

Reasons for the long-lasting participation in a community-based aerial sling class: Creative, performative, playful, challenging, and rewarding without feeling like a workout

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Abstract

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USA has the lowest life expectancy of its peer countries and steadily increasing obesity rates. Although exercise is key to health and well-being, long-term exercise participation is a significant challenge. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic study was to examine the reasons for the long-lasting participation in a community-based aerial sling class (Flow) among adult women. Drawing on the philosophical underpinnings of techne (art) and phronesis (practical wisdom/reasoning), it was hypothesized that the techne-related elements of the Flow class (e.g., performativity, creativity, play, accomplishment of challenging skills) would be highly motivating and thus lead to the participants' decision to continue with the class and other similar movement endeavors (link between techne and phronesis). Study participants were seven women (aged 28 – 48 years), including the class students and instructor at a major US city. The Flow class commenced in January 2024 and took place once per week for 1.15 hours. The class included skill based and performative elements such as dynamic sling choreographies. Following a show performance in May 2024, individual interviews were conducted via zoom to collect the study's data. Based on the qualitative analysis, three themes emerged regarding the reasons for the long-lasting (at least nine months) participation in the Flow class: a) Performativity, creativity, play: creating and performing choreographies, returning to childhood; b) "Proud" feeling of accomplishment; Motivating and not boring: "does not feel like a workout", sensing the "addictive" nature of aerial arts vs. "being bored by lifting weights at a gym", "mentally rewarding," "feeling accomplished"; and c) Improved strength, energy, stamina, and health: being stronger and healthier than before (e.g., improving symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis). Based on the study findings, the techne elements of the Flow class led to long-term participation in the class and other similar exercise endeavors. Therefore, exercise promoters should incorporate performative, creative, playful, and challenging elements in movement programming for long-lasting exercise participation.

Introduction

The healthcare costs in the USA far exceed those of similar, large, wealthy countries. Yet, the US life expectancy is the lowest of all its peers, and this disparity continues at older ages (Rakshit et al., 2024). Specifically, in 2022 the life expectancy at birth in the USA was 77.5 years, whereas the life expectancy at birth among

comparable countries was 82.2 years (Xu et al., 2022). Obesity US rates have also significantly increased from 30.5% to nearly 42% between 1999 and 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022). Obesity prevalence among adults aged 40 to 59 years is 44.3% while the obesity rate for young adults (20 – 39 years old) is 39.8% (CDC, 2022). Even though regular exercise is key to longevity and can curb high obesity rates and its

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underlying conditions (e.g., heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes and certain types of cancer) (CDC, 2022; Lee et al., 2022), long-lasting participation in physical activity is a significant challenge. For example, in a recent review and meta-analysis of 3.3 million people across 32 countries it was shown that only about 20% of adults adhere to the recommended aerobic and muscle-strengthening activity guidelines of the World Health Organization (Garcia-Hermozo et al., 2023). Women, people of lower socio-economic status, and those of poorer health tend to have the lowest exercise adherence rates (Garcia-Hermozo et al., 2023). Therefore, it is key to identify exciting and motivating exercise programs among community members. It is hypothesized in this study that artistic and playful movement programs can lead to wise decisions regarding long-term exercise participation – link between *techne* (art) and *phronesis* (moral wisdom or practical reasoning) (Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018).

The philosophical framework of this paper is based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the concepts of *techne* (art movement) and *phronesis* regarding living the good life (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999). Artistic movement is playful in nature and encompasses internal and incommensurable good ends (e.g., sensations of strength, energy, and skill mastery) that can lead to wise decisions (*phronesis*) regarding the love of movement for a lifetime (Kosma, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018). It will be briefly described below how conceptually the practical knowledge of *techne* (art movement) and *phronesis* are associated. This linkage was empirically tested and supported in this study in relation to the long-lasting love of movement and exercise participation within a community setting.

Based on Aristotle (350 B.C.E/1999), *techne* is art or craft like the technical knowledge of the craftsman. Although there are many *technai* (e.g., sketching a drawing, making a sculpture, building a house, or performing surgery), in this paper *techne* refers to the movement-central skills acquired in performing arts (art movement) like dancing, aerial dancing, and physical theater. While practical experience is key to skill acquisition (Gadamer, 1975/2012; Kosma, 2024a), the real mastery of skills (*techne*) is achieved when the performer also knows the importance of their art and ideally, they can transmit (teach) it to others (Angier, 2010; Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999; Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018).

A key concept in artistic movement is that the good ends of *techne* are integral to the very action of art movement, in that they can be viewed and best sensed when there is action/movement. Sensations of strength, energy, balance, beauty, skill mastery, flow, and euphoria are not products of dancing or aerial dancing but incommensurable parts of the action itself (Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Erickson, 2020a, 2020b; Kosma et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma et al., 2021a, 2021b; Parviainen, 2003). These mental, cognitive, and physical sensations are holistic (unison of body-mind-emotion) in nature and qualitatively distinct; a value cannot be placed on them (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999; Gadamer, 1975/2012; Kosma, 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018, 2021; Kosma et al., 2024a, 2024b; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014). Such creative and free expressions in performing arts are highly enjoyable (Kosma et al., 2023a, 2023b) and can lead to wise decisions (*phronesis*) regarding the long-lasting love of movement (Kosma, 2024a).

Phronesis is also practical knowledge that can be acquired via ever-changing, time, and context-dependent life experiences (*praxis*) based on one's upbringing, culture, and history (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018; Kosma et al., 2015). People form value systems via *praxis* and deliberate about how to occupy their lives, including their chosen lifestyles, profession, and leisure time. Do they view themselves as active community members who dedicate time to be physically active and eat healthy food (Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018)? Such lifestyle decisions require wise deliberation that can derive from the mastery of movement-central skills like dancing, climbing, and bodily expressing/performing, which encompass the art (*techne*) of movement (Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018).

Based on the concept of *phronesis* in movement, people can make informed decisions about the if, what, when, and how of physical activity if they acquire relevant movement skills (Kosma, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018). Wisdom in decision making regarding active lifestyles (*phronesis*) involves the mastery of *techne* (e.g., art movement). Sensations of accomplishment, confidence, strength, play, release, and free bodily expression can become motivating and meaningful for the long-lasting love of movement (Kosma, 2024a; 2024b; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018).

Indeed, the ideality of play is found in art like performing arts, which involve not only the mastery of movement skills but also the creation and expression of arty pieces before an audience (Gadamer, 1975/2012; Kosma, 2024a, 2024b). Such artistic and playful movement experiences can be highly valued in society and lead to long-term exercise participation, health, and well-being (Kosma, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma & Erickson, 2020a, 2020b; Kosma et al., 2023a, 2023b; Kosma et al., 2021a, 2021b). Therefore, it is key to embrace active communities for all age groups and ability levels (Kosma, 2022; Kosma, 2023b). Reinforcing a strong physical culture at the community level can lead to exercise participation for a lifetime (Kosma, 2024a).

There are no empirical, community-based studies that have examined the link between art movement (techne) and phronesis in relation to the long-term love of movement and exercise participation. There are only a few data-based studies at the college level, which have shown that performative aerial practice or physical theater led to the love of movement and health (Kosma et al., 2023b; Kosma et al., 2021b; Kosma & Erickson, 2020b). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic study was to examine the reasons for the long-lasting participation in a *community-based* aerial sling class among adult women. It was hypothesized that the techne-related (art movement) elements of the class (e.g., performativity, creativity, and play) would intrinsically motivate the participants to sustain long-term participation in the class and other similar movement endeavors (link between techne and phronesis).

Methods

Design and Procedures

This was a hermeneutic, qualitative, and community-based research study among seven women (age range: 28 – 48 years old), who participated in an advanced aerial sling class called “Flow.” The class instructor was also one of the study’s participants. Overall, these women were physically active by engaging in the Flow class and other level/skill-based aerial arts classes (see Table 1). This class was selected because not only did it involve skill learning, but also it incorporated performative elements. The ultimate goal for the participants was to create choreographies and bodily express and perform, reinforcing the paper’s conceptualization of techne. The

Flow class launched in January 2024 and took place once per week for 1.15 hours. The class context included a dynamic interplay of sling/hammock (loop of suspended fabric) movement skills and choreographies. Beyond learning different skills, the goal for the study participants was the creation of sling movement sequencies and choreographies while standing, swinging, and inverting. The instructor was supportive and encouraging, allowing freedom in expression. Although she would provide movement sequencies, she also encouraged modifications in the different routines and free bodily expression and creation. Within the contexts of aerial silks and physical theater, similar performing arts movement programs have been examined among college students at university settings (Kosma & Erickson, 2020a, 2020b; Kosma et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b; Kosma et al., 2021a, 2021b). About four months after the commencement of the Flow class (May 2024), the study participants created a routine and performed a showcase open to the public. Following the show performance, the study’s qualitative data were collected via individual, semi-structured interviews (about 30 minutes each) on zoom. Participants were asked about: their exercise levels and types; length of participation in the Flow class; differences among the Flow class, other non-performative aerial arts classes, and non-aerial arts exercise classes; the performativity element in the Flow class and creation of choreography; links among the Flow class, emotions, physicality, and lifelong goals and priorities; and reasons for the love of the Flow class (see interview guide in Table 2). Demographic information about the participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity was also collected.

The study’s research protocol was approved by the researcher’s Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research (IRB # 0392). Prior to the zoom-based interviews, the interviewer electronically shared with the participants the study’s consent form and interview guide. In this way, the participants had plenty of time to review the study protocol and interview questions at their own pace. Prior to data collection, the participants signed the study’s consent form, and any needed clarifications were discussed with the interviewer. Study participation was voluntary; thus, withdrawal from the research project at any point was possible without any penalties or negative consequences. The participants had the option to use their first name or a pseudonym for result reporting.

Nearly all study participants preferred to use their first name in the published data.

The in-depth, individual interviews were informal, democratic, and dialogical in nature. The interviewer drafted the initial interview guide before discussing it with the instructor of the Flow class for any suggested changes. The final questions were then pilot tested with the first two study interviewees, whose results were included in the study.

Data Analysis

The audiotapes were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were entered in the latest version of NVivo

together with the interviewer's post hoc reflections and debriefing notes. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to analyze the study's data (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2004; Kafle, 2011; Tuffour, 2017). The interviewer thoroughly read the data before developing codes and themes. Data coding was based on participant stories, the whole data set, study's purpose, and literature. Some of the results were further discussed with the class instructor and participants to facilitate the development of the study themes. Representative extracts were then selected based on the coded data, the entire data set, study purpose, and the literature.

Table 1
Exercise participation.

Participants	Activity Type	Frequency	Duration
Alana	Aerial arts	3 days/week	3.30 hours/week
	Bar/ballet class	5 days/week	5 hours/week
Becca	Aerial arts	3 days/week	3.45 hours/week
	Kickboxing	3 days/week	
	Dancing	2-3 days/week	
Christina	Aerial arts	4 days/week	5 hours/week
	CrossFit classes	3 days/week	
	Yoga at home	2-3 days/week	2-3 hours/week
Mandy	Aerial arts	2 days/week	2.30 hours/week
Nickie	Aerial arts	2-3 days/week	2.30-3.45 hours/week
	Yoga class	Occasionally	
	Dance class	Occasionally	
Taylor	Aerial arts	2 days/week	2.30 hours/week
	Strength, stretching	Occasionally	
Instructor	Aerial arts	3 days/week	Over 6 hours/week
	Open gym (aerial)	Occasionally	
	Acrobatics class	Occasionally	

All participants have been continuing with the Flow class among other aerial arts classes long term.

Table 2
Interview guide.

1. For how long have you been participating in the Flow class?
2. Beyond the Flow class, are you physically active? In what types of exercises do you currently participate, how frequently and at what intensity?
3. How does the Flow class compare with other (non-aerial) exercise classes?
4. Describe similarities and differences between the Flow class and other level/skill-based aerial arts classes that do not involve performativity.
5. How has the Flow class affected you emotionally and mentally?
6. How has the Flow class affected you physically?
7. What do you think about the performative nature of the Flow class?
8. How do you prepare your own class sequences and routines?
9. How has the Flow class influenced your daily goals and priorities?
10. Why do you love the Flow class?

Drawing on hermeneutic phenomenology, the in-depth examination of the studied phenomenon is imperative. Therefore, in this research the interviewer was seriously invested in the subject matter by participating in similar aerial arts classes offered by the same instructor and other instructors, making class observations, and taking notes. The principal investigator also reflected on and shared her personal experiences with those of the instructor and class participants. She used recursive analytical procedures to attempt to best capture the phenomenon of interest. Hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive in nature, thus result interpretation may vary based on the reader (Tuffour, 2017).

Results

Participant Characteristics

Eight White women (age range: 28 – 48 years old) participated in this study, including the students and instructor of the Flow aerial-sling class. Overall, the study participants had been physically active for 1.5 years to 5 years by participating in aerial arts classes and/or non-aerial arts classes like CrossFit, yoga, and dance (see Table 1). Importantly, these women have been participating in the Flow class for over nine months since its inception (personal observations and communication with the instructor).

Emerging Themes

Based on the hermeneutic phenomenological, qualitative analysis in the latest version of NVivo, three themes emerged regarding the reasons for the long-lasting participation in the Flow class: a) *Performativity, creativity, play*: creating and performing choreographies, returning to childhood; b) *“Proud” feeling of accomplishment; Motivating and not boring*: “does not feel like a workout”; sensing the “addictive” and “motivating” nature of aerial practice vs. “being bored by lifting weights at a gym”, “mentally rewarding after mastering a sequence of moves,” “feeling accomplished,” “teaching my daughters that they can do whatever they want to do.”; and c) *Improved strength, energy, stamina, and health*: being stronger, more energetic, and healthier than before (e.g., improving symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis) in an enjoyable way.

Theme 1: Performativity, creativity, play

The study participants expressed their love for the Flow class because of its creative, performative, and playful elements. After learning several skills, they were able to create their own sequences and perform before others. The instructor provided guidance and allowed for flexibility and freedom in creating and expressing different pieces.

Compared with her other exercise classes, Christina mentioned that aerial practice is “performance art”; it has a creative element that got her “addicted to it.”

“It’s not like I just do it for exercise... there is a creativity to it, and I think that’s part of why I got addicted to it. And that’s what’s specific with the flow class, too... we choose a song, and we come up with choreography to the song, and we may perform it. In our most recent showcase, the flow class did do a performance based on things that we had learned during the flow class. So, it’s not just coming to a class and doing exercise... the exercise is ultimately something that you’re trying to perfect and get to a point where you feel comfortable performing in front of an audience. The flow class is distinct because it’s all about thinking about performance. As for the other (level/skill-based aerial practice) classes, you can take what you learn in those classes and use it for performance, but they’re not performance-based classes. It’s usually just let’s focus on this skill for the day. And then maybe later I decide, oh, I like that move. I’m going to use it for my performance.”

“Usually, our teacher comes in with a sequence in mind. And that’s another thing that’s different about the flow class... rather than learning like one particular move, we learn several moves that are supposed to be sequenced together. So, you flow through one to the other. And usually, the instructor comes in and teaches us a sequence. And then we as students say, ‘wow, we really like that sequence. I see us being able to perfect it and get confident enough with it to perform.’ And that’s how we determine what might be good for our performance... I come up with choreography... and that’s fun for me. I do get support from the studio because when we have a showcase coming up, they have specific classes

called choreography classes where you come in and you share with an instructor, you know, 'here's my idea for my choreography.' You perform it for the instructor. And then the instructor gives you tips about how to make the choreography better. Usually, the instructor gives tips on transitioning from one thing to another, because that's what I think the hard part of a flow is. I can do this move and then this move and then this move. But putting them all together, so it looks nice and flowy and pretty."

Mandy also mentioned that the creative and performative elements of the Flow class are very motivating and "kind of addictive." She enjoys creating routines and performing together with her children.

"It was really fun to do routines with my kids. I did a routine with one of my daughters, and then I did another routine with my other daughter. And that was like my goal, like to be able to do a routine with them. But it was just so fun to put together routines that I like doing it just for myself too. So, it is very motivating... they have showcases a couple of times a year. And so, it keeps me going. Like I got to get ready for the next one and the next one. And that's just what motivates me to stay healthy and keep practicing because I like to do the routines. Not that I want to be a performer or anything. It's just a fun workout."

The creative element was also very exciting and motivating for Nickie.

"Well, that's one of the things that I love about the flow class so much... it does give me the opportunity to take what I've learned and make it my own... the instructor will give us a sequence, but everybody has a different underlining vibe... some people are very dramatic or lyrical... some people like to add a little bit of sexy to it. It definitely flexes my brain creativity a lot more."

Taylor particularly enjoyed the showcases because she could practice her sequence multiple times to "perfect" it. The instructor allowed "creativity and freedom" for participants to try different poses within the same wrap. She encouraged variability in performance by making sure the different sequences "feel good and work for the students' bodies." There are different ways to execute

transitions, and her goal for her students is to "stop thinking inside of a box." Although learning different skills is important, being able to put different skills together and create a sequence is exciting and motivating. In fact, the instructor highlighted that creating and performing choreographies can greatly assist with skill learning. She also mentioned that for the showcase in the level 2 Flow class they had "a little bit more fun, and it was more creative and more collaborative" than the Level 1 Flow showcase. Technically, though, the students in Flow 1 had a cleaner performance because "they wanted to know exactly what they were doing, so they could drill it, drill it, drill it."

Similarly, Becca exemplified that level/skill-based aerial practice classes are important to be able to perform Flow-type classes. In skill-based classes, she can learn movement skills with constant practice before she can use them in her Flow class, which is advanced and requires less analytical thinking and more emphasis on performativity elements.

"When you're learning skills, you're just trying to hit the move. When you're performing, you have to listen to the music, and you have to think about how it feels... is it slow? Is it fast? Is it weird? Is it angry?... I love the flow classes, but you have to take the level-based classes to be able to do the flow classes because you have to be at least decently comfortable doing the moves to be able to add expression to them."

Although Mandy stressed the importance of both skill/level-based aerial classes and flow classes, she prefers the Flow class because of the performance element.

"The level classes are more about learning the move and then coming back down. So, you're getting up there and trying to master one move and then coming down. And the flow is more about how to use those same moves, but put them all together to a song, like how to make a routine out of it... that's what the Flow class is all about. It's like teaching you how to flow to music... I like the flow because it's just more fun to do it to a song, like to make it look good and flow to a song. But it's both important just because you need to learn the basics and the moves too."

Nickie also discussed the significance of both level/skill-based classes and Flow classes with the ultimate goal being performativity.

"I definitely feel like I need both. The skill-based classes give me the basic movement, basic moves to work on and tricks. And then flow is more about helping my confidence in the air with transitioning from a particular move to another move and making things not look like, oh, just trick, trick, trick, trick, you know, making things more flow."

Christina described how the use of costumes and the performativity element of aerial silks gives her a chance to feel like a child again; it brings her back to her childhood.

"I always loved putting on costumes and doing the performance... so I remember the very first time I performed with (studio's name) is like a 30-year-old adult. I was like, oh, man, this is like adult recitals for adults. I remember that feeling of putting on makeup and choosing your outfit and all of that... it kind of did feel like a return to childhood because... when you're a kid, you get a lot of opportunities to like do recitals and perform. But usually when you grow up, you don't really have a space or an opportunity to do that. And so, it was fun to discover that. And I think that's been a big reason why I've gotten addicted to aerial... for example, we just finished a showcase and I'm already thinking about the next showcase. Whenever I come into class and we learn things, I write that down.... Oh, I want to use that for my next showcase. So, the fact that, you know, the end result of all of this learning is often me creating my own choreography and choosing the song and choosing the outfit... that's part of the reason why I'm so invested in doing it."

Theme 2: "Proud" feeling of accomplishment; Motivating and not boring: "does not feel like a workout"

Study participants mentioned that the Flow class is motivating and challenging. It is interesting and "addictive" in nature. They were able to experience a great workout without feeling bored like when they attempt to exercise at a gym. Becca's strength and health

improved with a fun type of movement (Flow class), whereas "lifting weights at a gym was boring." Similarly, Mandy shared that the Flow class is motivating because she can accomplish challenging goals in an enjoyable way, without sensing that she is working out.

"I don't like working out unless it's like fun. I'm not going to just sit there and do pushups or like equipment at a gym because that's just not entertaining at all. But with aerial, you're using muscles... you're by default strengthening in your arms without doing pushups, like just holding on for dear life. It's going to build muscles... so I definitely have gotten stronger without feeling like I'm working out."

Several students indicated that they enjoyed the Flow class because they could find pride in their achievements. It is challenging and fulfilling to create movement sequences and perform before others. It is "mentally rewarding... I can look at my video at the end of class and be like, I cannot believe I did that... it's like a mental sanity almost" (Alana). Alana breaks away from societal biases regarding what she is supposed to be doing for her age.

"...showing that I can do that. I'm so big in my age now, I'm 48 now, not being what society says you should be. And so, it's not normal really for someone to start that (aerial arts) at 45 and at 48 be doing that. But it just shows that you can. You don't have to give up or do what society tells you that you should do. So, for me, it is emotional because I'm able to do it. Yeah, that's really just, it's a proud feeling. And I know I'm teaching my daughters that they can do whatever they want to do."

Feeling accomplished was extremely motivating for Mandy: "...it was kind of addictive, like, oh, look what I can do." Taylor also discussed the "feeling of accomplishment" that links to her love for aerial arts.

"I always feel accomplished when I leave. Because with aerial... I have done things that I never thought would be possible for my body to do. So, it's a sense of looking back and being like, I did that. Because you look at a 17-foot ceiling with a piece of fabric hanging from it. And I feel like most people would look at that and say, 'no, there's no way.' But then you're an aerialist, you

do it. And it's just, again, I leave, and I look at me like I did that."

Similarly, the instructor mentioned that with practice one can succeed in aerial, which is rewarding and exciting.

"I was really big into hiking, but I was doing it alone for, like, a long time... I used to try to run, and, like, I would go to the gym, you know, every once in a while. I tried to be a gym person. But none of it stuck like this one (aerial sling) did. Like, you get the endorphins, but then I feel like you get little dopamine hits when you hit a milestone (in aerial), you know? Especially if there's something that I really want to try and I get it... There is, like, a high, you know? It's a runner's high... But it's not from overexertion. It's from succeeding. And with ariel, if you practice, you can succeed pretty quickly."

Both Mandy and Taylor have been able to transfer their aerial practice accomplishments to other areas in life.

"I mentioned doing things that you never would think your body would be capable of doing and then you do them. So, I've taken that approach to other things in my life where just because it seems hard or it seems impossible, it kind of fosters this; I can do the hard things. I can do things that maybe I look at and I think are impossible; with enough time, with enough support, you can accomplish these really hard things" (Taylor).

Theme 3: Improved strength, energy, stamina, and health

Several students mentioned that their love for aerial arts is linked to their need to improve their strength, stamina, and health. Many of them did not have enough energy to fulfill their daily responsibilities or participate in family activities. They suffered from health problems like rheumatoid arthritis, and they realized that they had to make a positive change in their lives, which was their involvement with aerial practice, including the Flow class.

"... honestly, my goal was to be able to play on the monkey bars again. That was my actual goal... because I went on a family hike, and I've

always had a lot of energy, even if I haven't been that strong, except that family hike, it was in the mountains, and I was the slowest one there, and I was just having to stop and rest, and stop and rest, and like, the family was at the top, and they were waiting for me for 30 minutes, and just so frustrating. And then there was a playground, where we were there, and they were all able to do stuff on the playground, and I just couldn't even consider doing anything, and I was just frustrated with my body, and with myself, and that was, it's like, either I make a change, or I don't" (Becca).

"I used to get like very out of breath, just like walking upstairs... it's definitely improved my stamina and my strength in general... a lot of aerialists are very deceivingly strong. You look at them and you don't think they're going to be that strong" (Nickie).

"I stopped jazzercise when my arthritis kicked up and it got really bad. I didn't really have energy. Like it was hard enough just to like get up and, home for the kids and then I had to take a nap... So, I didn't go back, but I just started with the yoga videos online. And then I started with the flexibility class because it was a lot of stretching and not a lot of cardio... once I realized that I could do the tumbling and do the silks, like my energy just came back. And I think diet combined with working out definitely helped it (rheumatoid arthritis) go away because my C-reactive protein was always in the red. And now the last lab results I got; it was in the green" (Mandy).

Discussion

Drawing on the philosophical underpinnings of Aristotle's concepts of *techne* and *phronesis* (practical wisdom/reasoning) (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999), the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the reasons for the long-lasting participation in a community-based aerial sling class (Flow) among adult women. In this study, *techne* refers to the movement-central skills acquired in performing arts like the Flow class. *Phronesis* reflects wisdom in decision making about leading the good life, which is influenced by the mastery of *techne*. Sensations of accomplishment,

confidence, strength, play, creativity, and free bodily expression can become motivating and meaningful leading to the wisdom of the long-lasting love of movement (Kosma, 2024a; 2024b; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018). Therefore, it was hypothesized that the techne-related (art movement) elements of the Flow class would be motivating and thus lead to the participants' decision to continue with the class and other similar exercise endeavors (link between techne and phronesis). The results will be discussed separately for each theme in relation to relevant literature and the study's philosophical framework,

Theme 1: Performativity, creativity, play

The study participants loved the aerial sling class – and kept on participating in the Flow class and other similar activities – because of its performativity and playful nature. Although students exemplified the importance of first learning relevant movement skills before putting choreographies together, it was the flow element of the class that motivated their continued participation in aerial sling and other similar activities. In other words, the “addictive” nature of the Flow class was its very artistic nature, in that the participants were able to put sequences together and “flow to music”; create pieces and perform before an audience or with their children; sense smooth transitions; add their own “vibe” to the artistic expression; and find the time and space to return to childhood (choose their own choreography, song, and outfit). The instructor, who encouraged freedom in expression and guided the whole process, emphasized that the flow elements of the class were key to improving skills; though skill learning is typically the first teaching step before the Flow students could experimentalize with creating choreographies. Although the combination of skill-based and performative elements in aerial silks has been shown to be key to improved performance among college students, it is the performative elements of those movement experiences that lead to the love of movement (Kosma & Erickson, 2020b; Kosma et al., 2021b). Conceptually, too, art movement within performing arts encompasses techne with sensations of flow, creativity, and expression that can lead to wise decisions regarding the love of such movement endeavors and future exercise participation (Kosma, 2024a; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018).

Another important aspect of this theme was the playful nature of the Flow class, in that participants were able to feel like children by creating and performing.

Given that the ideality of play is in art (Gadamer, 1975/2012) like in performing arts (Kosma, 2021, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c), it has been previously supported that physical theater (e.g., aerial silks) is viewed as playful among college students (Kosma et al., 2023b). It is possible that the playful nature of the Flow class led to sensations of love and “addiction,” which is different from feeling bored when trying to work out at a gym.

Theme 2: “Proud” feeling of accomplishment; Motivating and not boring: “does not feel like a workout”

Based on the results of the second theme, the motivating feeling of accomplishment, like performing difficult movement tasks and being physically and mentally challenged at an older age, accounted for the love of and long-term participation in the Flow class, among other similar classes. “Pride in achievement” and “defying expectations” (able to dance at an older age) was also linked to long-term adherence to a dance class among older women in Australia (Haynes et al., 2023). Participants in the current study were active and positive role models for their children, opposing societal bias regarding types of appropriate activities for mothers in their late 40s. Although the motivating nature of feeling accomplished in aerial silks has been previously reported among college students (Kosma & Erickson, 2020b), the uniqueness of this study is the fact that the participants contrasted the Flow class with other exercise classes they attempted to partake in. Specifically, they mentioned that in the Flow class they were becoming stronger and exercising their whole body without feeling like working out. The Flow class was exciting and not boring like when they tried to lift weights at a gym. Although they were greatly challenged, they immensely enjoyed the class, which also led to building their mental strength and managing life challenges. Based also on the results of Theme 1, the performative and playful nature of the Flow class (techne) may explain why the participants loved it and chose to continue with it vs. exercising at a gym.

Theme 3: Improved strength, energy, stamina, and health

Several study participants mentioned that the Flow class improved their energy, strength, stamina, and overall health. They were able to be physically active with their families and manage such conditions as rheumatoid arthritis. These positive changes in their lives were

additional reasons for their long-term participation in the Flow class, among other similar exercises. In a few other studies among college students, it was shown that aerial practice improved strength and energy (Kosma & Erickson, 2020b; Kosma et al., 2021a, 2021b). Similar health benefits of a dance class have been reported among older women (Haynes et al., 2023). In a recent review paper, it was shown that dance interventions are effective in improving the health of older adults (Hwang & Braun, 2015). The combination of such health benefits with a supportive dance atmosphere can also partially explain long program adherence (Coogan et al., 2021).

Study strengths, limitations, and future research

This is the first hermeneutic-qualitative, community-based empirical study to examine the reasons for the long-lasting participation in a community-based aerial sling class (Flow) among adult women. Based on Aristotle's concepts of *techne* and *phronesis* in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E/1999), it was hypothesized that the *techne*-related (art movement) elements of Flow would lead to the participants' wise decision to continue with the class and other similar exercise endeavors long term (link between *techne* and *phronesis*). Indeed, the community members of this study have been participating in the Flow class and other similar aerial arts classes for over nine months after its inception because of the class's *techne* elements, including creativity, performativity, play, skill mastery/accomplishment, and sensations of improved strength, energy, and health. Overall, the participants were physically capable of participating in this class, which may be challenging among people with physical disabilities and/or movement difficulties. Nevertheless, in future studies modified skill-based and performative aerial and non-aerial arts classes can be implemented for people with disabilities and even older populations. The study participants were all White women, and thus some of the class perspectives and/or exercise emphases may differ among men or people of other ethnicities. In future studies, examining perspectives of similar classes among diverse populations is warranted. This study involved only one community-based class; thus, in future research additional resources would be needed to deliver similar movement interventions on a larger scale. In this way, long-lasting active communities can be embraced, which is key to health and well-being.

Conclusion and Implications

To our knowledge, this was the first hermeneutic-qualitative, community-based research study to examine the reasons for the long-term participation in a community-based aerial sling class (Flow) among adult women. Based on the study results, the link between *techne* and *phronesis* was supported, in that study participants engaged in long-term participation in the Flow class and other similar classes because of the *techne* (artistic) elements of the movement class (Flow): performative and playful; challenging and motivating without feeling like a workout; and effective on increasing strength, energy, stamina, and overall health. Participants were challenged and felt accomplished, strong, and healthy. Therefore, they made the wise choice to continue with the class, among other similar movement endeavors. Exercise promoters should incorporate performative, creative, playful, and challenging elements in movement programming for the love of movement and long-lasting exercise participation. Kinesiology experts within community-based fitness settings could borrow aspects from performing arts and implement them in their programming, including music, free bodily exploration and creativity, and performances before an audience while making movement modifications for clinical populations. In this way, people can enjoy movement without feeling overwhelmed or bored.

Authors' Contribution

Study Design: MK; Manuscript Preparation: MK.

Ethical Approval

This is a concept-based paper. Data were not collected; thus, there is no need for an ethics committee approval.

Conflicts of Interest and Other Issues

The author declares that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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