

## 6 Bourgain's Theorem

In the last lecture, we studied low-distortion embeddings of general metrics into  $\ell_\infty$  using only a small number of dimensions. In this lecture we will extend that result and give embeddings into  $\ell_p$  for all  $1 \leq p < \infty$ ; this fundamental result is essentially due to Bourgain (1985). For completeness, we begin by stating the last lecture.

**Theorem 6.1 (Matoušek (1996))** *For any metric space  $(X, d)$ ,*

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{D} \ell_\infty^{O(Dn^{2/D} \log n)}$$

Theorem 6.1 uses the following embedding:

1. Pick random subsets  $S_{ij}$ , with  $j = 1, 2, \dots, \frac{D}{2}$  as follows

At level  $j$ , for each  $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$  (where  $m = O(n^{2/D} \log n)$ ), form the set  $S_{ij}$  by picking each node independently with probability  $(n^{-2/D})^j$ .

2. Let  $f_{ij}(x) = d(x, S_{ij})$  for all  $x \in X$ . Finally, set

$$f(x) = \bigoplus_{j=1}^{D/2} \bigoplus_{i=1}^m f_{ij}(x). \quad (6.1)$$

An easy application of the triangle inequality shows that the above embedding is a contraction. That is, for any two points  $x$  and  $y$  in  $X$ , in every dimension, the distance between  $x$  and  $y$  is less than  $d(x, y)$ . This fact will be useful later.

Note that if we use  $D = O(\log n)$ , we get that  $(X, d) \xrightarrow{\log n} \ell_\infty^{O(\log^2 n)}$ . Interestingly, we immediately get the fact that  $f$  is a low distortion embedding into  $\ell_1$  as well, albeit with a worse distortion. Indeed, the contraction, when viewing  $f$  as a map into  $\ell_1$ , is at most the contraction with respect to  $\ell_\infty$ , which is  $O(\log n)$ . Moreover, since the embedding is a contraction in every dimension, the *expansion* with respect to  $\ell_1$  is at most  $\log^2 n$ , the number of dimensions. Thus we get

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{\log^3 n} \ell_1^{O(\log^2 n)}$$

Using a more careful analysis, we can show that the above embedding has distortion  $O(\log^2 n)$  with high probability and a distortion  $O(\log^{1.5} n)$  in the  $\ell_2$ -norm (see last lecture). As an aside, note that Theorem 6.1 is meaningful only for  $D = O(\log n)$ . For larger values of  $D$ , the distortion as well as the number of dimensions is larger than those corresponding to  $\log n$ .

Now, we prove Bourgain's Theorem, which refines the embedding and proof of Theorem 6.1, and obtains an embedding into  $\ell_1^{O(\log^2 n)}$  with distortion only  $O(\log n)$ .

**Theorem 6.2 (Bourgain (1985), Linial, London, Rabinovich (1995))** *For any metric space  $(X, d)$ , and for any  $p$ ,*

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{O(\log n)} \ell_p^{O(\log^2 n)}$$

Theorem 6.2 uses the following algorithm to construct an embedding, which is very similar to that used for Theorem 6.1.

**Algorithm:**

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 $m := 576 \log n$ 
for  $j = 1$  to  $\log n$  do           /* levels of density */
  for  $i = 1$  to  $m$  do             /* repeat for high probability */
    choose set  $S_{ij}$  by sampling each node in  $X$ 
    independently with probability  $2^{-j}$ 
  end
end
 $f_{ij}(x) := d(x, S_{ij})$ 
 $f(x) := \bigoplus_{j=1}^{\log n} \bigoplus_{i=1}^m f_{ij}(x)$ 

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Let us first prove Theorem 6.2 for  $p = 1$ . Formally, let  $K$  denote the number of coordinates, i.e.,  $K = m \log n = 576 \log^2 n$ . We will now prove that

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{\epsilon^{64 \log n}} \ell_1^K .$$

**Lemma 6.3 (Expansion)**  $\|f(x) - f(y)\|_1 \leq K \cdot d(x, y)$

**Proof.** For any set  $S$  and any pair of points  $x, y \in X$ ,  $|d(x, S) - d(y, S)| \leq d(x, y)$ . Since the embedding has  $K$  dimensions, the lemma follows. ■

**Theorem 6.4 (Contraction)** *With probability  $\frac{1}{2}$ , for all  $x, y \in X$ ,*

$$\|f(x) - f(y)\|_1 \geq 9 \log n d(x, y) .$$

Proving this theorem will form a major part of this lecture. We will first describe how it implies Theorem 6.2.

**Proof of Theorem 6.2.** By construction, the embedding uses  $K \log^2 n$  dimensions. Theorem 6.4 shows that  $f$  has contraction  $\frac{1}{9 \log n}$ . On the other hand, the expansion of  $f$  is at most  $K = 576 \log^2 n$  by Lemma 6.3. Multiplying the two, we get that the distortion of the embedding is at most  $64 \log n$ . ■

Now we begin with a proof of Theorem 6.4. Fix a pair of points  $x, y \in X$ . Let  $r_j(x)$ , for  $j = 0, 1, \dots, \log n$ , be the smallest radius  $r$  such that a ball of radius  $r$  around  $x$  contains at least  $2^j$  points, that is,  $|B(x, r)| \geq 2^j$ . Likewise, let  $r_j(y)$  be the smallest radius  $r$  for which  $|B(y, r)| \geq 2^j$ . (Remember that the *ball*  $B(x, r)$  is just the set  $\{z \in X \mid d(x, z) \leq r\}$ . Similarly, let the *open ball*  $B^o(x, r)$  be defined as  $\{z \in X \mid d(x, z) < r\}$ . Let  $\rho_j = \max\{r_j(x), r_j(y)\}$ . By our construction, we have the following observation.

**Observation 6.5**  $|B(x, \rho_j)| \geq 2^j$  and  $|B(y, \rho_j)| \geq 2^j$ .

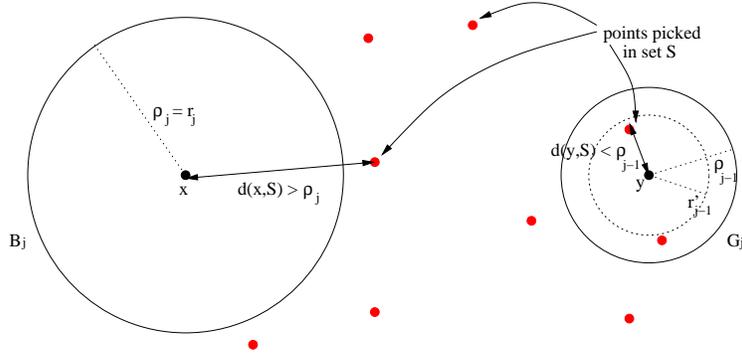


Figure 6.1: Balls  $B_j$  and  $G_j$  for a fixed pair of points  $x$  and  $y$  and iteration  $j$

Let  $t$  be the smallest value such that  $\rho_t + \rho_{t-1} > d(x, y)$ ; we then redefine  $\rho_t = d(x, y) - \rho_{t-1}$ . In the following argument, we will consider  $\rho_j$ 's for values of  $j$  at most  $t$ .

**Remark 6.6** *The value  $\rho_0 = 0$ , and the  $\rho_j$ 's are monotonically increasing. Furthermore, since  $\rho_{t-1} + \rho_t = d(x, y)$  and  $\rho_{t-1} \leq \rho_t$ , it follows that  $\rho_t \geq \frac{1}{2} d(x, y)$ .*

For all  $j$ , we define a pair of balls  $B_j$  (“bad”) and  $G_j$  (“good”) with the following property. One of these balls is centered around  $x$  and the other is centered around  $y$ . Moreover, at stage  $j$  in the construction of the embedding, there is a reasonable probability that we pick at least one point from  $G_j$  and none from  $B_j$ . This would give us the necessary separation between  $x$  and  $y$  in the dimensions corresponding to  $j$ . (See Figure 6.1). We will formalize this in the rest of the proof.

If  $\rho_j = r_j(x)$ , let  $B_j = B^o(x, \rho_j)$  and  $G_j = B(y, \rho_{j-1})$ . Otherwise, let  $B_j = B^o(y, \rho_j)$  and  $G_j = B(x, \rho_{j-1})$ . This means we center the bad ball around the node from  $\{x, y\}$  that has less nodes in its  $\rho_j$ -neighborhood. Note that open ball  $B_j$  contains *at most*  $2^j$  points (by definition of  $r_j(x)$  and  $r_j(y)$ ), and  $G_j$  contains *at least*  $2^{j-1}$  points (by Lemma 6.5). Furthermore the balls  $B_j$  and  $G_j$  do not intersect.

**Observation 6.7** *For all  $j$ ,  $|B_j| \leq 2^j$  and  $|G_j| \geq 2^{j-1}$ .*

Thus both the balls have size about  $2^j$ . So if we are sampling at rate  $2^{-j}$ , there is a reasonable chance that we will hit the “good” ball and miss the “bad” ball.

**Claim 6.8** *For any value of  $j$ ,*

$$\Pr[\text{for at least } 18 \log n \text{ values of } i, |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| \geq (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1})] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^3} .$$

Before we prove the claim, let us prove Theorem 6.4 using this claim.

**Proof of Theorem 6.4.** Claim 6.8 implies that, for a fixed  $j$ , we have

$$\Pr \left[ \sum_{i=1}^m |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| \geq 18 \log n \cdot (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1}) \right] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^3} .$$

In other words, for a fixed  $j$ , the probability of not getting “enough” contribution from the  $m$  coordinates corresponding to that  $j$  is bounded above by  $\frac{1}{n^3}$ . Since there are at most  $\log n$  values of  $j$ , the trivial union bound implies that the probability that *any one* of these values of  $j$  did not contribute  $18 \log n (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1})$  to the distance between  $x$  and  $y$  is  $\frac{\log n}{n^3} \leq 1/n^2$ . Hence

$$\Pr \left[ \sum_{j,i} |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| \geq (18 \log n) \sum_{j=1}^t (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1}) \right] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^2} .$$

However, note that  $\sum_{j,i} |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| = \|f(x) - f(y)\|_1$ ; on the right hand side, the sum  $\sum_{j=1}^t (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1})$  telescopes to  $\rho_t$ , which is at least  $\frac{1}{2} d(x, y)$ . Hence, for any fixed  $x, y \in X$ ,

$$\Pr \left[ \|f(x) - f(y)\|_1 \geq 18 \log n \frac{d(x, y)}{2} \right] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^2} .$$

Since there are  $\binom{n}{2}$  pairs  $x, y \in X$  that we need to argue about, the trivial union bound again implies

$$\Pr \left[ \forall x, y \in X: \frac{\|f(x) - f(y)\|_1}{d(x, y)} \geq 9 \log n \right] \geq \frac{1}{2} ,$$

which proves the theorem. ■

**Proof of Claim 6.8.** Consider the coordinate corresponding to  $i$  and  $j$ . Recall that we form the set  $S_{ij}$  by sampling vertices independently at rate  $2^{-j}$ . Let us consider the case when  $B_j$  is centered around  $x$ , and  $G_j$  around  $y$ , as in Figure 6.1. (The other case is proved identically.)

We want to compute the probability of the event that we get a good contribution, i.e., of the event

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{E} &= \{|f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| \geq (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1})\} \\ &= \{|d(S_{ij}, x) - d(S_{ij}, y)| \geq (\rho_j - \rho_{j-1})\} . \end{aligned}$$

It will be tricky to calculate the probability of this event directly, so let us define another event  $\mathcal{E}'$  thus

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{E}' &= \{d(S_{ij}, x) \geq \rho_j \quad \wedge \quad d(S_{ij}, y) \leq \rho_{j-1}\} \\ &= \{S_{ij} \text{ misses “bad” ball } B_j \wedge S_{ij} \text{ hits “good” ball } G_j\} . \end{aligned}$$

(Make sure you believe this!) It can be checked that the event  $\mathcal{E}'$  implies  $\mathcal{E}$ , and hence  $\Pr[\mathcal{E}] \geq \Pr[\mathcal{E}']$ ; hence it suffices to lower bound the probability of  $\mathcal{E}'$ . Finally, let us define

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{E}_{\text{hit}} &:= S_{ij} \cap G_j \neq \emptyset \\ \mathcal{E}_{\text{miss}} &:= S_{ij} \cap B_j = \emptyset \end{aligned}$$

and hence  $\mathcal{E}' = \mathcal{E}_{\text{hit}} \wedge \mathcal{E}_{\text{miss}}$ . Note that  $\mathcal{E}_{\text{miss}}$  and  $\mathcal{E}_{\text{hit}}$  are independent, since the balls  $G_j$  and  $B_j$  are disjoint.

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr[\mathcal{E}_{\text{hit}}] &= 1 - \Pr[S_{ij} \cap G_j = \emptyset] \\ &= 1 - (1 - 2^{-j})^{|G_j|} \\ &\geq 1 - (1 - 2^{-j})^{2^{j-1}} \\ &\geq 1 - e^{-1/2} \geq \frac{1}{4} . \end{aligned}$$

The third step in the above equations follows from the fact that  $|G_j| \geq 2^{j-1}$ . Likewise, for  $B_j$  we have,

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr[\mathcal{E}_{\text{miss}}] &= (1 - 2^{-j})^{|B_j|} \\ &\geq (1 - 2^{-j})^{2^j} \geq \frac{1}{4} . \end{aligned}$$

And finally,

$$\Pr[\mathcal{E}'] = \Pr[\mathcal{E}_{\text{hit}}] \cdot \Pr[\mathcal{E}_{\text{miss}}] \geq \frac{1}{16} .$$

We now use the following fundamental large-deviations bound, which says that the sum of many independent “well-behaved” random variables is closely concentrated around its expectation. (See, e.g., Alon and Spencer (1992) for a proof.)

**Lemma 6.9 (Chernoff (1952), Hoeffding (1963))** *Let  $X_1, \dots, X_t$  denote binary random variables, with  $E[X_i] \geq \mu$  for all  $i$ . Let  $X = \sum_{i=1}^t X_i$ . Then,  $E[X] \geq \mu t$ . The probability that  $X$  deviates significantly from its expectation is bounded as follows:*

$$\Pr[X \leq (1 - \epsilon)\mu t] \leq e^{-\epsilon^2 \mu t / 3} .$$

To apply the Chernoff bound, let  $X_i$  be the indicator variable that the event  $\mathcal{E}'$  happens for  $S_{ij}$ . Thus we have  $E[X_i] = \Pr[X_i = 1] \geq \frac{1}{16}$ . Hence, by Chernoff bound,

$$\Pr\left[\sum_{i=1}^m X_i \geq 18 \log n\right] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^3} .$$

Thus we have shown that the event  $\mathcal{E}'$ , and hence  $\mathcal{E}$  for at least  $18 \log n$  values of  $i$ , and hence

$$\Pr[|f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)| \geq \rho_j - \rho_{j-1} \text{ for at least } 18 \log n \text{ values of } i] \geq 1 - \frac{1}{n^3} ,$$

proving the claim. ■

## 6.1 Embeddings into $\ell_p$

In this section, we will show that the same mapping  $f$  that we defined for embedding into  $\ell_1$  works for all  $p \geq 1$ . It is a fairly surprising result, since we produce a mapping of  $(X, d)$  into  $\mathbb{R}^{O(\log^2 n)}$  which has a low distortion for all norms  $\ell_p$  *simultaneously*.

**Theorem 6.10** *There exists an embedding that maps any arbitrary finite metric space  $(X, d)$  into  $\ell_p^{O(\log^2 n)}$  with  $O(\log n)$  distortion.*

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{O(\log n)} \ell_p^{O(\log^2 n)} .$$

*In particular, with probability at least  $\frac{1}{2}$ , the mapping  $f$  defined above has this property.*

In order to prove this theorem, we will use the Cauchy-Schwarz Inequality.

**Fact 6.11 (Cauchy-Schwarz)** *For two vectors  $\vec{a}, \vec{b} \in \mathbb{R}^k$ , it holds that  $\|\vec{a}\|_2 \cdot \|\vec{b}\|_2 \geq \langle \vec{a}, \vec{b} \rangle$ .*

**Proof Theorem 6.10.** We will first prove the theorem for  $p = 2$ . We give an upper bound on  $\|f(x) - f(y)\|_2$ . Recall that  $K = 576 \log^2 n$  is the number of dimensions of the map  $f$ .

$$\begin{aligned} \|f(x) - f(y)\|_2 &= \left( \sum_{i,j} |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)|^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \\ &\leq \left( \sum_{i,j} d(x, y)^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \\ &= \sqrt{K} \cdot d(x, y) \\ &= O(\log n) \cdot d(x, y) \end{aligned}$$

To give a lower bound on the distance between  $x$  and  $y$  in the embedding, we use the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality from Fact 6.11. Set  $a_{ij} = |f_{ij}(x) - f_{ij}(y)|$  and  $b_{ij} = 1$ . Plugging these values in the inequality gives

$$\left( \sum_{i,j} |f_{i,j}(x) - f_{i,j}(y)|^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \cdot \sqrt{K} \geq \sum_{i,j} |f_{i,j}(x) - f_{i,j}(y)|$$

which means that

$$\begin{aligned} \sqrt{K} \cdot \|f(x) - f(y)\|_2 &\geq \|f(x) - f(y)\|_1 \\ &\geq O(\log n) \cdot d(x, y) , \end{aligned}$$

where the last inequality following from Theorem 6.2. Now using that  $\sqrt{K} = \Theta(\log n)$ , we get that

$$\|f(x) - f(y)\|_2 \geq \frac{d(x, y)}{O(1)} ,$$

which proves the theorem. ■

This result can be easily generalized to  $\ell_p$  using the Hölder's inequality (see Homework).

**Fact 6.12 (Hölder's Inequality)** For two vectors  $\vec{a}, \vec{b} \in \mathbb{R}^k$ , and  $p, q \in \mathbb{R}^+$  such that  $\frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{q} = 1$ , it holds that  $\|\vec{a}\|_p \cdot \|\vec{b}\|_q \geq \langle \vec{a}, \vec{b} \rangle$ .

**Remark 6.13** As a sanity check, notice that if  $p = q = 2$ , then this gives us the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality from Fact 6.11. Furthermore, if  $p = 1$  and  $q = \infty$ , then the inequality implies that  $\|\vec{a}\|_1 \cdot b_{\max} \geq \langle \vec{a}, \vec{b} \rangle$ , which can also be easily checked.

A stronger version of Theorem 6.10 proved by Matoušek (1997) gives the following result:

$$(X, d) \xrightarrow{O(\log n/p)} \ell_p .$$

## 7 Lower Bounds for Embedding finite Metrics into $\ell_1$

In this section we show that the result of Bourgain is tight. We show that for arbitrarily large  $n$  there exist metrics on  $n$  points such that the minimum distortion for embedding the metric into  $\ell_1$  is  $\Omega(\log n)$ . Recall the IP from the last class

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{minimize} && \sum_{x,y} \text{cap}(x,y) \cdot d(x,y) \\ & \text{subject to} && \sum_{x,y} \text{dem}(x,y) \cdot d(x,y) = 1 && \text{(IP)} \\ & && d \text{ is elementary cut metric} \end{aligned}$$

We looked at the relaxation of this IP where we require  $d$  only to be a metric (instead of being a cut-metric). This gives an LP. Let  $d^*$  denote the metric that obtains the optimal value for this LP. In the last lecture we have shown that if  $d^*$  embeds into  $\ell_1$  with distortion  $D$ , then we have

$$LP^* \leq IP^* \leq D \cdot LP^* ,$$

where  $LP^*$  and  $IP^*$  denote the optimal value for the LP and IP, respectively. From the following theorem we can derive a lower bound on the distortion needed for embedding finite metrics into  $\ell_1$ .

**Theorem 7.14 (Leighton-Rao (1988))** For infinitely many values of  $n$ , there exist instances of the sparsest cut problem on graphs  $G_n$  with  $n$  vertices such that

$$IP^*/LP^* \geq \Omega(\log n) .$$

**Corollary 7.15** Let the metric  $d_{G_n}^*$  be generated by (LP) on the instances in Theorem 7.14. Then

$$(V_n, d_{G_n}^*) \xrightarrow{\Omega(\log n)} \ell_1 .$$

**Proof.** Suppose not, and let  $(V_n, d_{G_n}^*) \xrightarrow{o(\log n)} \ell_1$ . Then by our result from the previous lecture,  $IP^* \leq o(\log n) \cdot LP^*$  on these instances, which contradicts Theorem 7.14. ■

Hence, we have shown that there are metrics that require  $\Omega(\log n)$  distortion to embed into  $\ell_1$ , showing that Bourgain's embedding is existentially tight. However we still have to prove Theorem 7.14.

The lower bound is achieved by a family of expanders. Let us recall the following definition:

**Definition 7.16** *The expansion of set  $S \subseteq V$  is given by:*

$$\Phi(S) := \frac{\text{cap}(S, V \setminus S)}{\min\{|S|, |V \setminus S|\}}$$

The expansion  $\Phi(G)$  of  $G$  is defined to be  $\min_S \Phi(S)$ . A graph  $G$  is an expander if the expansion is a constant independent of  $n$ ; i.e.,  $\Phi(G) \geq \Omega(1)$ .

Constant-degree expanders are known to exist: this can be shown via a probabilistic argument. Explicit constructions are more difficult to come by, but these are also known:

**Theorem 7.17 (Lubotzky, Phillips, and Sarnak (1988))** *For infinitely many  $n$ , there exist 3-regular expanders  $G_n$ .*

The expansion is closely related to the sparsity of the graph; note that if we define demands  $\text{dem}(x, y) = 1$  for all pairs of vertices  $x \neq y \in G$ , we get:

$$\frac{n}{2} \cdot \text{sparsity}(G) \leq \Phi(G) \leq n \cdot \text{sparsity}(G) \tag{7.3}$$

**Proof Theorem 7.14.** Let  $G_n = (V_n, E_n)$  be a 3-regular expander, and fix any vertex  $v \in V_n$ . We claim that the number of vertices at distance at least  $\frac{1}{2} \log_2 n$  from  $v$  is at least  $\frac{1}{2}n$ .

Indeed, in any  $\Delta$ -regular graph, the number of vertices at distance no more than  $t - 1$  is at most  $1 + \Delta + (\Delta - 1)^2 + \dots + (\Delta - 1)^{t-1}$ , which is

$$1 + \frac{(\Delta - 1)^t - 1}{\Delta - 1} .$$

Now plugging in  $\Delta = 3$  and  $t = \frac{1}{2} \log_2 n$ , we get that the number of vertices *farther* than  $\frac{1}{2} \log_2 n$  from  $v$  is at least  $n - \sqrt{n} \geq n/2$ .

**Lemma 7.18** *For the 3-regular expanders of Theorem 7.17,*

$$LP^* \leq O\left(\frac{1}{n \log n}\right) .$$

**Proof.** For each  $v \in V_n$ , look at all  $\frac{1}{2}n$  or more vertices that are at distance at least  $\frac{1}{2} \log_2 n$  from  $v$ . This gives at least  $\frac{1}{2}n \cdot n$  demand pairs, such that sending  $\lambda$  units of flow between any one of these pairs uses up at least  $\lambda \cdot \frac{\log_2 n}{2}$  units of volume. Since the total capacity available in the 3-regular graph is only  $\frac{3}{2}n$ , we must have that

$$\frac{1}{2}n \cdot n \cdot \frac{\lambda \log n}{2} \leq \frac{3}{2}n ,$$

and hence  $\lambda \leq \frac{6}{n \log n}$ . ■

However, since  $G_n$  is an expander,  $\Phi(G_n) = \Omega(1)$ , and hence Equation (7.3) implies that sparsity( $G_n$ ) =  $IP^* \geq \Theta(\frac{1}{n})$ . Therefore, the integrality gap  $IP^*/LP^* \geq \Omega(\log n)$ , which completes the proof of Theorem 7.14. ■

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