coaching expertise. In particular, the coaches discussed how their first contact with sports was mediated by a family member. The practice of a sport during childhood is usually encouraged by family, as described by WC2:

My father is a judo teacher, so he introduced me in to sport and has always... has always encouraged me throughout my careers as an athlete and as a coach (...). (WC2)

The support of family and friends during the trajectory as a coach was considered central by the all three coaches. Moreover, the encouragement of friends seems to be of fundamental importance to their athletic and coach development and persistence in the sport as an athlete and a coach. WC1 highlights the support of her family:

(...) but I am also lucky because my husband is from the judo domain and he understands it... my mother-in-law and father-in-law... they helped me since my time as an athlete; when I had a daughter in the mid-

dle of my career as an athlete, I returned later and I have always had their support. (WC1)

Most important, in the women coaches' context is the fact that the women coaches reported that household functions acted a barrier to their function as a coach. Female judo coaches reported having responsibilities not only to their careers, but also in their home as housewives, and in particular, a dedication to their children. Two of the three women coaches have children and are responsible for day-to-day family care. WC1 reported on her routine with her children:

I have kids [...] so... women are different, so actually... I have my busy routine dedicated to my children, taking them to school, picking them back up (...). The tasks I have as a mother and also within the household are quite a lot and they [my children] are in a phase that they need me a lot, so I have that routine of taking to them to school, coming back and taking care of the daily busy house routine. (WC1)

Moreover, the women coaches reported other barriers to their development, such as prejudice in a predominantly male environment. WC3 comments:

I had a lot of difficulty at the beginning of my career because I was a woman and I was young; I faced a lot of prejudice, a lot of prejudice. Some male coaches believed that the position was theirs and not [that] of a woman. It was very difficult, but with conviction, commitment, and professionalism... I was able to perform the functions. (WC3)

Ultimately, all of the categories related to the aforementioned studies on coach development were identified within the deductive analysis. In addition, other factors reported by coaches that emerged from the inductive analysis were not reported in previous studies and appeared to be relevant to these Brazilian expert women

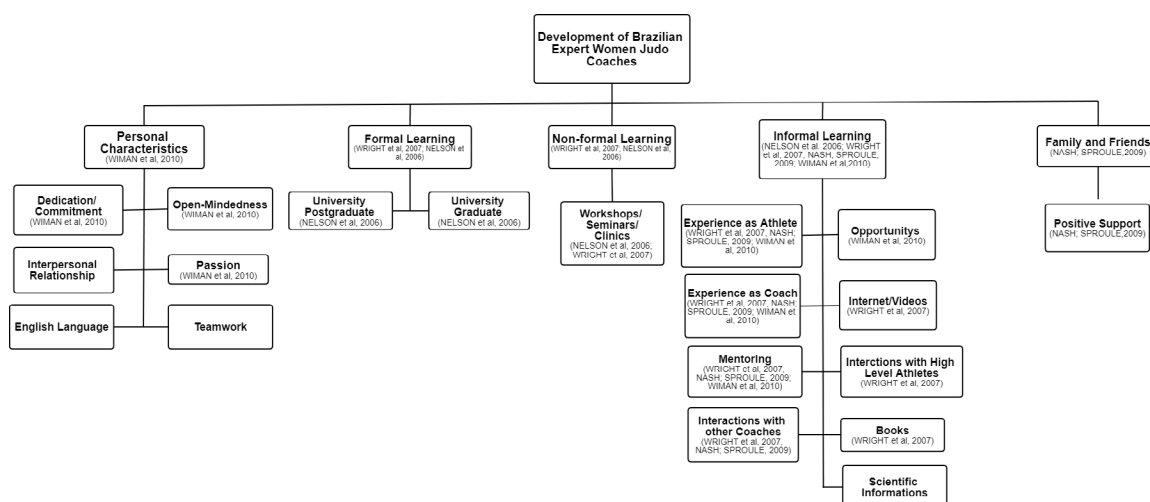


Figure 1. Summary of the factors related to the Brazilian expert female judo coaches' career development.

judo coaches' development. Figure 1 presents a summary of the factors related to the Brazilian expert female judo coaches' development based on the categories and sub-categories discussed in this section, in association with relevant literature where pertinent.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the three expert Brazilian women judo coaches' learning across their careers. In summary, our results showed that personal characteristics, formal, non-formal, and informal learning situations, and the support of family and friends are important categories that contributed to the development of these Brazilian expert female judo coaches. These elements are well-documented in the coach development literature [Nash, Sproule 2009; Wright *et al.* 2007; Wiman *et al.* 2010; Brasil *et al.* 2017; Tozetto *et al.* 2017]. On the other hand, through the inductive analysis, this study found less reported subcategories: teamwork, and scientific information.

Although there is no set profile that defines expert coaches [Abraham, Collins 1998], some common personal characteristics among expert coaches were identified and may have contributed to professional development. For instance, “dedication / commitment” and “passion” are characteristics that can ensure that coaches spend the time and energy they need to learn different kinds of skills and improve their performance. In addition, athletes have observed these characteristics in coaches and considered these characteristics as important in their coaches [Wiman *et al.* 2010; Werthner, Trudel 2009].

Moreover, listening to other people's ideas and opinions and considering them within the decision-making process is another important characteristic that can contribute to the career development of expert women coaches, as identified in the present study. Coaches who are open to other ideas and opinions, classified as “open-mindedness” in our analysis, tend to engage in critical self-analysis of their work and are exposed more frequently to new learning situations [Wiman *et al.* 2010].

Unlike with previous studies on the development of expert coaches which were conducted by English first-language speakers [Wiman *et al.* 2010; Wright *et al.* 2007; Carter, Bloom 2009; Rynne, Mallett 2014], or in countries where English is well-structured within the school curriculum [Mesquita *et al.* 2014], our results found that fluency in the English language is a fundamental characteristic of an international coach and critical to their development as an expert. Particularly, English fluency is crucial for acquiring information from other coaches, communicating with referees and competition organizing committees during events, and for navigating international travel situations. In addition, the vast

majority of the world's scientific information about judo is written in English. This challenge was similarly noted by Chinese elite coaches [He *et al.* 2018]. Therefore, poor English language skills can be a barrier to gaining access to relevant scientific information [Kilic, Ince 2015], which as will be discussed later, seems to be an important factor for the development of female expert judo coaches in Brazil.

The Bachelor's degree in Physical Education [Nelson *et al.* 2006; Mallett *et al.* 2009] and graduate degree entitled *lato sensu* or specialization [Tozetto *et al.* 2017], are usually part of coaches' formal learning contexts in Brazil. All three coaches confirmed that they had earned a bachelor's degree in Physical Education with specialization in judo or related areas such as sports sciences. Recently in Brazil, several political and judicial propositions have questioned the mandatory status of the Bachelor's degree in Physical Education for combat sport coaches at this high-level of performance. However, the results of the present study indicate that the Bachelor's degree in Physical Education, as well as other forms of formal learning, such as specialization (*lato sensu*) and master's or Ph.D. degrees, does contribute to the development of expert coaches.

In spite of this, some authors argue that the Bachelor's degree courses in Physical Education in Brazil only have a limited impact on coaching practice at the elite level and in coaches' professional development [Milistetd *et al.* 2016; Milistetd *et al.* 2018]. However, in the present study, these formal learning opportunities (Bachelor's degree courses and postgraduate courses) were described as providing relevant knowledge about sports sciences (e.g. Sports Physiology; Biomechanics of Human Movement; Motor Learning; Sport Psychology, etc.). The coaches not only considered this knowledge as important to their coaching practices, but also to participate actively with the other members of their coaching team, as previously discussed. In addition, it is possible that their further education helped these women be further recognized by their male colleagues. Despite the fact that informal learning situations are commonly featured as important learning opportunities in combat sports in Brazil, our participants are all post graduates, which might reinforce the idea that women believe in the importance of improving professional skills, and/or that professional education is a way for women coaches to gain respect vis a vis their male counterparts; a phenomenon seen in other professions [Passero *et al.* 2019].

As investigated by Milistetd *et al.* [2016], the Brazilian Judo Confederation offers no mandatory coach certification courses. These authors point out that, as the national law associates coaching with the Physical Education degree, it is common for the Brazilian National Federations to offer no formal coaching education. Actually, Milistetd *et al.* [2016] advocate that it is a gap in the National system, encouraging the Brazilian



Sport Federations to develop their coaching development programs. As an additional information, the Brazilian Olympic Institute (managed by the Brazilian Olympic Committee) offered a course for Judo Elite Coaches, but it is not mandatory to have a Federation or license for coaching Judo in Brazil.

Non-formal learning situations, such as conferences, seminars, workshops, and clinics, that are mediated by an academic specialist or another experienced coach [Wright *et al.* 2007] are often used by experts coaches in ongoing learning. In general, these non-formal learning situations are offered by government agencies dedicated to sport development [Nelson *et al.* 2006] or sports organizations (e.g., the Brazilian Confederation of Judo). The non-formal learning situations are often favored by professionals, including expert coaches, as the format of these learning opportunities generally requires minimal time commitment and had a lower workload than formal learning situations. Additionally, non-formal learning situations are somewhat controlled by the coach as they can choose to attend certain opportunities based on their interest, availability, and the specific training contexts.

Several studies (e.g. Irwin *et al.* [2004]; Nelson *et al.* [2006]; Wright *et al.* [2007]) have highlighted that experience as an athlete or practitioner makes a substantial contribution to the development of expert coaches. In general, athletic experiences can provide knowledge about the sports (e.g. techniques, tactics, rules, training routines) in different kinds of sports. As an athlete, the future coach has the opportunity to work and interact with other coaches [Cushion *et al.* 2003]. Therefore, previous athletic experiences seem to contribute significantly to the development of expert coaches, as was found in this study.

A sociocultural characteristic of judo is the appreciation of grades which are ranked according to skill and knowledge. That is, there would hardly exist a high-level judo coach who is not at least a black belt, which it is considered as the basic skill and knowledge level about Judo. Interestingly, our expert women coaches earned high grades (i.e., belts) in judo (3<sup>rd</sup> dan, 4<sup>th</sup> dan, and 6<sup>th</sup> dan) and were athletes of the highest competitive level (all coaches participated at the World Championships and two competed in at least one Olympic Games). As in many other sports, the number of women coaches is less than the number of men coaches, especially at the high performance level [Fielding-Lloyd, Mean 2015; Norman 2008; Vinson *et al.* 2016]. This gender preference barrier may be even more pronounced in Brazil as the socioculture of the combat sport context has been male-oriented for years [Fernandes *et al.* 2015]. Taken together with the limited positions available in a given function/activity [Albuquerque *et al.* 2012], and the minimal opportunities in place for female coaches presently in combat sports (e.g., Judo and Taekwondo), it can be speculated that the competition for jobs for female coaches is high.

The grade/belt system in Judo, which does not generally differentiate between male and female performers, means that those hiring women coaches have a relatively gender-free way of comparing their expertise as judokas to that of male candidates. Thus, to be competitive, female expert coaches seemingly need to demonstrate experience beyond the minimum requirement. As such, having experience as a high-level athlete, holding a high-belt grade, and earning a graduate degree appear to be almost necessary.

Considering that the professional coaching environment inherently involves social interactions with other coaches, especially more experienced coaches, this is another factor that has been identified as a possible contributor to the development of coaches [Irwin *et al.* 2004; Wright *et al.* 2007; He *et al.* 2018; Stoszowski, Collins 2016]. The female coaches in our study had access to expert coaches earlier in their careers, as athletes on the Brazilian Judo Team. This allowed our coaches to gain access to the most experienced coaches in the country at this time, including access to the head coaches of the male Brazilian Judo Team. Specifically, both the male and female Judo Teams travelled and lived together in the same training camps and competitions, which increased opportunities for the transmission of specific knowledge [Lemyre *et al.* 2007] and understanding of professional conduct [Nelson *et al.* 2006]. Moreover, a mentoring process may occur in the relationship between coach and athlete [Jones *et al.* 2009]. Thus, the fact that the coaches of the present study were high-level athletes who had worked with expert coaches, both in their local teams and in the Brazilian Judo Team, may also have been a factor that influenced their development as expert coaches.

Other sources of knowledge portrayed in our results are related to informal learning situations. The experience accumulated as a coach over the years affords a greater understanding of training-related issues, provides insight into a coach's duties, helps with the resolution of day-to-day problems, as well as the building and testing of strategies and networks [Mallett *et al.* 2016; Brasil *et al.* 2017; Wiman *et al.* 2010]. Despite this, only one coach discussed the contribution of the accumulated experience as a coach, which may mean that connections with other coaches and educational/belt backgrounds are considered to be more relevant for expert women coaches than their own experience as coaches.

“Interpersonal relationships” and “teamwork” as informal learning situations also contributed to the development of these female coaches. Taking into consideration the interactive nature of training and competition environments (e.g., social interactions between athletes, managers, coaches, staff) and that the social structures and cultures of sports are founded upon social interactions [Jones *et al.* 2002], we can assume that positive “interpersonal relationships” are important factors to

be considered in competitive sports, such as Judo in Brazil. Thus, “interpersonal relationships” and “teamwork” characteristics helped create a positive relationship between the coaches and athletes, which in turn assisted in improving athletes’ performances [Lafrenière *et al.* 2011], as well as driving teamwork in this collaborative environment. In contrast to previous research, one characteristic that coaches in our study discussed as important to their development was the willingness to being open to others. Notably, coaches in our study reported listening and sharing with other coaches as an important developmental opportunity. This was less so the case with regards to athletes, as coaches explained this exchange of information was less valuable in their development. This may be the result of traditional hierarchies in combat sports and martial arts, as well as the predominant tendency for coaches within these sports to use transactional styles of leadership [Rowold 2006]. An additional reason for this lack of open mindedness in communications with athletes could be based on female coaches trying to align with more traditional approaches that align more socially with traditional male roles in coaching, in an attempt to be accepted in the field [Kilty 2006]. Considering the recent insertion of women in judo in Brazil, especially as coaches, future research should investigate women coaches’ leadership and their relationships with athletes in combat sports to better understand this phenomenon.

As reported in other studies, self-directed learning (e.g., through the Internet, books, and videos) plays a substantial role in coach development [Lemyre *et al.* 2007; Brasil *et al.* 2017; Irwin *et al.* 2004; Tozetto *et al.* 2017]. For example, the Internet has increasingly given support to coaches, whether via online courses, access to scientific information. Moreover, specifically for judo coaches, there are several online resources available,<sup>2</sup> including videos of combats and competitions around the world that are widely used by judo coaches. In this vein, as reported by other authors [Wright *et al.* 2007; Gilbert, Trudel 2002], the Internet allows coaches to observe opponents through the video, making technical and tactical analyses (performance analysis of the opponents) that can inform future competition strategies and help coaches simulate conditions during training for their athletes [Miarka *et al.* 2015].

Books are another source of informal learning that are used by coaches to learn not only about Judo, but also about different topics that may contribute to their work [Abraham *et al.* 2006; Brasil *et al.* 2017], such as management strategies, available technology, leadership techniques, and other relevant topics.

Interestingly, the inductive analysis conducted yielded the “scientific information” category. While this only appeared in one of the coach interviews, it warrants further discussion for two main reasons. One,

evidence-based practice is of extreme relevance at the high-performance coaching level. Two, Brazil is one of the largest producers of scientific articles about Judo [Peset *et al.* 2013]. As noted by the coaches in this study, the Internet allowed them to easily access articles during their formal education or throughout their coach development process. These articles are relatively new (at least when compared with other forms, such as books), and are of high-quality. Given that evidence-based practice is important at the high-performance level, and Brazil plays a prominent role in the scientific exploration of Judo, it makes sense that scientific information emerged as a subcategory in the development of the Brazilian female coaches.

In the family and friends category [Nash, Sproule 2009], our results indicated that family contributed in a few different ways (e.g., in providing initial exposure to the sport) to the development of our three participant coaches [Nash, Sproule 2009; Brasil *et al.* 2017]. Given that our coaches were athletes just after the end of the prohibition for women judo competitions in Brazil, such family support was critical in bringing and keeping these women in judo. The involvement of friends also appeared to be an important influence on our coaches’ desire to remain in sport as athletes and into their coaching careers. In addition, the family provided positive support for the coaches, offering advice and assisting them with professional conflicts or challenges [Lemyre *et al.* 2007]. Family also contributed to the development of the coaches’ personal values [Tozetto *et al.* 2017], as well as, served as a source of support during absences due to extensive travels. However, while familial support was critical in the coaches’ initiation and continued involvement in sport, family-related obligations challenged our coaches. In particular, their responsibilities as mothers and as homemakers were identified as prominent and important, which at times hindered their development. As noted in other research, this challenge has forced some women coaches to forego high-performance coaching careers [Kilty 2006].

In addition, other female-specific concerns reported in our study were noted at the organizational/structural level of the sport [LaVoi, Dutove 2012]. In the present study, the female coaches faced prejudice as a result of their involvement in a male-dominated environment. In many cases, women who are high-performance are seen as intruders, and this may also give rise to other barriers, such as lack of opportunity for coaches to hold senior positions, mentoring opportunities, and open interactions with coaches [LaVoi, Dutove 2012; Norman 2008]. As suggested by previous studies, the culture of the sport reinforces the gender power structure of Brazilian society (e.g., fewer coaching opportunities offered to women [Walker, Bopp 2011]) and unattractive salaries when compared with male coaches [Shaw, Hoeber 2003]. More recently, the interviewed coaches revealed that the

<sup>2</sup> For example, <http://judobase.org> or <http://ippon.org>

Brazilian Judo Federation wanted women coaching the National Team, which opened doors for these coaches. Thus, organizational policies made a difference for these women, which resultantly lead to their involvement with the Women's National Judo team in Brazil. In addition, it is important to note that Japan's Yuko Fujii was invited in 2018 to be the first woman to coach the men's judo squad in Brazil.

The present study has some limitations. The most important are: 1) We did interview all potential women Judo expert coaches; and 2) The participants answered some questions retrospectively, which may be recall bias.

## Conclusion

Our results indicated that the investigated career pathways were a result of a combination of extensive formal and non-formal education, personal characteristics, informal learning, and the support of family and friends. Moreover, motherhood and housekeeping tasks acted a barrier to their function as a coach.

In the present study, only judo coaches were investigated; other Olympic combat sports such as taekwondo, boxing, and karate should be investigated in future studies. However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that investigated expert Brazilian female judo coaches which reinforces the need for future studies in different sociocultural contexts, in different combat sports, and especially with a focus on female coaches.

Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that the sample of this study was composed of three renowned female coaches from Brazil, a country which has recently achieved excellent results internationally in judo, especially within the women's sport. We recommend that new research in the Brazilian context should investigate the socio-political elements involved in women's insertion in the National Team. Internationally, the relational personal elements and supportive people involved in a women's combat sport professional journey can be better understood in future investigations.

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## Od zakazu do doskonałości: Retrospektywne studium sytuacji uczenia się kobiet, trenerek ekspertek w brazylijskim judo

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój trenera, sporty walki, kobiety, sztuki walki, trenerzy

### Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie. Kilka czynników, w tym płeć, wpływa na rozwój trenerów ekspertów. Trajektoria rozwoju kobiet trenerek może przedstawiać specyficzne problemy w porównaniu z mężczyznami, takie jak niewielka liczba możliwości oferowanych trenerkom, przewaga mężczyzn na stanowiskach kierowniczych i niższe wynagrodzenia. W kontekście brazylijskim w latach 1941-1979 kobiety były początkowo zniechęcane, a następnie oficjalnie zabroniono im uczestnictwa w wyczynowym judo. Od tego czasu kobiety trenujące wyczynowo judo należą do rzadkości.

Problem i cel. Celem niniejszej pracy było zbadanie procesu uczenia się trzech brazylijskich trenerek-ekspertek w judo na przestrzeni ich kariery zawodowej.

Metody. Każda z trenerek wzięła udział w częściowo ustrukturyzowanym wywiadzie. Zastosowano dedukcyjno-indukcyjne podejście do analizy treści.

Wyniki. Zgodnie z literaturą przedmiotu, wyniki autorów wykazały, że cechy osobiste, formalne, nieformalne i pozaformalne sytuacje uczenia się oraz wsparcie rodziny i przyjaciół były ważne dla rozwoju tych trenerek. Z analizy indukcyjnej wyłoniły się również inne podkategorie, które nie były wcześniej opisywane: praca zespołowa i informacja naukowa.

Wnioski. Zbadane ścieżki kariery wykazały, że brazylijskie trenerki judo byli w stanie poradzić sobie z barierami zawodowymi dzięki połączeniu obszernej edukacji formalnej i nieformalnej, a także wsparciu rodziny i przyjaciół. Niezależnie od tego wsparcia, trenerki nadal były obciążone obowiązkami wynikającymi z macierzyństwa i prac domowych.