Combinatorics, Probability and Computing (2008) 17, 559–575. © 2008 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0963548308009206 Printed in the United Kingdom

G-Intersection Theorems for Matchings and Other Graphs

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Received 17 August 2006; revised 1 May 2008

If G is a graph with vertex set $[n]$ then $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ is *G-intersecting* if, for all $A, B \in \mathscr{A}$, either $A \cap B \neq \emptyset$ or there exist $a \in A$ and $b \in B$ such that $a \sim_G b$.

The question of how large a k-uniform G-intersecting family can be was first considered by Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2], who identified two natural candidates for the extrema depending on the relative sizes of k and n and asked whether there is a sharp phase transition between the two. Our first result shows that there is a sharp transition and characterizes the extremal families when G is a matching. We also give an example demonstrating that other extremal families can occur.

Our second result gives a sufficient condition for the largest G-intersecting family to contain almost all k-sets. In particular we show that if C_n is the n-cycle and $k > \alpha n + o(n)$, where $\alpha = 0.266\ldots$ is the smallest positive root of $(1-x)^3(1+x) = 1/2$, then the largest C_n-intersecting family has size $(1 - o(1))\binom{n}{k}$.

Finally we consider the non-uniform problem, and show that in this case the size of the largest G-intersecting family depends on the matching number of G.

1. Introduction

The following generalization of the notion of an intersecting family was introduced by Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2]. If G is a graph with vertex set $[n]$ then $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ is *G-intersecting* if, for all $A, B \in \mathscr{A}$ either $A \cap B \neq \emptyset$ or there exist $a \in A$ and $b \in B$ such that $a \sim_G b$.

The question of how large a k-uniform G-intersecting family can be is a natural generalization of the Erdős–Ko–Rado problem; indeed, if G is the empty graph it is answered by the classical Erdős–Ko–Rado theorem [6].

† This author is a Royal Society University Research Fellow.

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Theorem 1.1 (Erdős–Ko–Rado 1938 [6]). *If $\mathscr{A} \subseteq \binom{[n]}{k}$ is intersecting then*

$$|\mathscr{A}| \leqslant \begin{cases} \binom{n-1}{k-1}, & 1 \leqslant k \leqslant n/2, \\ \binom{n}{k}, & n/2 < k \leqslant n. \end{cases}$$

Moreover, if $k < n/2$, then equality is attained if and only if $\mathscr{A}$ consists of all k-sets containing a fixed element of $[n]$; while (trivially), if $k > n/2$, then equality is attained if and only if $\mathscr{A} = \binom{[n]}{k}$.

For a graph G with vertex set $[n]$ and $1 \leqslant k \leqslant n$, we define

$$N(G,k) = \max\left\{|\mathscr{A}| : \mathscr{A} \subseteq \binom{[n]}{k} \text{ is } G\text{-intersecting}\right\}.$$

Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] were the first to consider the problem of determining $N(G,k)$. They identified two types of behaviour for the extrema depending on the relative sizes of k and n, mirroring the extremal behaviour of ordinary k-uniform intersecting families (as given by Theorem 1.1).

The *augmented neighbourhood* of $A \subseteq [n]$, denoted by $\Gamma^+(A)$, is the union of A and its neighbourhood in G. So a family $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ is G-intersecting if and only if, for all $A, B \in \mathscr{A}$, we have $A \cap \Gamma^+(B) \neq \emptyset$.

An obvious example of a k-uniform G-intersecting family is the collection of all k-sets meeting a fixed clique in G. For instance, if $G = C_n$ is the n-cycle, then

$$\mathscr{A} = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : A \cap \{1,2\} \neq \emptyset\right\}$$

is C_n-intersecting. However, $\mathscr{A}$ is not maximal: it can be extended to

$$\mathscr{B} = \mathscr{A} \cup \left\{B \in \binom{[n]}{k} : 3, n \in B\right\}.$$

More generally, if K is a clique in G and $M_1, M_2, \ldots, M_r \subseteq [n]\backslash K$ satisfy

$$K \subseteq \Gamma^+(M_i) \text{ for } 1 \leqslant i \leqslant r \quad \text{and} \quad M_i \cap \Gamma^+(M_j) \neq \emptyset, \quad i \neq j,$$

then

$$\mathscr{A}(K; M_1, \ldots, M_r) = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : A \cap K \neq \emptyset \text{ or } M_i \subseteq A \text{ for some } i\right\} \tag{1.1}$$

is also G-intersecting. We will call such a family a (G,k)-*star* with *centre*

$$C = K \cup \bigcup_{i=1}^{r} M_i.$$

Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] showed that if G is sparse and $k = O(n^{1/4})$, then the largest G-intersecting families are of this form. (More recently Bohman and Martin [3] gave an improvement, showing that a similar result also holds for $k = O(n^{1/2})$.) Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] also showed that if G is sparse with minimum

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degree δ and $k > cn$, where c is a constant satisfying $c - (1-c)^{\delta+1} > 0$, then

$$N(G,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}.$$

These two different types of extrema mirror the two cases of the Erdős–Ko–Rado theorem; however, there is a large gap between the values of k for which they are known to occur. Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] asked whether there is a sharp phase transition and whether other types of extrema exist.

Our first result in the next section (Theorem 2.1) shows that there is a sharp transition, and characterizes the extremal families when G is a perfect matching. We also give an example of a graph demonstrating that other types of extrema exist.

In Section 3 we give a sufficient condition for the largest G-intersecting family to contain almost all k-sets (Theorem 3.1). In particular we show that if C_n is the n-cycle and $k > \alpha n + o(n)$, where $\alpha = 0.266\ldots$ is the smallest positive root of $(1-x)^3(1+x) = 1/2$, then the largest C_n-intersecting family has size $(1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$ (Corollary 3.2). This improves an earlier bound of $k > 0.317n$ due to [2].

In Section 4 we consider the non-uniform problem, and show that in this case the size of the largest G-intersecting family depends on the matching number of G (Theorem 4.1).

We end the paper with some open problems and conjectures.

2. Matchings

Let M_n be a matching of order $n = 2t$ with edges $e_1, \ldots, e_t$, where $e_i = \{2i-1, 2i\}$. For $A \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ let $I_A = \{i \in [t] : A \cap e_i \neq \emptyset\}$ (so I_A indexes the edges that A meets). An obvious candidate for the largest M_n-intersecting family when k is small is

$$\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}} = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : 1 \in I_A\right\}.$$

The precise form of the extremal family when k is large will depend on the parity of t. For t odd let

$$\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}} = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : |I_A| > \frac{t}{2}\right\}.$$

For t even we can extend $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$ by adding half of those k-sets meeting exactly $t/2$ edges. To be precise, for t even let $\mathscr{B} \subseteq \binom{t}{t/2}$ be an (ordinary) intersecting family of maximum size $\frac{1}{2}\binom{t}{t/2}$. We define

$$\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}} = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : |I_A| > \frac{t}{2} \text{ or } I_A \in \mathscr{B}\right\}.$$

Note that both $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ and $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$ are M_n-intersecting.

The result of Bohman and Martin [3, Theorem 2] implies that $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ is a k-uniform M_n-intersecting family of maximum size for $k = O(n^{1/2})$, while the result of Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2, Theorem 7] implies that $N(M_n,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$ for $k > 0.38196n$. We can give the following result describing a sharp threshold for the behaviour of $N(M_n,k)$ and characterizing the extremal families.

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Theorem 2.1. *Let $n = 2t \geqslant 1000$, $1 \leqslant k \leqslant n$ and M_n be a matching of order n with edges $\{1,2\}, \{3,4\}, \ldots, \{n-1,n\}$. If $d = 1 - 2^{-1/2} = 0.29289\ldots$ then*

$$N(M_n,k) = \begin{cases} |\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}| = \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2}{k}, & k < dn, \\ |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}| = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}, & k > dn(1+\epsilon_n), \end{cases}$$

where $\epsilon_n = 30\sqrt{\frac{\log n}{n}} = o(1)$. Moreover, up to isomorphism, these bounds are only achieved by the families $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ and $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$ described above.

For the remainder of this section we will say that k is *small* (with respect to n) if $k < dn$ and k is *large* (with respect to n) if $k > dn(1+\epsilon_n)$.

Proof of Theorem 2.1. Let $\mathscr{A} \subseteq \binom{[n]}{k}$ be a k-uniform M_n-intersecting family of maximum size (so $|\mathscr{A}| = N(M_n,k)$). We define

$$\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A}) = \{I_A \subseteq [t] : A \in \mathscr{A}\}.$$

Note that the sets in $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ all have sizes in the range $\lceil k/2 \rceil$ up to k (since a k-set cannot meet less than $\lceil k/2 \rceil$ edges or more than k edges).

For $B \subseteq [t]$ define

$$W_k(B) = \left\{ A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : I_A = B \right\}.$$

So $W_k(B)$ is the family of all k-sets meeting precisely those edges indexed by B. The size of this family depends only on the size of B. For $1 \leqslant m \leqslant t$ let $w_k(m) = |W_k([m])|$ (so $w_k(m) \neq 0$ if and only if $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k$).

We break the proof down into a number of lemmas whose proofs we defer. Lemma 2.2 tells us that $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ is a maximal intersecting family in $\{B \subseteq [t] : \lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant |B| \leqslant k\}$. Together with Lemma 2.3, this allows us to reduce the problem of determining $N(M_n,k)$ to a weighted intersection problem for $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$, with the weight of a set $B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ given by $w_k(|B|)$.

Lemmas 2.4 to 2.7 establish various facts regarding the weights. In particular, Lemma 2.5 shows that the weights are unimodal; Lemma 2.6 shows that when k is small the weight of a set $B \subset [t]$, $|B| < t/2$ is greater than the weight of its complement while Lemma 2.7 shows that when k is large the total weight of all sets of size at most $t/2$ is negligible. Lemma 2.8 is a version of the local LYM inequality [4].

Lemma 2.2. *$\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ has the following properties.*

(a) *$\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ is intersecting.*
(b) *If $B \subseteq [t]$, $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant |B| \leqslant k$ and $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A}) \cup \{B\}$ is intersecting, then $B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$.*
(c) *If $B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$, $B \subset C \subseteq [t]$ and $|C| \leqslant k$, then $C \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$.*

Lemma 2.3. *If $A \in \mathscr{A}$, $B \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ and $I_A = I_B$, then $B \in \mathscr{A}$. Hence*

$$\mathscr{A} = \dot{\bigcup_{B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})}} W_k(B).$$

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Thus, if $\mathscr{A}_m = \{A \in \mathscr{A} : |I_A| = m\}$, $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) = \{B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A}) : |B| = m\}$ *and* $i_m(\mathscr{A}) = |\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A})|$, *then*

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| = i_m(\mathscr{A})w_k(m) \quad \text{and} \quad |\mathscr{A}| = \sum_{m=\lceil k/2\rceil}^{k} i_m(\mathscr{A})w_k(m).$$

Lemma 2.4.

$$w_k(m) = \begin{cases} 2^{2m-k}\binom{m}{k-m}, & \lceil k/2\rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Lemma 2.5. *There exists* $m^* = m^*(k,t)$ *such that* $\{w_k(m)\}_{m=\lceil k/2\rceil}^{k}$ *satisfies*

$$w_k(\lceil k/2\rceil) < \cdots < w_k(m^*) \geqslant w_k(m^*+1) > w_k(m^*+2) > \cdots > w_k(k).$$

That is, the sequence is strictly increasing up to a maximum which is attained at m^* *and possibly also attained at* m^*+1, *and thereafter the sequence is strictly decreasing.*

Lemma 2.6. *If* k *is small then* $m^* < t/2$. *Moreover, if* $\lceil k/2\rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k$ *and* $m < t/2$, *then* $w_k(m) > w_k(t-m)$.

Lemma 2.7. *If* k *is large, then* $m^* > t/2$ *and*

$$\sum_{m<t/2} w_k(m)\binom{t}{m} < \frac{1}{t}\binom{n}{k}.$$

Lemma 2.8. *If* $m_1 \leqslant m_2$, $\mathscr{B} \subseteq \binom{[t]}{m_2}$ *and*

$$\partial^{(m_1)}(\mathscr{B}) = \left\{C \in \binom{[t]}{m_1} : C \subseteq B \ \text{ for some } B \in \mathscr{B}\right\},$$

then

$$\frac{|\partial^{(m_1)}(\mathscr{B})|}{\binom{t}{m_1}} \geqslant \frac{|\mathscr{B}|}{\binom{t}{m_2}}.$$

Returning to the proof of Theorem 2.1, we suppose first that k is small and let $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$, $\mathscr{A}_m$, $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A})$ and $i_m(\mathscr{A})$ be as defined above. Lemma 2.3 implies that for $m < t/2$

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| + |\mathscr{A}_{t-m}| = i_m(\mathscr{A})w_k(m) + i_{t-m}(\mathscr{A})w_k(t-m). \tag{2.1}$$

By Lemma 2.2(a), $i_m(\mathscr{A}) + i_{t-m}(\mathscr{A})$ is the size of an intersecting family in $\binom{[t]}{m} \cup \binom{[t]}{t-m}$. Hence Lemma 2.6 and the Erdős–Ko–Rado theorem (Theorem 1.1) imply that

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| + |\mathscr{A}_{t-m}| \leqslant \binom{t-1}{m-1}w_k(m) + \binom{t-1}{t-m-1}w_k(t-m),$$

with strict inequality unless $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) \cup \mathscr{I}_{t-m}(\mathscr{A})$ consists of all sets in $\binom{[t]}{m} \cup \binom{[t]}{t-m}$ containing a fixed element of $[t]$ (which is the case for $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$). Finally, if t is even then Theorem 1.1

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implies that

$$|\mathscr{A}_{t/2}| \leqslant w_k(t/2)\frac{1}{2}\binom{t}{t/2}, \tag{2.2}$$

and again this is achieved by $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$. Hence $N(M_n,k) = |\mathscr{A}| \leqslant |\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}|$.

To see that $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ is (up to isomorphism) the unique extremal family, note that for equality to hold $\mathscr{I}_{\lceil k/2\rceil}(\mathscr{A})$ must consist of all $\lceil k/2\rceil$-sets containing a fixed element $i \in [t]$. Without loss of generality we may suppose that $i = 1$. Lemma 2.2(c) now implies that $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}} \subseteq \mathscr{A}$. Finally $k < dn$ implies that $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ is a maximal M_n-intersecting family and hence $\mathscr{A} = \mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$. (Indeed it is easy to check that $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ is a maximal M_n-intersecting family whenever $k \leqslant n/3$.) Note that this part of Theorem 2.1 holds for all values of n and $k < dn$ (the condition $n \geqslant 1000$ is only required for the k large case).

Now suppose that k is large, that is, $k > dn(1+\epsilon_n)$. If $k > t = n/2$ then $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}} = \binom{[n]}{k}$ and the result is trivial, so suppose that $k \leqslant t$. In this case Lemma 2.7 tells us that the maximum of $w_k(m)$ is achieved at $m^* > t/2$. By Lemma 2.5, $w_k(m)$ is strictly increasing for $m < m^*$ so $w_k(m) > w_k(t-m)$ for $t/2 < m \leqslant m^*$. By Lemma 2.2(a), $i_m(\mathscr{A}) + i_{t-m}(\mathscr{A})$ is the size of an intersecting family in $\binom{[t]}{m} \cup \binom{[t]}{t-m}$ so, for $t/2 < m \leqslant m^*$, $w_k(m) > w_k(t-m)$ implies that

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| + |\mathscr{A}_{t-m}| \leqslant \binom{t}{m} w_k(m), \tag{2.3}$$

with strict inequality unless $\mathscr{I}_{t-m}(\mathscr{A})$ is empty and $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) = \binom{[t]}{m}$ (which is the case for $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$).

If t is odd then (2.3) bounds the number of sets in $\mathscr{A}_m$ for $t - m^* \leqslant m \leqslant m^*$. However, if t is even then we note that $i_{t/2}(\mathscr{A})$ is the size of an intersecting family in $\binom{t}{t/2}$ and so (2.2) holds.

If $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) = \emptyset$ for $m < t - m^*$ then (2.3) and, in the case of t even (2.2), imply that $|\mathscr{A}| \leqslant |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}|$, with strict inequality unless $\mathscr{A} = \mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$. We suppose now, for a contradiction, that there exists $m < t - m^*$ such that $\mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) \neq \emptyset$. Let $m_0 < t - m^*$ be chosen[1] so that

$$\frac{i_{m_0}(\mathscr{A})}{\binom{t}{m_0}} = \max\left\{\frac{i_m(\mathscr{A})}{\binom{t}{m}} : m < t - m^*\right\}.$$

Let $\beta = i_{m_0}(\mathscr{A})/\binom{t}{m_0} > 0$. By Lemma 2.3 we have

$$\sum_{m<t-m^*} |\mathscr{A}_m| \leqslant \beta \sum_{m<t-m^*} w_k(m)\binom{t}{m}. \tag{2.4}$$

The complements of the sets in $\mathscr{I}_{m_0}(\mathscr{A})$ are all missing from $\mathscr{I}_{t-m_0}(\mathscr{A})$, which implies that, if $\mathscr{B} = \binom{[t]}{t-m_0} \backslash \mathscr{I}_{t-m_0}(\mathscr{A})$, then $|\mathscr{B}| \geqslant i_{m_0}(\mathscr{A}) = \beta\binom{t}{m_0}$. Recall that

$$\partial^{(m)}(\mathscr{B}) = \left\{C \in \binom{[t]}{m} : C \subseteq B \text{ for some } B \in \mathscr{B}\right\}.$$

[1] So the proportion of m_0-sets in $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ is maximal subject to $m_0 < t - m^*$.

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If $t/2 < m \leqslant t - m_0$ then Lemma 2.2(c) implies that $\partial^{(m)}(\mathscr{B}) \cap \mathscr{I}_m(\mathscr{A}) = \emptyset$, while Lemma 2.8 implies that

$$\frac{|\partial^{(m)}(\mathscr{B})|}{\binom{t}{m}} \geqslant \frac{|\mathscr{B}|}{\binom{t}{t-m_0}} \geqslant \beta.$$

Note that $m^* < t - m_0$, and hence, for $t/2 < m \leqslant m^*$,

$$i_m(\mathscr{A}) \leqslant \binom{t}{m} - |\partial^{(m)}(\mathscr{B})| \leqslant (1-\beta)\binom{t}{m}. \tag{2.5}$$

Now, if $t/2 < m \leqslant m^*$ then $w_k(m) > w_k(t-m)$, so (2.5) implies that

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| + |\mathscr{A}_{t-m}| \leqslant \binom{t}{m}((1-\beta)w_k(m) + \beta w_k(t-m)). \tag{2.6}$$

If $m < t - m^*$ then, by the definition of β,

$$|\mathscr{A}_m| \leqslant \beta \binom{t}{m} w_k(m), \tag{2.7}$$

while, trivially, if $m > m^*$ then $|\mathscr{A}_m| \leqslant w_k(m)\binom{t}{m}$. Together with (2.6), (2.7), and in the case of t even (2.2), this implies that

$$|\mathscr{A}| - |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}| \leqslant \sum_{m<t/2} \beta \binom{t}{m} w_k(m) - \sum_{t/2<m\leqslant m^*} \beta \binom{t}{m} w_k(m).$$

Now Lemma 2.7 implies that

$$|\mathscr{A}| - |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}| < \beta\left(\frac{1}{t}\binom{n}{k} - \sum_{t/2<m\leqslant m^*} \binom{t}{m} w_k(m)\right).$$

So we will have $|\mathscr{A}| < |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}|$ (and the proof will be complete) if we show that

$$\sum_{t/2<m\leqslant m^*} \binom{t}{m} w_k(m) \geqslant \frac{1}{t}\binom{n}{k}. \tag{2.8}$$

Let m_1 satisfy

$$w_k(m_1)\binom{t}{m_1} = \max\left\{w_k(m)\binom{t}{m} : \lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k\right\}.$$

Recall that

$$\sum_{m=\lceil k/2 \rceil}^{k} \binom{t}{m} w_k(m) = \binom{n}{k}$$

and $k \leqslant t$. Hence

$$\binom{t}{m_1} w_k(m_1) \geqslant \frac{1}{\frac{k}{2}+1}\binom{n}{k} \geqslant \frac{2}{t+2}\binom{n}{k}. \tag{2.9}$$

Since $m^* > t/2$, both $w_k(m)$ and $\binom{t}{m}$ are increasing in m for $m \leqslant t/2$ and decreasing in m for $m > m^*$ so $m_1 \in \{\lceil t/2 \rceil, \ldots, m^*\}$. If $m_1 \neq t/2$ then $t/2 < m_1 \leqslant m^*$, and so (2.9) implies that

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(2.8) holds. Otherwise t is even and $m_1 = t/2$, in which case (2.9) and $w_k(t/2+1) > w_k(t/2)$ imply that

$$\binom{t}{t/2+1} w_k(t/2+1) > \frac{t}{t+2}\binom{t}{t/2} w_k(t/2) \geqslant \frac{2t}{(t+2)^2}\binom{n}{k}.$$

This implies that (2.8) holds so long as $2t^2 \geqslant (t+2)^2$, which is true for $t \geqslant 5$. □

Proof of Lemma 2.2. If $A, B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ then there exist $C, D \in \mathscr{A}$ such that $A = I_C$ and $B = I_D$. Since $\mathscr{A}$ is M_n-intersecting so C and D must meet a common edge e_i. Hence $i \in A \cap B$ and so $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ is intersecting.

If Lemma 2.2(b) does not hold then there is $B \subseteq [t]$, with $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant |B| \leqslant k$ such that $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A}) \cup \{B\}$ is intersecting but $B \notin \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$. Now $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant |B| \leqslant k$ implies that $W_k(B) \neq \emptyset$ and so $\mathscr{B} = \mathscr{A} \cup W_k(B)$ is a k-uniform M_n-intersecting family satisfying $|\mathscr{B}| > |\mathscr{A}|$, contradicting the maximality of $|\mathscr{A}|$.

Finally (b) implies (c), since if $B \subset C$ and $B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ then $\mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A}) \cup \{C\}$ is also intersecting. □

Proof of Lemma 2.3. If $A \in \mathscr{A}$, $B \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ and $I_A = I_B$ then $\mathscr{A} \cup \{B\}$ is M_n-intersecting. So, by the maximality of $|\mathscr{A}|$, $B \in \mathscr{A}$. Hence

$$\mathscr{A} = \bigcup_{B \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})} W_k(B).$$

Moreover this is a disjoint union since if $B, C \in \mathscr{I}(\mathscr{A})$ and $B \neq C$ then $W_k(B) \cap W_k(C) = \emptyset$. The final part follows directly from the definitions. □

Proof of Lemma 2.4. If $m < \lceil k/2 \rceil$ or $m > k$ then no k-set meets m edges and hence $w_k(m) = 0$, so suppose that $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k$. Consider $A \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ meeting the first m edges of M_n (that is $A \in W_k([m])$). For such a set let a_i denote the number of edges it meets in exactly i elements, where $i = 1, 2$. Since $a_1 + a_2 = m$ and $a_1 + 2a_2 = k$ we have $a_1 = 2m - k$ and $a_2 = k - m$. Thus such a set is uniquely determined by choosing $k - m$ of the m edges from which to take both vertices and then choosing one of the two possible vertices from each of the remaining $2m - k$ edges. □

Proof of Lemma 2.5. We show first that if $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant m \leqslant k$ then

$$w_k(m)^2 > w_k(m+1)w_k(m-1). \tag{2.10}$$

First note that this holds for $m = \lceil k/2 \rceil$ or $m = k$ since in this case the right-hand side of (2.10) is zero while the left-hand side is positive. So suppose that $\lceil k/2 \rceil < m < k$. Now

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{w_k(m)^2}{w_k(m+1)w_k(m-1)} &= \frac{m(k-m+1)(2m-k+2)(2m-k+1)}{(m+1)(k-m)(2m-k)(2m-k-1)} \\ &> \frac{m(k-m+1)}{(m+1)(k-m)} \\ &> 1.\end{aligned}$$

Hence if $y_m = w_k(m)/w_k(m+1)$ then $\{y_m\}_{m=\lceil k/2 \rceil}^{k}$ is strictly increasing. This implies the result. □

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Proof of Lemma 2.6. Let k be small. We will assume that $t = 2s$ is even; the proof for t odd is essentially identical. By Lemma 2.5, if $w_k(s-1) > w_k(s)$ then $m^* < s$. Recall that since k is small we have $k \leqslant dn - 1$, where $d = 1 - 2^{-1/2}$ and $n = 2t = 4s$. Now

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{w_k(s-1)}{w_k(s)} &= \frac{(2s-k)(2s-k-1)}{4s(k-s+1)} \\ &> \frac{(2s-k-1)^2}{4s(k-s+1)} \\ &\geqslant 1.\end{aligned}$$

Hence $m^* < s = t/2$.

We now prove by induction on $a \geqslant 1$ that if $\lceil k/2 \rceil \leqslant s - a \leqslant k$ then $w_k(s-a) > w_k(s+a)$. (Note that we may suppose that $s + a \leqslant k$, since otherwise $w_k(s+a) = 0$.) For $a = 1$ this follows from $m^* \leqslant s - 1$ and Lemma 2.5, so suppose that $a \geqslant 2$ and the result holds for $a - 1$. It is sufficient to show that

$$\frac{w_k(s-a)}{w_k(s+a)} \geqslant \frac{w_k(s-(a-1))}{w_k(s+a-1)}, \tag{2.11}$$

since the right-hand side of (2.11) is strictly greater than 1 by our inductive hypothesis. We consider

$$\gamma = \frac{w_k(s-a)w_k(s+a-1)}{w_k(s+a)w_k(s-(a-1))}.$$

We wish to show that $\gamma \geqslant 1$. Now

$$\begin{aligned}\gamma &= \frac{(2s-2a-k+2)(2s-2a-k+1)(2s+2a-k)(2s+2a-k-1)}{16(s-a+1)(s+a)(k-s+a)(k-s-a+1)} \\ &> \frac{(2s-k+2a-1)^2(2s-k-2a-1)^2}{16((s^2-a^2)((k-s+1)^2-a^2)}.\end{aligned} \tag{2.12}$$

Since (2.12) is decreasing in k and $k < dn$ (since k is small) we may suppose that $k = dn - 1 = 4ds - 1$. Rearranging, we now need to check that

$$(s-2ds+a)^2(s-2ds-a)^2 - (s^2-a^2)((4ds-s)^2-a^2) \geqslant 0. \tag{2.13}$$

Differentiating (2.13) with respect to a we see that it is increasing in a, for $a > 0$ (the partial derivative is $16ad^2s^2$). Hence it is sufficient to check that (2.13) holds for $a = 0$, which it does with equality. □

For the proof of Lemma 2.7 we will require Azuma's inequality.

Lemma 2.9 (Azuma [1]). *If $Y_0, \ldots, Y_t$ is a martingale and $|Y_i - Y_{i-1}| \leqslant c_i$ for $1 \leqslant i \leqslant t$, then for any $\lambda > 0$*

$$\mathbb{P}(Y_t \geqslant Y_0 + \lambda) \leqslant \exp\left(\frac{-\lambda^2}{2\sum_{i=1}^t c_i^2}\right).$$

Proof of Lemma 2.7. Let k be large. We will assume that $t = 2s$ is even; the proof for t odd is essentially identical. By Lemma 2.5, if $w_k(s) < w_k(s+1)$ then $m^* > s$. Since k is

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large we have $k \geqslant dn + 4d = 4d(s+1)$, where $d = 1 - 2^{-1/2}$ and $n = 2t = 4s$. Now

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{w_k(s)}{w_k(s+1)} &= \frac{(2s-k+2)(2s-k+1)}{4(s+1)(k-s)} \\ &< \frac{(2s-k+2)^2}{4(s+1)(k-s-1)} \\ &\leqslant 1.\end{aligned}$$

Hence $m^* > s = t/2$.

We now need to show that

$$\sum_{m<t/2} w_k(m)\binom{t}{m} < \frac{1}{t}\binom{n}{k}. \tag{2.14}$$

If $A \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ is chosen uniformly at random and

$$I_A = \{i \in [t] : A \cap e_i \neq \emptyset\},$$

then

$$\mathbb{P}(|I_A| < t/2) = \sum_{m<t/2} \frac{w_k(m)\binom{t}{m}}{\binom{n}{k}}.$$

So it is sufficient to prove that

$$\mathbb{P}(|I_A| < t/2) < \frac{1}{t}. \tag{2.15}$$

For $j \in [n]$ let

$$X_j(A) = \begin{cases} 1, & j \in A, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Recall that M_n has edges $e_1, \ldots, e_t$, with $e_i = \{2i-1, 2i\}$. For $i \in [t]$ let $\mathscr{F}_i$ be the σ-algebra generated by $X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_{2i}$ and define $Y_i = \mathbb{E}(|[t]\backslash I_A| \mid \mathscr{F}_i)$. If $Y_0 = \mathbb{E}(|[t]\backslash I_A|)$ then $Y_0, Y_1, \ldots, Y_t$ is a martingale and

$$\mathbb{E}(|[t]\backslash I_A|) = \sum_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{P}(A \cap e_i = \emptyset) = \frac{t\binom{n-2}{k}}{\binom{n}{k}}.$$

The values of X_{2i-1} and X_{2i} can change the expected number of edges which A meets among $e_{i+1}, \ldots, e_t$ by at most two, as well as determining whether or not $i \in I_A$. Hence

$$|Y_i - Y_{i-1}| \leqslant 3.$$

Azuma's inequality then implies that

$$\mathbb{P}\left(Y_t > t\frac{\binom{n-2}{k}}{\binom{n}{k}} + \sqrt{18t\log t}\right) < \frac{1}{t}.$$

Now $|I_A| = t - Y_t$ so the proof will be complete if we show that (for k large)

$$\frac{t\binom{n-2}{k}}{\binom{n}{k}} + \sqrt{18t\log t} \leqslant \frac{t}{2}.$$

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This will hold if

$$(2t-k)^2 \leqslant 2t^2 - 4t^2\sqrt{\frac{18\log t}{t}}.$$

A routine calculation now shows that this holds for $k > dn\big(1+30\sqrt{\frac{\log n}{n}}\big)$ and $n = 2t \geqslant 1000$. □

Proof of Lemma 2.8. This is a simple exercise in double counting. Each set $B \in \mathscr{B}$ contains $\binom{m_2}{m_1}$ subsets of size m_1, while each set $C \in \partial^{(m_1)}(\mathscr{B})$ is contained in $\binom{t-m_1}{m_2-m_1}$ supersets of size m_2 (and thus in at most this number of sets in $\mathscr{B}$). Hence

$$|\partial^{(m_1)}(\mathscr{B})|\binom{t-m_1}{m_2-m_1} \geqslant |\mathscr{B}|\binom{m_2}{m_1},$$

which implies the result. □

In fact the same value $d = 1-2^{-1/2}$ is a threshold for a slightly more general class of graphs.

Theorem 2.10. *If G_n is the graph of order n with w_n pairwise disjoint edges and $n-2w_n$ isolated vertices, where $w_n \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$, then there exists $\delta_n = o(1)$ such that*

$$N(G_n,k) = \begin{cases} \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2}{k}, & k < dn, \\ (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}, & k > dn(1+\delta_n). \end{cases}$$

Proof. For $k < dn$ note that G_n is a subgraph of M_n and so $N(G_n,k) \leqslant N(M_n,k)$. Moreover $\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}$ is a (G_n,k)-star of size $\binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2}{k}$.

For $k > dn(1+\delta_n)$ a similar proof to that already given for Theorem 2.1 can be used (for more details see Corollary 3.3 in the next section). □

Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] asked whether other types of extremal G-intersecting families can occur – apart from families which are either (G,k)-stars or consist of almost all of $\binom{[n]}{k}$. We show that they can, by giving a simple example of a graph for which (for appropriate values of k) the extremal family must be of a third type.

Let H_n be the graph with vertex set $[n]$ and edges $\{1,2\},\{3,4\},\{5,6\}$. The following family is H_n-intersecting:

$$\mathscr{A}_2 = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : A \text{ meets at least two of the three edges of } H_n\right\}.$$

Note that

$$|\mathscr{A}_2| = \binom{n}{k} - 3\binom{n-4}{k} + 2\binom{n-6}{k}.$$

Let $\epsilon > 0$ be small, $n \geqslant n_0(\epsilon)$ be large and $1-2^{-1/2}+\epsilon < k/n < 1/2-\epsilon$. Since $k/n > 1-2^{-1/2}+\epsilon$ it is straightforward to check that $\mathscr{A}_2$ is larger than the largest (H_n,k)-star. (The largest (H_n,k)-star consists of all k-sets meeting a fixed edge of H_n and so has size $\binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2}{k}$.) Moreover, $N(H_n,k) \neq (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$, since $k/n < 1/2-\epsilon$ implies (by the

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Erdős–Ko–Rado theorem) that any H_n-intersecting family contains at most $\binom{n-7}{k-1}$ of the sets in $\binom{[n]\setminus[6]}{k}$, so $N(H_n,k) \leqslant \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-7}{k}$.

Hence, if $\mathscr{B}$ is a k-uniform H_n-intersecting family of maximum size then $\mathscr{B}$ does not contain almost all k-sets and $\mathscr{B}$ is not an (H_n,k)-star. We do not know what form $\mathscr{B}$ can take, only that it must be of some new third type; however, $\mathscr{A}_2$ is an obvious candidate extremal family.

3. General k-uniform problem: k large

The conclusion of Theorem 2.1 for k large can be extended to give an analogous result in a more general setting. The exact formulation of this generalization (Theorem 3.1) is rather ugly; however, we give two natural corollaries (Corollaries 3.2 and 3.3). Recall the definition (1.1) of a (G,k)-star with centre C from the Introduction.

Theorem 3.1 has the following intuitive interpretation: if a largest (G,k)-star contains slightly more than half of all k-sets and there are lots of 'independent' (G,k)-stars of this size then the 'majority family', consisting of all k-sets belonging to more than half of these (G,k)-stars, contains almost all k-sets. (Idea of proof: a random k-set belongs to any particular largest (G,k)-star with probability $1/2+\epsilon$, so with high probability it belongs to a majority of them.)

Theorem 3.1. *Let $\{G_n\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ be a sequence of graphs of order n and $1 \leqslant k \leqslant n$. If the following three conditions hold for all n sufficiently large, then $N(G_n,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$.*

(i) *There exist isomorphic (G_n,k)-stars: $\mathscr{A}_1^*, \mathscr{A}_2^*, \ldots, \mathscr{A}_{w_n}^*$ with pairwise disjoint centres $C_1, C_2, \ldots, C_{w_n}$ such that $w_n \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$.*

(ii) *The common size of the centres of the $\mathscr{A}_i^*$ is γ_n.*

(iii) *Each of the $\mathscr{A}_i^*$ has size S_n satisfying*

$$S_n \geqslant \left(\frac{1}{2} + (\gamma_n+1)\sqrt{\frac{\log w_n}{w_n}}\right)\binom{n}{k}.$$

It is natural to ask whether the conditions of Theorem 3.1 are in fact best possible. In general we have no idea, but we give two conjectures in Section 5 of cases when we believe they are.

Let C_n^p denote the pth power of the n-cycle (that is, the graph with vertex set $[n]$ and $i \sim_{C_n^p} j$ if and only if $1 \leqslant \mathrm{dist}(i,j) \leqslant p$, where distance is measured around the cycle).

Corollary 3.2. *Let $p \geqslant 1$ be a constant and let α_p be the smallest positive root of*

$$(1-x)^{2p+1}(1+px) = 1/2.$$

There exists $\epsilon_{p,n} = o(n)$ such that if $k \geqslant \alpha_p n + \epsilon_{p,n}$ then $N(C_n^p,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$. In particular, $N(C_n,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$ for $k > 0.266n$.

Corollary 3.3. *If $r \geqslant 1$ is a constant and the number of pairwise disjoint r-cliques in G_n is unbounded as $n \to \infty$ then there exists $\epsilon_{r,n} = o(n)$ such that $N(G_n,k) = (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}$, for $k > (1-2^{-1/r})n + \epsilon_{r,n}$.*

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We note that both Corollaries 3.2 and 3.3 could be extended to the case of p, r non-constant, but for simplicity we omit these extensions.

Proof of Theorem 3.1. Suppose that $\{G_n\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$, $\mathscr{A}_1^*, \mathscr{A}_2^*, \ldots, \mathscr{A}_{w_n}^*$, and $C_1, C_2, \ldots, C_{w_n}$ satisfy conditions (i)–(iii). For $A \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ let

$$\lambda(A) = \#\{i \in [w_n] : A \in \mathscr{A}_i^*\}$$

and define

$$\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}} = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : \lambda(A) > w_n/2\right\}.$$

Clearly $\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$ is G_n-intersecting, since if $A, B \in \mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}$ then there exists $i \in [w_n]$ such that $A, B \in \mathscr{A}_i^*$, and $\mathscr{A}_i^*$ is G_n-intersecting (since it is a (G_n, k)-star). We will adapt the proof method of Theorem 2.1 to show that $|\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}| = (1 - o(1))\binom{n}{k}$.

Let $A \in \binom{[n]}{k}$ be chosen uniformly at random. For $j \in [n]$ let

$$X_j(A) = \begin{cases} 1, & j \in A, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Since the centres $C_1, C_2, \ldots, C_{w_n}$ are pairwise disjoint and have common size γ_n we may suppose that for $i \in [w_n]$ we have $C_i = [(i-1)\gamma_n + 1, i\gamma_n]$. For $i \in [w_n]$ let $\mathscr{F}_i$ be the σ-algebra generated by $X_1(A), X_2(A), \ldots, X_{i\gamma_n}(A)$. (That is, we condition on how A meets the centres of $\mathscr{A}_1^*$, $\mathscr{A}_2^*$, …, A_i^*.) Let $Y_0 = \mathbb{E}(w_n - \lambda(A))$ and for $i \in [w_n]$ define $Y_i = \mathbb{E}(w_n - \lambda(A)|\mathscr{F}_i)$. Now $Y_0, Y_1, \ldots, Y_{w_n}$ is a martingale and, since each centre has size γ_n, we have

$$|Y_i - Y_{i-1}| \leqslant \gamma_n + 1,$$

for $i \in [w_n]$. Moreover,

$$Y_0 = w_n\left(1 - \frac{S_n}{\binom{n}{k}}\right) \leqslant \frac{w_n}{2} - (\gamma_n + 1)\sqrt{w_n \log w_n}.$$

Applying Azuma's inequality (Lemma 2.9), we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{P}(A \notin \mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}) &= \mathbb{P}(Y_{w_n} \geqslant w_n/2) \\ &\leqslant \mathbb{P}(Y_{w_n} \geqslant Y_0 + (\gamma_n + 1)\sqrt{w_n \log w_n}) \\ &\leqslant \frac{1}{\sqrt{w_n}} \\ &= o(1). \end{aligned}$$

The result now follows. □

Proof of Corollary 3.2. A largest (C_n^p, k)-star, $\mathscr{C}^*$, is given by taking a largest clique K (of order $p+1$) and all $\binom{p+1}{2}$ pairs of vertices $\{i, j\} \in \binom{[n]\setminus K}{2}$ satisfying $i \not\sim_{C_n^p} j$ and $K \subseteq \Gamma^+(\{i, j\})$. Hence

$$|\mathscr{C}^*| = \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2p-1}{k} - p\binom{n-2p-2}{k-1}.$$

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Note that the centre of $\mathscr{C}^*$ has size $3p+1$. Moreover, the number of (C_n^p, k)-stars of maximum size with pairwise disjoint centres is at least $\lfloor n/(3p+1) \rfloor \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$. (So conditions (i) and (ii) of Theorem 3.1 hold.)

Writing $c = k/n$ we have

$$|\mathscr{C}^*| \geqslant \left(1 - (1-c)^{2p+1}(1+cp) + O\left(\frac{1}{n}\right)\right)\binom{n}{k}.$$

Hence, for a suitable choice of $\epsilon_{p,n}$ (which can clearly be taken to satisfy $\epsilon_{p,n} = o(n)$), if $k \geqslant \alpha_p n + \epsilon_{p,n}$ then condition (iii) of Theorem 3.1 also holds and the result follows. □

Proof of Corollary 3.3. This is almost identical to the proof of Corollary 3.2 so we give only a sketch. Let $K_1, K_2, \ldots, K_{w_n}$ be pairwise disjoint r-cliques in G_n, with $w_n \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$. If

$$\mathscr{A}_i^* = \left\{A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : A \cap K_i \neq \emptyset\right\}$$

then $|\mathscr{A}_i^*| = \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-r}{k}$. Conditions (i) and (ii) of Theorem 3.1 hold with $\gamma_n = r$. Moreover, there exists $\epsilon_{r,n} = o(n)$ such that if $k > (1-2^{-1/r})n + \epsilon_{r,n}$ then condition (iii) also holds. The result now follows. □

4. Non-uniform G-intersecting families

The question of how large a non-uniform intersecting family $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ can be is rather easy: $\mathscr{A}$ cannot contain both a set and its complement and so $|\mathscr{A}| \leqslant 2^{n-1}$; moreover, this bound can attained in numerous different ways.

The non-uniform G-intersection problem is also easier to solve than the k-uniform version. For a graph G of order n let

$$N(G) = \max\{|\mathscr{A}| : \mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]} \text{ is } G\text{-intersecting}\}.$$

The size of the extremal family depends on the matching number, $m(G)$, the size of a largest matching in G.

Theorem 4.1. *If $\{G_n\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ is a sequence of non-empty graphs of order n with $m(G_n)$ non-decreasing then either $m(G_n) \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$, in which case $N(G_n) = (1-o(1))2^n$, or there exists $m \geqslant 1$ such that $m(G_n) = m$ for all $n \geqslant n_0$ and*

$$1 - e^{-m/8} \leqslant \mathbb{P}(\mathrm{Bin}(m, 3/4) > m/2) \leqslant \frac{N(G_n)}{2^n} \leqslant 1 - 2^{-(2m+1)}. \tag{4.1}$$

In the latter case both bounds are attainable.

Lemma 4.2. *Let G be a graph of order n with a matching of size $m \geqslant 1$. Then*

$$\frac{N(G)}{2^n} \geqslant \mathbb{P}(\mathrm{Bin}(m, 3/4) > m/2) \geqslant 1 - e^{-m/8}.$$

Proof. Take a matching M of size m and define

$$\mathscr{M}_{\mathrm{maj}} = \{A \in 2^{[n]} : A \text{ meets } > m/2 \text{ of the edges in } M\}. \tag{4.2}$$

Note that $\mathscr{M}_{\mathrm{maj}}$ is G-intersecting.

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If we select a set $A \in 2^{[n]}$ uniformly at random by choosing each $i \in [n]$ independently with probability $1/2$, then A meets any edge $e \in M$ independently with probability $3/4$. Hence, if $X \sim \mathrm{Bin}(m, 3/4)$ then

$$\mathbb{P}(A \in \mathscr{M}_{\mathrm{maj}}) = \mathbb{P}(X > m/2).$$

Hoeffding's inequality [7] implies that this is at least $1 - e^{-m/8}$ and the result follows. □

Proof of Theorem 4.1. Since $m(G_n)$ is increasing, either $m(G_n) \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$ or there exists $m \geqslant 1$ such that $m(G_n) = m$ for all $n \geqslant n_0$. In the former case Lemma 4.2 implies that $N(G_n) = (1 - o(1))2^n$, so suppose that $m(G_n) = m$ for all $n \geqslant n_0$. Lemma 4.2 now implies that the lower bound in (4.1) holds. For the upper bound consider a maximal matching in G_n: this contains at most $2m$ vertices. Let $W \subseteq [n]$ be the other vertices of G_n. Since W is the complement of a maximal matching it is an independent set, and so if $A, B \subseteq 2^W$ are G_n-intersecting then $A \cap B \neq \emptyset$. Hence, if $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ is G_n-intersecting then it contains at most half of the sets from 2^W. The fact that $|W| \geqslant n - 2m$ yields the upper bound in (4.1).

Note that if G_n is the union of a clique of order $2m + 1$ and $n - 2m - 1$ isolated vertices then the upper bound in (4.1) is sharp. (The family of all sets meeting the clique is G_n-intersecting and of the correct size.)

To see that the lower bound in (4.1) is also attainable requires slightly more work. We claim that if G_n is the union of a matching M on m edges and $n - 2m$ isolated vertices, then the family $\mathscr{M}_{\mathrm{maj}}$ defined in (4.2) is a largest G_n-intersecting family. (We will assume for simplicity that m is odd; if m is even a similar argument will work.)

Let $\mathscr{A} \subseteq 2^{[n]}$ be a G_n-intersecting family of maximum size. Let $E = \{e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_m\}$ be the m edges of the matching and let $V = \{v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_{n-2m}\}$ be the $n - 2m$ isolated vertices. For $A \subseteq E$ and $B \subseteq V$ let

$$\mathscr{S}(A, B) = \{C \in 2^{[n]} : A = \{e \in E : C \cap e \neq \emptyset\} \text{ and } B = \{v \in V : v \in C\}\}.$$

So $\mathscr{S}(A, B)$ contains those sets which meet precisely those edges in A and contain precisely those isolated vertices in B.

First note that if $A \subseteq E$ and $B \subseteq V$ then $|\mathscr{S}(A, B)| = 3^{|A|}$. Secondly, if $A \subseteq E$ and $B \subseteq V$ then at most one of $\mathscr{A} \cap \mathscr{S}(A, B)$ and $\mathscr{A} \cap \mathscr{S}(E \backslash A, V \backslash B)$ can be non-empty (otherwise $\mathscr{A}$ is not G_n-intersecting). Moreover, the maximality of $\mathscr{A}$ implies that if $\mathscr{A} \cap \mathscr{S}(A, B) \neq \emptyset$ then $\mathscr{S}(A, B) \subseteq \mathscr{A}$. Finally, note that if, for each $A \subseteq E$ and $B \subseteq V$, we take the larger of $\mathscr{S}(A, B)$ and $\mathscr{S}(E \backslash A, V \backslash B)$, then the resulting family is at least as large as $\mathscr{A}$. However, this family is $\mathscr{M}_{\mathrm{maj}}$. □

5. Open problems and conjectures

An analogue of Theorem 2.1 should surely hold when $G_{r,n} = K_1 \dot{\cup} K_2 \dot{\cup} \cdots \dot{\cup} K_t$ is the disjoint union of r-cliques, where $r > 2$ is a constant and $n = rt$. Indeed, by Corollary 3.3 we have $N(G_{r,n}, k) = (1 - o(1))\binom{n}{k}$ for $k > d_r n(1 + o(1))$ (where $d_r = 1 - 2^{-1/r}$). Moreover, if $k < d_r n(1 - o(1))$ then we can prove that $N(G_{r,n}, k) = \big(1 + o(1)\big)\big(\binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-r}{k}\big)$. However, an exact version should hold, so we make the following conjecture.

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Conjecture 5.1. *If $r > 2$ is a constant, $G_{r,n}$ is a disjoint union of r-cliques and $d_r = 1 - 2^{-1/r}$, then there exists $\delta_{r,n} = o(1)$ such that*

$$N(G_{r,n},k) = \begin{cases} \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-r}{k}, & k < d_r n(1-\delta_{r,n}), \\ (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}, & k > d_r n(1+\delta_{r,n}). \end{cases}$$

Moreover, the extremal families are unique up to isomorphism.

Since there is a small range of values of k for which Theorem 2.1 fails to determine $N(M_n,k)$, we ask the following obvious question.

Question 5.2. *Is $N(M_n,k) = \max\{|\mathscr{A}_{\text{pair}}|, |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}|\}$ for all values of k and n?*

Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2] made the following conjecture concerning the cycle.

Conjecture 5.3 (Bohman, Frieze, Ruszinkó and Thoma [2]). *There is a constant c such that, for any fixed $\epsilon > 0$,*

$$N(C_n,k) = \begin{cases} \binom{n}{k} - \binom{n-2}{k} + \binom{n-4}{k-2}, & k < (c-\epsilon)n, \\ (1-o(1))\binom{n}{k}, & k > (c+\epsilon)n. \end{cases}$$

Given our result for cycles (Corollary 3.2), we make the following conjecture.

Conjecture 5.4. *Conjecture 5.3 is true with $c = 0.266\ldots$, the smallest positive root of $(1-x)^3(1+x) = 1/2$.*

Given our example showing that there exist graphs and values of k for which the extremal k-uniform G-intersecting families are neither (G,k)-stars nor almost all of $\binom{[n]}{k}$, we pose the following question.

Question 5.5. *Is it true that for any graph G and $1 \leqslant k \leqslant n$, there exist (G,k)-stars $\mathscr{A}_1^*,\ldots,\mathscr{A}_t^*$ such that $N(G,k) = |\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}}|$? Here, for t odd,*

$$\mathscr{A}_{\text{maj}} = \left\{ A \in \binom{[n]}{k} : A \text{ belongs to } > t/2 \text{ of the } \mathscr{A}_i^* \right\},$$

and for t even we extend this family to include as many k-sets as possible that belong to exactly $t/2$ of the $\mathscr{A}_i^*$.

We note that a result of Erdős, Frankl and Katona [5] implies that a positive answer to this question would yield a positive answer to Question 5.2.

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