

Redefining groove

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Disciplinary background A. Groove is a popular and widely-used concept in the field of music. Yet its precise definition remains elusive. Upon closer inspection, groove appears to be used as an umbrella term with various connotations depending on the musical era, the musical context, and the background of the individual using the term. For instance, from an ethnomusicological perspective, groove is defined as an “unspecifiable but ordered sense of something that is sustained in a distinctive, regular and attractive way, working to draw a listener in” (Feld, 1988, p.76).

Disciplinary background B. The term groove is under close inspection of music psychologists over the last couple of decades. Even though current research exhibit groove as a multifaceted phenomenon (Witek, 2017; Senn et al., 2020) with performance (Frühauf et al., 2013), music (Stupacher et al., 2016), and listener experience aspects (Danielsen, 2010); definition of groove remains rather simply as a: ‘pleasurable desire to move to music’ (Janata et al., 2012; Kowalewski et al., 2020; Senn et al., 2020). This multidimensionality and lack of a comprehensive understanding of the term have resulted in rather dissimilar definitions of groove being used across different studies, leading to phenomenological ambiguity.

Abstract

Thus, the primary motivation for this study was to explore different definitions and connotations of the term groove and provide a more holistic representation of what exactly constitutes groove.

For this aim 105 participants (61 women, 41 men, 3 other) took part in an extensive online survey. Participants aged from 16 to 54, originated from 19 different countries, with the majority of them reporting to be Finnish (N=56) or Turkish (N=23) nationals and students (N=59). Moreover, three levels of musical training were observed among the participants: Eight years and above (N=29), less than 8 years (N=35), and no musical training (N=41). Initially, participants rated their familiarity with the term on a 7-point Likert scale. Subsequently, they were asked to respond to the question “what makes a song ‘groove’ in your opinion” as a free-text, on voluntary based. 88 of participants provided groove descriptions.

Since the aim of this research was to review definitions of groove with a more holistic approach (in order to be inclusive for both well established and also novel factors pertaining with the concept of groove in the literature), a mixed data analysis method, abductive thematic analysis was preferred. Abduction is stated as “a creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.167).

The abductive thematic analysis revealed that participants’ groove descriptions fit into three main categories: music-, experience-, and individual differences related aspects. Based upon this analysis, we propose a contemporary working definition of the term groove as used in the field of music psychology: “Groove is a participatory experience (related to immersion, movement, enjoyment, and social connection) resulting from subtle interaction of specific music- (such as time- and pitch-related features), performance- and/or individual difference-related factors.”

Furthermore, in order to distinguish different aspects of groove that are associated with its perceived musical features and induced effects on listeners, we propose the terms perceived and induced

groove, in a similar manner as in the music and emotion literature (for a review see: Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Importantly, this specification will permit further research with a common language to refer to distinct aspects of groove and thus create a more profound understanding in groove literature.

Finally, we direct future studies to focus on the concept of groove under influence of different variables, such as the roles of individual differences (such as age, expertise and personality traits), execution of overt movements, or presences of others on listeners' perceived and induced groove experiences. These will further elucidate our understanding of what groove actually is.

Interdisciplinary implications. Contrary to its commonly accepted definition in music psychology, groove is not a simple concept, but one that arises from various interactions between a) the artists who are performing the music, (b) the musical elements that emerge during the performance, (c) its listeners and the artists, (d) the listeners as individuals, and (e) the listeners within a group. Thus, it can be said that groove is not solely a musical phenomenon but rather it concerns the participation of the other factors mentioned earlier. Thus, untangling the multidisciplinary of the concept, collaboration of the domains (such as music information retrieval, music performance, as well as individual and group psychology - including subdisciplines of movement and emotion research) would be necessary. Therefore, we hope that updating its definition and considering groove as a multifaceted phenomenon with its nuances will enable more profound future work in the fields of musicology.

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