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MENGERIAN THEOREMS FOR PATHS OF BOUNDED LENGTH

by

L. LOVÁSZ (Szeged), V. NEUMANN-LARA (México) and M. PLUMMER (Nashville)

Dedicated to the memory of FERNANDO ESCALANTE

1. Introduction

Let u and v be non-adjacent points in a connected graph G. A classical result known to all graph theorists is that called MENGER's theorem. The point version of this result says that the maximum number of point-disjoint paths joining u and v is equal to the minimum number of points whose deletion destroys all paths joining u and v. The theorem may be proved purely in the language of graphs (probably the best known proof is indirect, and is due to DIRAC [3] while a more neglected, but direct, proof may be found in ORE [7]). One may also prove the theorem by appealing to flow theory (e.g. BERGE [1], p. 167).

In many real-world situations which can be modeled by graphs certain paths joining two non-adjacent points may well exist, but may prove essentially useless because they are too long. Such considerations led the authors to study the following two parameters. Let n be any positive integer and let u and v be any two non-adjacent points in a graph G.

Denote by $A_n(u, v)$ the maximum number of point-disjoint paths joining u and v whose length (i.e., number of lines) does not exceed n. Analogously, let $V_n(u, v)$ be the minimum number of points in G the deletion of which destroys all paths joining u and v which do not exceed n in length. A special case would obtain when $n = p = |V(G)|$, and we have by Menger's theorem, the equality $A_n(u, v) = V_n(u, v)$.

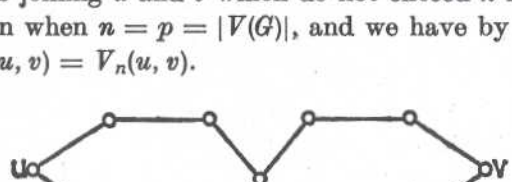

Fig. 1

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In general, however, one does not have equality, but it is trivial that $A_n(u, v) \leq V_n(u, v)$ for any positive integer n. On the other hand, the graph of Fig. 1 has $V_5(u, v) = 2$, but $A_5(u, v) = 1$.

We prefer to formulate our work as a study of the ratio $\frac{V_n(u, v)}{A_n(u, v)}$ or simply $\frac{V_n}{A_n}$ when the points u and v are understood. For any terminology not defined in this paper, the reader is referred to the book by HARARY [4].

2. Bounds for the ratio

As in the introduction we shall assume throughout this paper that u and v are non-adjacent points in the same component of a graph G. It is trivial that $1 \leq \frac{V_n(u, v)}{A_n(u, v)} \leq n - 1$. As usual, $d(u, v)$ denotes the distance between points u and v. Our first result involves this distance.

THEOREM 1. *For every positive integer $n \geq 2$ and for each $m = n - d(u, v) \geq \geq 0$, $\frac{V_n(u, v)}{A_n(u, v)} \leq m + 1$.*

The construction in Section 3 shows that this bound is sharp.

PROOF. The proof proceeds by induction on m. Hence first let $m = 0$, i.e., suppose $n = d(u, v) = n_0$. We orient some of the lines of G according to the following rule: let xy be any line. Then if $d(x, v) > d(y, v)$, orient x to y. Then, clearly, any u-v geodesic (i.e., a shortest u-v path) yields a dipath from u to v. On the other hand, we claim that any u-v dipath must arise from a geodesic u-v path in G, for just consider our rule of orientation. If (x, y) is a directed line in our dipath, $d(x, v) > d(y, v)$ and distance decreases by 1 as we traverse each diline toward v. Hence our dipath cannot have $> n$ lines and hence must have come from a u-v geodesic.

Thus in the oriented subgraph of G, the u-v paths are exactly the geodesics, so by Menger's theorem, $V_n(u, v) = A_n(u, v)$ and the case for $m = 0$ is proved.

Now by induction hypothesis, assume that the theorem holds for some $m_0 \geq 0$ and suppose $m = n - d(u, v) = m_0 + 1$ (and hence that $n > d(u, v)$).

Let X be a minimum set of points covering all u-v geodesics. By the case for $m = 0$,

$$|X| = V_{d(u,v)}(u, v) = A_{d(u,v)}(u, v) \leq A_n(u, v).$$

Consider the graph $G - X$. If $d_{G-X}(u, v) > n$, X has covered all u-v paths of length $\leq n$ and we have, $V_n(u, v) = |X| \leq A_n(u, v) \leq mA_n(u, v)$ and we done. So suppose $d_{G-X}(u, v) \leq n$, say $d_{G-X}(u, v) = n - t$ for some t, $\leq t < m$. (Note that $t < m$ for X destroys all u-v geodesics and thus $n - d_{G-X}(u, v) < n - d(u, v) = m$).

So by the induction hypothesis applied to points u and v in graph $G-X$, have

$$V_n^{G-X}(u, v) \leq (t+1)\, A_n^{G-X}(u, v).$$

t we can then cover all n-paths in G joining u and v with a set Y where

$$|Y| = |X| + (t+1)\, A_n^{G-X}(u, v) \leq |X| + (t+1)\, A_n(u, v).$$

$$V_n(u, v) \leq |X| + (t+1) A_n(u, v) \leq (t+2)\, A_n(u, v) \leq (m+1) A_n(u, v)$$

nd the proof is complete.

The next theorem shows that we can do better as far as a bound depend-g solely upon n is concerned.

THEOREM 2. *For any graph G, any non-negative integer n, and any two on-adjacent points u and v, $V_n(u, v) \leq \left[\frac{n}{2}\right] A_n(u, v)$.*

PROOF. If $d(u, v) \geq n/2 + 1$, we are done by Theorem 1. So suppose $(u, v) \leq (n+1)/2$. Choose D such that $d(u, v) \leq D \leq n$ and let P_0 be a -v geodesic in G. Form a new graph G_1 from G by removing all interior oints of P_0. Clearly $d_{G_1}(u, v) \geq d_G(u, v)$. Now remove any u-v geodesic n G_1, say P_1, to obtain G_2. Continue in this manner until we obtain a graph $_r$ containing a u-v geodesic P_r such that $l(P_r) \leq D$, but the length of any -v geodesic in $G_{r+1} > D$. For convenience let us denote G_{r+1} by G' and imilarly for parameters of this graph. Thus $d_{G_{r+1}}(u, v) = d'(u, v) \geq D + 1$.

Since we have removed r disjoint u-v paths from G to get G', we have

$$A_n \geq A_n' + r, \tag{1}$$

for all discarded paths had length no greater than the length of a u-v geodesic in G'.

Also

$$V_n \leq V_n' + r(D-1). \tag{2}$$

Moreover, if G' is connected, we have by Theorem 1 that

$$V_n' \leq (n - d'(u, v) + 1) A_n' \leq (n - \mathrm{D} - 1 + 1) A_n' = (n - D) A_n'. \tag{3}$$

The combining (2) and (3), we obtain by (1)

$$V_n \leq (n-D) A_n' + r(D-1) \leq (n-D)(A_n - r) + r(D-1) =$$
$$= (n-D) A_n + r(2D - n - 1).$$

Since r is non-negative, choose D to be the greatest integer so that $2D-n-1\leq 0$. Hence $D\leq\left[\frac{n+1}{2}\right]$ and since D is integral, $D=\left[\frac{n+1}{2}\right]$.

Hence $n-D=n-\left[\frac{n+1}{2}\right]=\left[\frac{n}{2}\right]$ and thus $V_n\leq\left[\frac{n}{2}\right]A_n$.

If G' is not connected between u and v, we have $A'_n=V'_n=0$ and conclude similarly.

The bound in this theorem is sharp for $n=2$, 3 and 5 (for $n=5$, see Fig. 1). It is, however, not sharp for $n=4$.

THEOREM 3. *For any graph G with non-adjacent points u and v, $V_4(u,v)=$ $=A_4(u,v)$.*

PROOF. Partition the points of $G-u-v$ into disjoint classes (i,j) as follows: $w\in(i,j)$ iff $d(u,w)=i$ and $d(w,v)=j$. Clearly we may ignore classes $(1,1)$ and all (i,j) for $i+j>4$. So the remaining graph $\hat{G}$ has the appearance of Figure 2.

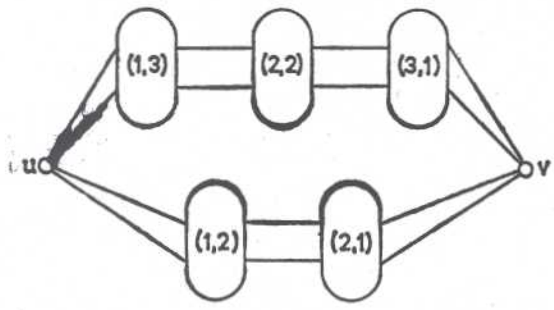

Fig. 2

Now construct a di-graph $\hat{D}$ as follows. Let $V(\hat{D})=V(\hat{G})$ and $(x,y)\in E(\hat{D})$ iff (1) $xy\in E(\hat{G})$ and (2) $d(u,y)>d(u,x)$.

Hence $\hat{D}$ has the appearance of Figure 3.

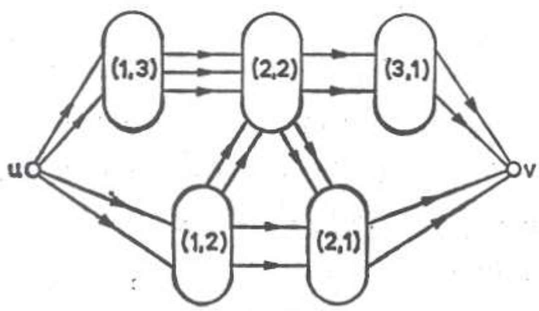

Fig. 3

Observe that

(a) each dipath in $\hat{D}$ has length ≤ 4 and
(b) each *chordless* path of $\hat{G}$ of length ≤ 4 corresponds to a dipath in $\hat{D}$.

Let S be a set of V_4 points in $\hat{G} - u - v$ whose deletion destroys all u-v paths of length ≤ 4. But then in $\hat{D} - u - v$ all dipaths from u to v are also destroyed, so $V_4 \geq \vec{H}(u, v)$ where $\vec{H}(u, v)$ denotes the minimum number of points whose deletion separates u and v in $\hat{D}$. But by Menger's theorem applied to $\hat{D}$, $\vec{H}(u, v)$ (= the maximum number of point-disjoint dipaths from u to v) $\leq A_4$, since each set of point-disjoint dipaths from u to v in $\hat{D}$ corresponds to a set of point-disjoint u-v paths in $\hat{G}$ of the same cardinality.

Thus it will suffice to prove $V_4 \leq \vec{H}(u, v)$. Let L be any set of $\vec{H}(u, v)$ points in $\hat{D} - u - v$ whose removal separates u and v. We now claim L meets all u-v paths in $\hat{G}$ of length ≤ 4. If not, there is a path P joining u and v with length ≤ 4 and $(V(P) - u - v) \cap L = \emptyset$. We may assume P is chordless. But, then it translates into a dipath from u to v in $\hat{D}$ on the same points. L does not meet this dipath, which is a contradiction.

In the construction of the next section we will have $\frac{V_n}{A_n} = \left[\sqrt{\frac{n}{2}}\right]$ or $\left[\sqrt{\frac{n}{2}}\right] + 1$. It is unknown to us where for a fixed n, the value of $\sup \frac{V_n}{A_n}$ lies in the interval $\left(\left[\sqrt{\frac{n}{2}}\right], \left[\frac{n}{2}\right]\right)$.

3. A Construction

We will construct a graph $G(n, t)$ such that given $t (> 0)$, there is an n and a graph $G(n, t)$ which has 2 distinct non-adjacent points u and v such that $A_n(u, v) = 1$, but $V_n(u, v) = t + 1$. Moreover, we will show in addition that given any integer $k (\geq 1)$, we can construct a $G(n, t, k)$, which is k-connected.

For the moment, suppose t is a given positive integer. Choose any $n > t + 1$ and fix it. Construct a path L of length $s = n - t$ joining u and v. As is customary, we shall refer to paths having at most their endpoints in common as *openly disjoint*. Now for each i, $2 \leq i \leq t + 1$, take every pair of points a, b on L which are at a distance $= i$ on L and attach a path of length $i + 1$ at a and b which is openly disjoint from L. Such paths we shall call *ears*. (See Figure 4).

Now let P be any u-v path of length $= s' (\leq n)$. P has at least $n - t$ lines since L is a u-v geodesic.

Suppose P uses r ears. Since replacing an ear by the corresponding segment of L shortens the length by ≥ 1, we have $s' \geq n - t + \mathrm{r}$. Hence

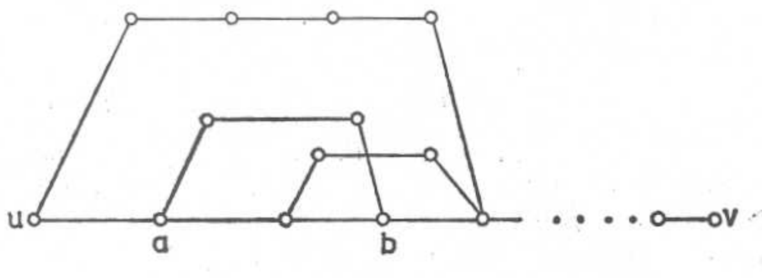

Fig. 4

$r \leq t$. Since each ear has $\leq t + 1$ interior points, P has $\leq r(t + 1)$ points not on L. So the number of points of P on L is (not including u and v)

$$\geq (s' - 1) - r(t + 1) \geq n - t + r - 1 - r(t + 1) =$$
$$= n - (r + 1)t - 1 \geq n - (t + 1)t - 1.$$

If $n - (t + 1)t - 1 > \frac{1}{2}$ (the number of inner points of L), then any two such paths P must have an interior point in common. Note that the number of inner points of $L = n - t - 1$. Thus what we need is that $n - (t + 1)t - 1 > \frac{1}{2}(n - t - 1)$, i.e., $n \geq 2t^2 + t + 2$. If n is given, the best t satisfying this inequality is either $\left[\sqrt{\frac{n}{2}}\right] - 1$ or $\left[\sqrt{\frac{n}{2}}\right]$. Then with such an n, any two u-v paths of length $\leq n$ must have some inner point of L in common; i.e., $A_n(u, v) = 1$.

We now proceed to show that $V_n(u, v) \geq t + 1$. Suppose there is a set T of t points which cover all u-v paths of length $\leq n$. We may assume all points of T lie on L, for otherwise move right on the "offending ear" until L is reached and use the point of L thus encountered in place of the original T-point. If the ear ends at v take the left-hand end point on L. Note also that u, v are joined by no one ear by our choice of n.

Let us call the sets of points of T which are consecutive on L the *blocks* of T. There are no more than t such blocks. Recall that L contains $n - t + 1$ points where $n - t + 1 = (n + 1) - t \geq 3$ and hence $n - t \geq 2$. Thus we can form a new u-v path Q by jumping each block of T with an ear. This new path Q then misses T and we have added exactly one to the length of L for each block jumped. It follows that Q has length $\leq s + t = n - t + t = n$. Hence, there is a u-v path Q of length $\leq n$ which misses T contradicting the definition of T. Thus $V_n(u, v) \geq t + 1$.

We know at this point that $G(n, t)$ is at least 2-connected. Let k be any integer ≥ 2. We now proceed to modify the graph $G(n, t)$ constructed above so that the resulting graph $G(n, t, k)$ retains the properties that $A_n(u, v) = 1$, $V_n \geq t + 1$ and in addition is k-connected.

The idea is to construct a new graph H, join it to $G(n, t)$ by suitably chosen lines so that the resulting graph is k-connected, but also so that no new "short" u-v paths are introduced.

Let the points of $G(n, t)$ be $w_1, \ldots, w_N$. Further, let $M = k + n$. Form a path of MN points $p_1p_2 \ldots p_{MN}$ and then replace each p_i with a clique, K_k^i, on k points where each point of K_k^i is joined to each point of K_k^{i+1}. Now join w_1 to exactly one point of each of $K_k^1, \ldots, K_k^k$; w_2 to exactly one point of $K_k^{M+1}, \ldots, K_k^{M+k}$; and, in general, w_j to exactly one point of $K_k^{(j-1)M+1}, \ldots \ldots, K_k^{(j-1)M+k}$ for $j = 1, \ldots, N$. It is now easily seen that no new path joining any w_i and w_j is of length $< n + 1$. It is clear that $A_n = 1$ and $V_n = t + 1$ in this new graph for any path of length $\leq n$ joining u and v must lie entirely within the original $G(n, t)$ part of this new graph. It is equally clear that the new graph $G(n, t, k)$ is k-connected.

4. A different type of Mengerian result

In this section we take a different approach. Recall that $V_n(u, v) \geq A_n(u, v)$ and moreover, strict inequality can occur. One's intuition may indicate that even in this case, if the subscript on A_n is allowed to increase to some new value n' one can always obtain $V_n \leq A_{n'}$. The next theorem says that such a conjecture is not only appealing, but true.

THEOREM 4. *Let n and h be positive integers. Then there is a constant $f(n, h)$ such that if $V_n(u, v) \geq h$, then $A_{f(n,h)}(u, v) \geq h$.*

In the proof we need the following result.

THEOREM 5 (BOLLOBÁS [2], KATONA [6], JAEGER—PAYAN [5]). *Given any family of r-sets which needs at least t points to cover, then there exists a subfamily with $\leq \binom{r+t-1}{r}$ elements which still needs t points to cover.*

REMARK. It is trivial to see that instead of "r-sets" one can say "sets of size at most r".

PROOF of Theorem 4. Consider sets of interior points of u-v paths of length $\leq n$. By the assumption we need $\geq h$ points to cover the members of this family. By the preceding theorem and the remark following it we can select $\binom{n+h-2}{n-1}$ paths of length $\leq n$ such that we still need h points to cover these paths. So let G_1 be the union of these paths and apply Menger's theorem to G_1 to see that there are $\geq h$ openly disjoint u-v paths. So how long can a longest path in G_1 be? We have $\binom{n+h-2}{n-1}$ paths of length $\leq n$.

So $G_1 - u - v$ has $\leq (n-1)\binom{n+h-2}{n-1}$ points. Now among all sets of $\geq h$ openly disjoint u-v paths in G_1, the longest path one could find would be of length $(n-1)\binom{n+h-2}{n-1} - (h-1) + 1$. (This of course happens when one has $h-1$ paths of length 2 and a single long path of the above length.)

Thus set $f(n,h) = (n-1)\binom{n+h-2}{n-1} - h + 2$ and we have $A_{f(n,h)}(u,v) \geq h$.

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JÓZSEF ATTILA TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BOLYAI INTÉZET
H–6720 SZEGED
ARADI VÉRTANÚK TERE 1.
HUNGARY

INSTITUTO DE MATEMÁTICAS
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO
VILLA OBREGÓN
CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA
MÉXICO 20. D. F.
MEXICO

DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
NASHVILLE, TN 37235
U. S. A.