

6. The number of proper 4-colorings of a graph

Objekttyp: **Chapter**

Zeitschrift: **L'Enseignement Mathématique**

Band (Jahr): **40 (1994)**

Heft 1-2: **L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE**

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

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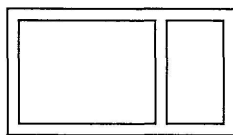
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For example, all elements of weight 3 in $K_{m,n}$ can be represented (up to proper size and location) by the following picture:



or its vertical analogue. This picture represents a codeword of the form

$$E(k, l; r_1, r_2) + E(k, l; r_1, r_3) + E(k, l; r_2, r_3) .$$

Thus, the number of codewords of weight 3 in $K_{m,n}$ is equal to

$$w_3(K_{m,n}) = \binom{m}{2} \binom{n}{3} + \binom{m}{3} \binom{n}{2} .$$

Similarly, one can show that

$$w_4(K_{m,n}) = 3 \binom{m}{2} \binom{n}{4} + 9 \binom{m}{3} \binom{n}{3} + 3 \binom{m}{4} \binom{n}{2} ;$$

$$w_5(K_{m,n}) = 12 \binom{m}{2} \binom{n}{5} + 72 \binom{m}{3} \binom{n}{4} + 72 \binom{m}{4} \binom{n}{3} + 12 \binom{m}{5} \binom{n}{2} + 9 \binom{m}{3} \binom{n}{3} .$$

As a last remark, note that an upper bound for the weights in the associated code L_f is given by $\frac{1}{8}n^3(n-1)$, and that this bound is actually attained for some n if and only if there exists a Hadamard matrix of order n . This follows from, say, Corollary 3.

6. THE NUMBER OF PROPER 4-COLORINGS OF A GRAPH

Let $G = (V, E)$ be a simple graph (no loops, no multiple edges) with vertex set V and edge set E . We will identify V with $\{1, \dots, n\}$, and denote the cardinality of E by e .

A *4-coloring* of G is the assignment to every vertex of one among four fixed colors; such a coloring is *proper* if the colors assigned to the end vertices of any edge are distinct. For a survey on the 4-colorings of planar graphs, see [SK].

We will count the number of proper 4-colorings of G , in terms of the weight enumerator of a certain code of length $3e$.

STEP 1. *The defining equations for proper 4-colorings.*

As our palette of colors, we will choose the 4-set $\{1, -1\}^2$. The space of all 4-colorings of G can thus be identified with $\{1, -1\}^{2n}$, for example as follows:

Convention. If $p = (p_1, \dots, p_{2n}) \in \{1, -1\}^{2n}$, then the pair (p_i, p_{i+n}) represents the color assigned to vertex i , for $i = 1, \dots, n$.

Consider now $2n$ variables $x_1, \dots, x_{2n}$, and define

$$g_{i,j} := (1 + x_i x_j) (1 + x_{i+n} x_{j+n})$$

for $1 \leq i, j \leq n$.

If p is a 4-coloring of G , then $g_{i,j}(p) = 0$ if and only if the colors assigned to vertices i and j are distinct.

Thus, a 4-coloring p of G is proper if and only if

$$g_{i,j}(p) = 0 \quad \text{for all } (i,j) \in E.$$

STEP 2. *Reduction to a single equation.*

Let

$$g := \sum_{(i,j) \in E} g_{i,j}^2.$$

By construction, g satisfies the following properties:

- (1) $g(p) \geq 0$ for all 4-colorings p ;
- (2) $g(p) = 0$ if and only if p is proper.

Developing the expression for g , we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned} g &= \sum_E g_{i,j}^2 \\ &= \sum_E (1 + x_i x_j + x_{i+n} x_{j+n} + x_i x_j x_{i+n} x_{j+n})^2 \\ &= 4 \sum_E (1 + x_i x_j + x_{i+n} x_{j+n} + x_i x_j x_{i+n} x_{j+n}) \\ &= 4e + 4f, \end{aligned}$$

where

$$f := \sum_E (x_i x_j + x_{i+n} x_{j+n} + x_i x_j x_{i+n} x_{j+n}).$$

(Here again, the computation was performed modulo $x_i^2 = 1$ for all i .)

Obviously, f satisfies the following properties:

- (1) $f(p) \geq -e$ for all 4-colorings p ;
- (2) $f(p) = -e$ if and only if p is proper.

STEP 3. *The code associated with f .*

Let $K_G := L_f^\perp$ be the dual of the code L_f associated with f . To describe it, we consider the map

$$\begin{aligned}\phi_G: \mathbf{F}_2^{3e} &\rightarrow \mathbf{F}_2^{2n} \\ E_{i,j} &\mapsto e_i + e_j \\ E_{i+n,j+n} &\mapsto e_{i+n} + e_{j+n} \\ E_{i+2n,j+2n} &\mapsto e_i + e_j + e_{i+n} + e_{j+n} \quad ((i,j) \in E)\end{aligned}$$

where $\{E_{i,j}, E_{i+n,j+n}, E_{i+2n,j+2n}\}_{(i,j) \in E}$ and $\{e_i\}_{i \in V}$ denote the standard bases of the left and right spaces, respectively. By construction, $K_G = \text{Ker}(\phi_G)$.

Here again, as a direct consequence of Theorem 4 and of the stated properties of f , we have:

THEOREM 7. *Let K_G be the code of length $3e$ defined above, and let $P_G(T)$ denote its weight enumerator. Then, the number $\chi_G(4)$ of proper 4-colorings of G , is given by*

$$\chi_G(4) = \frac{1}{4^{e-n} e!} P_G^{(e)}(-1),$$

where $P_G^{(e)}(-1)$ denotes the value at -1 of the e -th derivative of $P_G(T)$.

Proof. Apply the formula of Theorem 4 by replacing

- N , the length of the code, by $3e$;
- v , a lower bound for the range of f , by $-e$;
- n , the number of variables in f , by $2n$. □

Note that there are some obvious elements of weight 3 in K_G , namely

$$E_{i,j} + E_{i+n,j+n} + E_{i+2n,j+2n} \quad ((i,j) \in E).$$

More interestingly, every cycle of length r in G gives rise to at least 3 elements of weight r in K_G . Indeed, if $(i_1, \dots, i_r)$ is a cycle, then

$$E_{i_1+kn, i_2+kn} + E_{i_2+kn, i_3+kn} + \dots + E_{i_r+kn, i_1+kn} \in K_G,$$

for $k = 0, 1, 2$.

One can go a little bit further. A somewhat technical computation shows that $P_G(T)$ can be decomposed as follows:

$$P_G(T) = (1 + T^3)^e P_{\tilde{K}} \left(\frac{T}{1 - T + T^2} \right),$$

where $\tilde{K}$ is the $\mathbf{F}_4$ -code defined by the exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow \tilde{K} \rightarrow \mathbf{F}_4^e \rightarrow \mathbf{F}_4^n,$$

with weight enumerator $P_{\tilde{K}}(T)$. (The map on the right sends the basis vector corresponding to an edge, to the formal sum of its two endvertices.)

With the above formula, we find that $P_G^{(e)}(-1) = 3^e e! P_{\tilde{K}}(-\frac{1}{3})$. Plugging this into Theorem 7, we obtain

$$\chi_G(4) = \frac{3^e}{4^{e-n}} P_{\tilde{K}}\left(-\frac{1}{3}\right).$$

In particular, G is 4-colorable if and only if $P_{\tilde{K}}(-\frac{1}{3}) \neq 0$. See also [E, Theorem 5.7], for a different formulation and proof of this formula.

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(Reçu le 16 novembre 1993)

Shalom Eliahou

Section de Mathématiques

Université de Genève

C.P. 240

1211 Genève 24, Switzerland

e-mail: shalom@sc2a.unige.ch