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An Intervention to Combat the Negative Effects of Perfectionism by Incorporating Elements of Self-Compassion for Youth Gymnasts

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Abstract

In general, perfectionism means to not accept any results that are not considered “flawless”. Perfectionism is a topic that has been widely researched in clinical settings but more research is needed in the sports environment. The current project aims to investigate interventions aimed at reducing perfectionistic tendencies in the sport of gymnastics, a context that may be especially prone to developing perfectionism. There are two widely accepted dimensions of perfectionism: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic strivings are having high personal standards and wanting to achieve high goals while perfectionistic concerns are worries about making mistakes and evaluating oneself based on performance/mistakes. Perfectionistic striving typically produces adaptive outcomes, while perfectionistic concerns are viewed as the maladaptive aspects of perfectionism including poor performance, anger, anxiety, depression, and other maladaptive behaviors. (Dunn et. al, 2018). It is for this reason that perfectionistic concerns are targeted in interventions. One construct that seems to be possible to contrast the negative effects of perfectionistic concerns is self-compassion. Self-compassion is when someone has an accepting, supportive, and nonjudgmental attitude directed towards themselves and can alleviate suffering while enhancing overall mental health (Mosewich). The goal of incorporating this construct is to highlight perfectionistic striving elements and diminish perfectionistic concerns. For this project, we have developed four workshops that will be introduced to youth gymnasts in order to educate them about perfectionism and combat its negative effects in both sport and other domains. To evaluate the intervention, athletes will complete the Perceived Stress Scale, Sport Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, and Self-Compassion scale before and after the intervention.



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

An intervention to combat the negative effects of perfectionism by incorporating elements of self-compassion for youth gymnasts

Ellie Cain & Eric M. Martin, Ph.D.

I. Introduction

- In gymnastics, scoring is determined by marks off of a perfect 10 score, which can make perfectionism very prevalent in the sport which often results in excess stress.
- Although many consider perfectionism as solely negative, it can be either adaptive and maladaptive.
 - Adaptive perfectionism - Perfectionistic strivings, or having high personal standards and lofty goals which are helpful in sport
 - Maladaptive perfectionism - Perfectionistic concerns, or being concerned about making mistakes and hyper aware of the evaluation of performance, negatively impact performance
- One possible aspect that can combat maladaptive perfectionism while enhancing overall mental health is self compassion. Self-compassion is an accepting, supportive, and nonjudgmental attitude directed towards the self and has three components:
 - Self-kindness: Extending care and understanding rather than harsh judgment towards the self
 - Common humanity: Understanding that suffering, feeling inadequate, and experiencing setbacks are shared experiences among others and is not isolated
 - Mindfulness: A present focused, non-judgemental mindset.

Purpose: To design a program that combats perfectionism in youth gymnastics focused on self-compassion and other psychological constructs.

Research Question: How does an educational intervention influence youth athletes perfectionism, stress, and self-compassion?

II. Methods/Participants

First author led 30 minute workshops two times per week for two weeks with athletes

We attained owner's permission and IRB approval, as well as parental consent, and athlete assent

Athletes completed surveys at T1 (pre-intervention) and T2 (post-intervention)

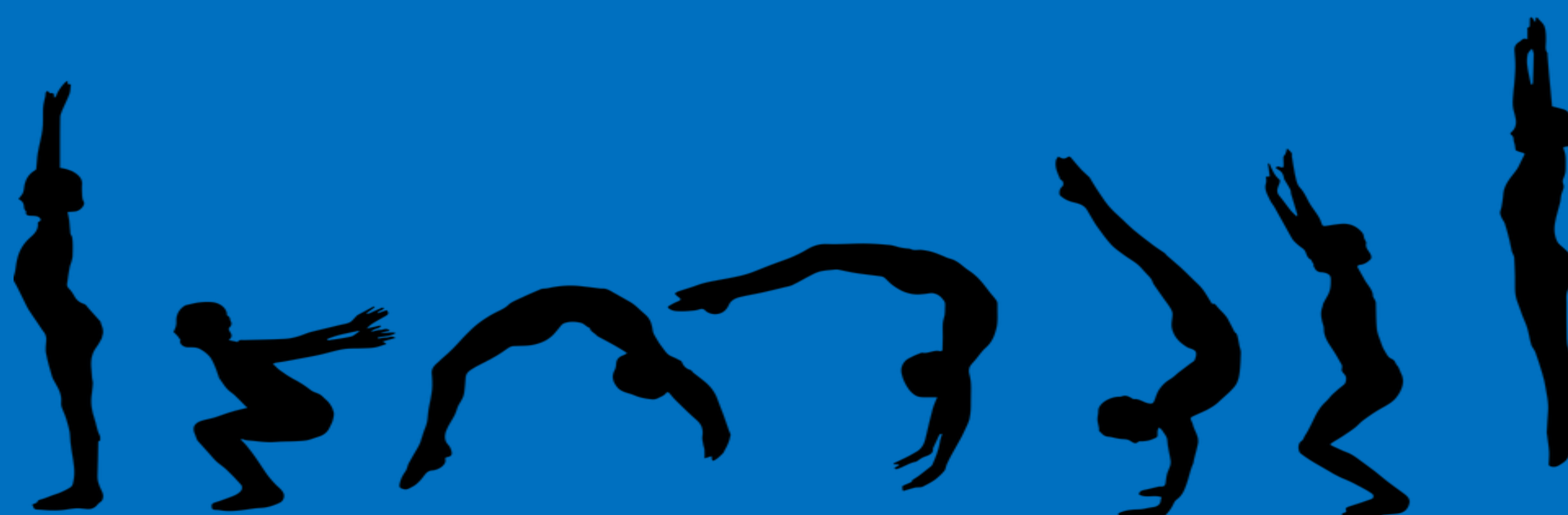
- Sport Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale-2
 - Subscales (Adaptive): Personal Standards and Organization
 - Subscales (Maladaptive): Perceived Parental Pressure, Perceived Coach Pressure, Concern Over Mistakes, and Doubts about Action
- Self-Compassion Scale
 - Subscales (adaptive): Self-kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness
 - Subscales (Maladaptive): Self-judgement, Isolation, and Over Identify
- Perceived Stress Scale

The group was 6 youth gymnasts, varying in ethnicities, aged 13-17 years-old training and competing at levels 9-10. On average, they had been training in gymnastics for 10 years.

1. Total self-compassion increased and total perfectionism decreased following the workshops.

2. The gymnasts felt more confident in their ability to use more self-compassion and have less negative perfectionistic thinking after participation in the workshops.

3. Athletes enjoyed the workshop format and mentioned identifying their own tendencies in sport and hearing others' perspectives about their experiences as the most beneficial to their own learning.



III. Workshops

Workshop 1: What does perfect really mean?

Learning Outcome: Understand perfectionism and be able to identify it in their own lives
Overview of workshop: Give athletes an overview of what perfectionism is, the positive and negative effects of perfectionism, and why it is relevant in the realm of gymnastics

Workshop 2: Making better mistakes

Learning Outcome: Create a plan on how to overcome mistakes
Overview of Workshop: Provide gymnasts a mistake recovery plan and help them acknowledge that mistakes are inevitable and common, even in a sport that penalizes mistakes in how they are scored.

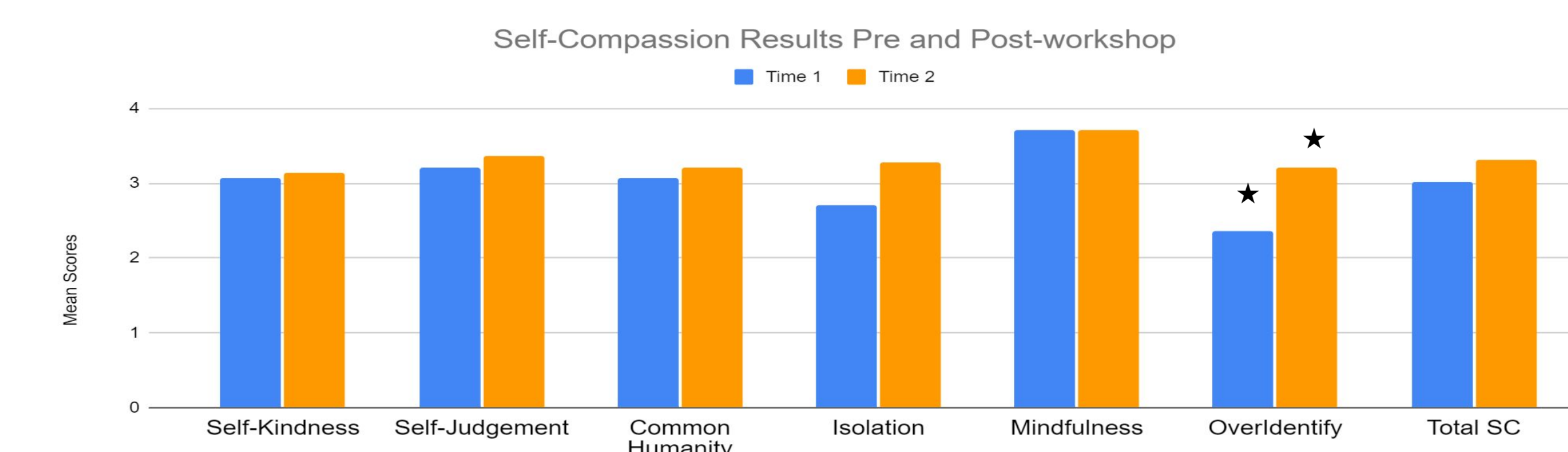
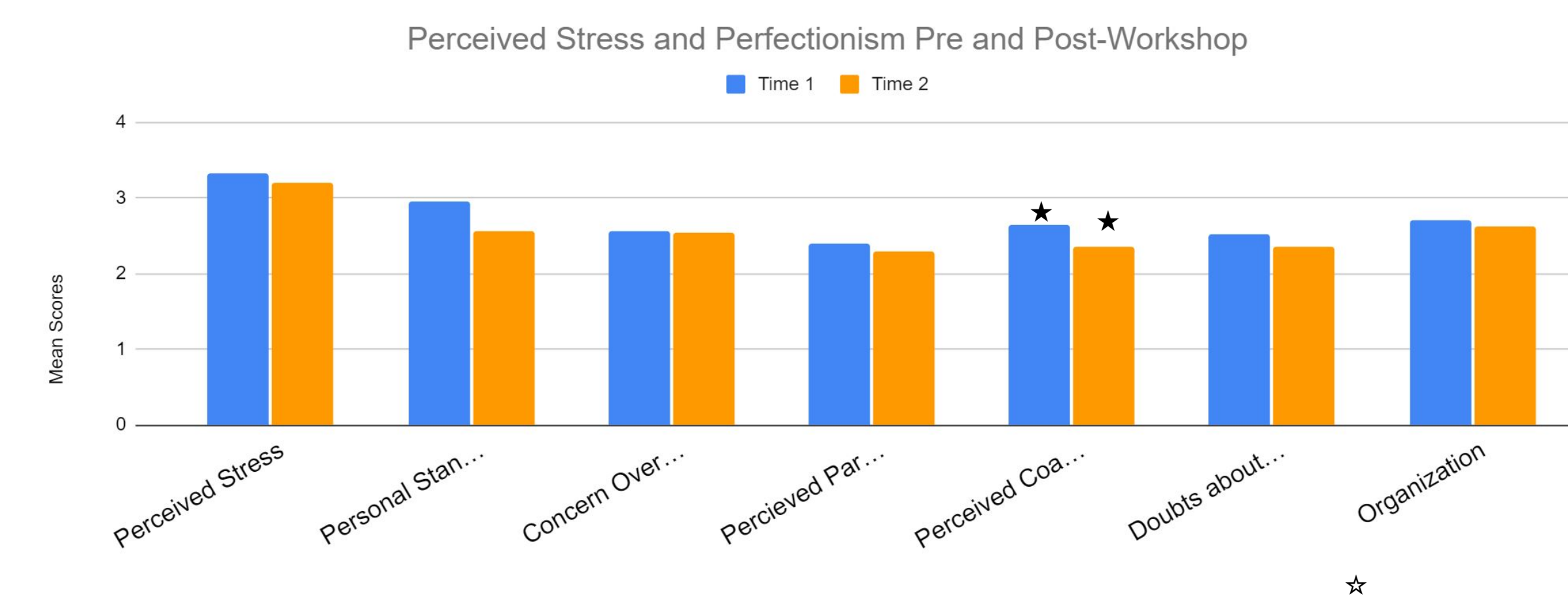
Workshop 3: Who shows us what perfect is?

Learning outcome: Understand and identify how others can impact athletes' perfectionism and thoughts surrounding gymnastics
Overview of Workshop: Coaches and parents have a significant impact on youth athletes' perfectionism, and understanding their influence can be helpful in better dealing with these aspects in sport.

Workshop 4: Be kind to yourself

Learning outcome: Understand self-compassion and apply it to their own life
Overview of Workshop: Self-compassion has been shown to be a tool to combat perfectionism and improve performance and overall attitude towards oneself.

IV. Results



★ = significance p<0.05

V. Discussion

Gymnastics is based on the goal of being perfect. Therefore gymnasts tend to have higher levels of perfectionism and this series of 4 workshops aimed to educate about and improve perfectionistic tendencies.

- Since there was positive change in almost all the measures for perfectionism and self-compassion, the workshop seemed to be a positive change for gymnasts.
- The average rating on a scale from 1-10 from the participants on how beneficial they found the workshops was a 9.33. Two of the six athletes specifically stated that they liked the Self-Compassion Workshop the best (workshop 4).
- Adding more participants and more workshop topics could be a way to make the program more effective long term.