Redefining Groove

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Abstract

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 individual using the term. Our aim in this paper was to explore different definitions and connotations of the term groove so as to reach a more detailed understanding of it. Consequently, in an online survey, 89 participants provided free-text descriptions of the term groove. A thematic analysis revealed that participants’ 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 differences-related factors.” Furthermore, we propose the terms perceived and induced groove to distinguish the different aspects of groove that are associated with its perceived musical features and induced effects on listeners. 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; for example, what are 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.

Keywords: groove, thematic analysis, musical features, immersion, movement, positive affect, social connection