The cover time of sparse random graphs.

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Abstract

We study the cover time of a random walk on graphs $G \in G_{n,p}$ when $p = \frac{c \log n}{n}, c > 1$. We prove that **whp** the cover time is asymptotic to $c \log \left(\frac{c}{c-1}\right) n \log n$.

1 Introduction

Let $G = (V, E)$ be a connected graph, let $|V| = n$, and $|E| = m$. For $v \in V$ let C_v be the expected time taken for a simple random walk W on G starting at v, to visit every vertex of G. The *cover time* C_G of G is defined as $C_G = \max_{v \in V} C_v$. The cover time of connected graphs has been extensively studied. It is a classic result of Aleliunas, Karp, Lipton, Lovász and Rackoff [1] that $C_G \leq 2m(n-1)$. It is also known (see Feige [7], [8]), that for any connected graph G

$$(1 - o(1))n \log n \leq C_G \leq (1 + o(1))\frac{4}{27}n^3.$$

In this paper we study the cover time of the random graph, $G \in G_{n,p}$. It was shown by Jonasson [11] that **whp** [1]

(a) $C_G = (1 + o(1))n \log n$ if $\frac{np}{\log n} \to \infty$.

(b) If $c > 1$ is constant and $np = c \log n$ then $C_G > (1 + \alpha)n \log n$ for some constant $\alpha = \alpha(c)$.

Thus Jonasson has shown that when the expected average degree $(n-1)p$ grows faster than $\log n$, a random graph has the same cover time **whp** as the complete graph K_n, whose cover time is determined by the Coupon Collector problem. Whereas, when $np = \Omega(\log n)$ this is not the case.

In this paper we sharpen Jonasson's results for the case $np = c \log n$ where $\omega = (c - 1) \log n \to \infty$. This condition on ω ensures that **whp** $G_{n,p}$ is connected, (see Erdős and Rényi [6]).

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[1]A sequence of events $\mathcal{E}_n$ is said to occur *with high probability* (**whp**) if $\lim_n \to \infty \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E}_n) = 1$

Theorem 1. *Suppose that* $np = c\log n = \log n + \omega$ *where* $\omega = (c-1)\log n \to \infty$ *and c=O(1). If* $G \in G_{n,p}$*, then* **whp**

$$C_G \sim c\log\left(\frac{c}{c-1}\right) n\log n.$$

It follows from the results of Broder and Karlin [4] that if $c-1 = \Omega(1)$ then **whp** $C_G = O(n\log n)$. This is because $G_{n,p}$ is then an expander **whp** . Thus it was known that **whp** $C_G = \Theta(n\log n)$ for this value of p.

Our paper improves on previous results by giving asymptotically exact values for the cover time. When $c-1 = \Omega(1)$ we give the exact constant of multiplication in $C_G = \Theta(n\log n)$. Also, when $c-1 = \frac{\omega}{\log n}$ where $\omega = o(\log n)$ we establish the novel result that $C_G \sim n\log n\log\log n$. The challenge is to find a technique which can make an accurate average case analysis of the random walk.

In the next section we give some properties that hold **whp** in $G_{n,p}$. In Section 4 we show that a graph with these properties has a cover time described by Theorem 1.

2 Outline of proof

In Section 3 we describe the properties of $G_{n,p}$ that will be needed for our proof. We call graphs with these properties *typical* and estimate the cover time of typical graphs.

For a walk starting at vertex u and a vertex $v \neq u$ and a time s, we define $\mathcal{A}_s(v)$ to be the event that W_u has not visited v by time s. We then argue that

$$C_u \leq t + \sum_{v\in V}\sum_{s>t} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) \tag{1}$$

for any $t > 0$, see equation (14).

We then write

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) = \prod_{i=1}^{s} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_i(v) \mid \mathcal{A}_{i-1}(v)) \tag{2}$$

and spend much of the time estimating $\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_i(v) \mid \mathcal{A}_{i-1}(v))$ for i not too small.

Heuristically, a random walk of length s under the conditioning $\mathcal{A}_s(v)$ should be much like a random walk on $H = G[V \setminus \{v\}]$. Now the probability of $\overline{\mathcal{A}}_s(v)$ when we *forbid* a visit to v in the first $s-1$ steps is close to

$$\sum_{w\in N_G(v)} \frac{d_H(w)}{2|E(H)|} \cdot \frac{1}{d_H(w)}.$$

Here, $d_H(w)$ is the degree of v in H and $\frac{d_H(w)}{2|E(H)|}$ is the steady state of a random walk on H. $N_G(v)$ is the set of neighbours of v in G. If H is an expander and s much larger than the mixing time then the sum of these probabilities is the probability that W_u is at a neighbour of v at time $s-1$. The factor $\frac{1}{degree_H(w)}$ is then the probability we move to v at the next step. The main part of the analysis in Lemma 3 goes to show that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_i(v) \mid \mathcal{A}_{i-1}(v)) \sim 1 - \frac{d(v)}{2m}$$

for large i. This is then used in (2) to estimate $\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v))$ from above and below.

The upper bound follows from (1) after some calculation.

The lower bound uses the Chebyshev inequality and requires the estimate $\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v_1) \wedge \mathcal{A}_s(v_2)) \sim \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v_1))\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v_2))$ for suitably chosen pairs v_1, v_2.

3 Properties of $G_{n,p}$

Let $d(v)$ be the degree of vertex $v \in V$ and let δ, Δ denote the minimum and maximum degree. Let $\delta_v \geq 2$ be the minimum degree of a neighbour of v, *excluding neighbours of degree one*. Let $dist(u, v)$ denote the distance between the vertices u, v of the graph G.

Let $c = c(n) > 1$ where $c > 1$. We say that a graph G is *typical* if it has the structural properties **P0**–**P7** given below. The proof of the following lemma is given in the Appendix.

Lemma 1. *Let* $p = \frac{c \log n}{n}$ *where* $\omega = (c-1)\log n \to \infty$ *and c=O(1). Then* **whp** $G \in G_{n,p}$ *is typical.*

P0: G is connected.

P1: $\Delta(G) \leq \Delta_0 = (c + 10)\log n$ and

$$\delta(G) \geq \begin{cases} 1 & c \leq 1 + e^{-500} \\ \alpha \log n & c > 1 + e^{-500} \end{cases}$$

where $\alpha = \alpha^*/2$ and $\alpha^* > e^{-600}$ satisfies $c - 1 = \alpha^* \log(ce/\alpha^*)$.

P2: Call a vertex *small* if its degree is at most $\log n/20$. There are at most $n^{1/3}$ *small* vertices and no two small vertices are within distance $\leq \frac{\log n}{(\log \log n)^2}$ of each other.

P3: For $L \subseteq V$, $|L| \leq 4$, let $H = G[V \setminus L]$ be the subgraph of G induced by $V \setminus L$. For $S \subseteq V \setminus L$ let $e_H(S, \overline{S})$ be the number of edges of H with one end in S and the other in $\overline{S} = V \setminus (L \cup S)$. For all $H \subseteq G$ such that $\delta(H) \geq 1$, and for all $S \subseteq V \setminus L$, $|S| \leq n/2$,

$$\frac{e_H(S, \overline{S})}{d_H(S)} \geq \frac{1}{6}.$$

P4: Let $D(k)$ be the number of vertices of degree k in G. Let

$$\overline{D}(k) = n\binom{n-1}{k}p^k(1-p)^{n-1-k}$$

denote the expected size of $D(k)$ in $G_{n,p}$.

Define

$$\begin{aligned} K_0 &= \{k \in [1, \Delta_0] : \overline{D}(k) \leq (\log n)^{-2}\}. \\ K_1 &= \{1 \leq k \leq 15 : (\log n)^{-2} \leq \overline{D}(k) \leq \log \log n\}. \\ K_2 &= \{k \in [16, \Delta_0] : (\log n)^{-2} \leq \overline{D}(k) \leq (\log n)^2\}. \\ K_3 &= [1, \Delta_0] \setminus (K_0 \cup K_1 \cup K_2). \end{aligned}$$

P4a: If $k \in K_3$ then $\frac{1}{2}\overline{D}(k) \le D(k) \le 2\overline{D}(k)$, and

$$D(k) \begin{cases} = 0 & k \in K_0 \\ \le (\log\log n)^2 & k \in K_1 \\ \le (\log n)^4 & k \in K_2 \end{cases}$$

P4b: If $\omega \ge (\log n)^{2/3}$ then $K_1 = \emptyset$ and

$$\min\{k \in K_2\} \ge (\log n)^{1/2} \quad \text{and} \quad |K_2| = O(\log\log n).$$

P5: The number of edges $m = m(G)$ of G satisfies $\left|m - \frac{1}{2}cn\log n\right| \le n^{1/2}\log n$.

P6: Let $k^* = \lceil (c-1)\log n \rceil$, $V^* = \{v : d(v) = k^*\}$ and let $B^* = \{v \in V^* : dist(v,w) \le \frac{10\log n}{(\log\log n)^2}$ for some $w \in V^*, w \ne v\}$. Then

$$|V^*| \ge \frac{1}{2}\overline{D}(k^*) \quad \text{and} \quad |B^*| \le \frac{1}{10}\overline{D}(k^*).$$

Let $X = \{v : \ \delta_v \le \alpha \log n\}$. Then

$$|V^* \cap X| \le \frac{1}{10}\overline{D}(k^*).$$

P7 Call a cycle *short* if its length is at most $\frac{\log n}{10\log\log n}$. The minimum distance between two short cycles is at least $\frac{\log n}{\log\log n}$ and the minimum distance between a small vertex and a short cycle is at least $\frac{\log n}{10\log\log n}$.

P8: G has at least one triangle and at least one 5-cycle.

4 The cover time of a typical graph

In this section G denotes a fixed graph with vertex set $[n]$ which satisfies **P0–P8** and u is some arbitrary vertex from which a walk is started. For a subgraph H of G let $W_{u,H}$ denote a random walk on H which starts at vertex u and let $W_{u,H}(t)$ denote the walk generated by the first t steps. Let $X_{u,H}(t)$ be the vertex reached at step t and let $P_{u,H}^{(t)}(v) = \mathbf{Pr}(X_{u,H}(t) = v)$. Let $\pi_{u,H}(v)$ be the steady state probability of the random walk $W_{u,H}$. Note that properties **P1** and **P8** guarantee that the Markov chain associated with the walk is irreducible and aperiodic and therefore it has a steady state. For an unbiased random walk on a connected graph H with $m(H)$ edges, $\pi_H(v) = \pi_{u,H}(v) = \frac{d_H(v)}{2m(H)}$ where $d_H(v)$ denotes degree in H.

Let $H = H(v) = G[V \setminus \{v\}]$ if v is not a neighbour of a vertex w of degree 1, and let $H(v) = G[V \setminus \{v,w\}]$ if v has a neighbour w of degree 1. (Note that **P2** rules out a vertex having two neighbours of degree 1). For a subgraph H let $N_H(v)$ be the neighbourhood of v in H (i.e $N_H(v) = N_G(v) \cap V(H)$). When $H = G$ we drop the H from the above notation and often drop the u as well.

Lemma 2. *Let G be typical, then there exists a sufficiently large constant $K > 0$ such that if $\tau_0 = K\log n$ then for all $v \in V$, and for all $u, x \in H = H(v)$, after $t \ge \tau_0$ steps*

$$|P_{u,H}^{(t)}(x) - \pi_{u,H}(x)| = O(n^{-10}). \tag{3}$$

Proof The *conductance* Φ of the walk $W_{u,H}$ is defined by

$$\Phi(W_{u,H}) = \min_{\pi(S)\leq 1/2} \frac{e_H(S:\overline{S})}{d_H(S)}.$$

It follows from **P3** that the conductance Φ of the walk $W_{u,H}$ satisfies $\Phi \geq \frac{1}{6}$. Now it follows from Jerrum and Sinclair [10] that

$$|P^{(t)}_{u,H}(x) - \pi_{u,H}(x)| = O\left(n^{1/2}\left(1-\frac{\Phi^2}{2}\right)^t\right). \tag{4}$$

For sufficiently large K, the RHS above will be $O(n^{-10})$ at τ_0. We remark that there is a technical point here. The result of [10] assumes that the walk is lazy, and only makes a move to a neighbour with probability 1/2 at any step. This leaves the steady state distribution unchanged, halves the conductance and (4) remains true. For us it is sufficient simply to keep the walk lazy for $2\tau_0$ steps until it is mixed. This is negligible compared to the cover time.

□

For $v \neq u \in V$, let $\mathcal{A}_t(v)$ be the event that $W_{u,G}(t)$ does not visit v.

Lemma 3.
(a) *If $t > 2\tau_0$ and $\delta_v \geq 2$ then*

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_t(v)) &\leq \left(1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^2 - O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}\right)^{t-2\tau_0}\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v))\\
\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_t(v)) &\geq \left(1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2 + O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}\right)^{t-2\tau_0}\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v))
\end{aligned}$$

(b) *Suppose that $v, v' \in V^* \setminus X$ (see **P6**) and that $dist(v,v') > \frac{10\log n}{(\log\log n)^2}$. Then*

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v)\cap\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v')) \leq \left(1-\left(1+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{k^*}{m}\right)^{t-2\tau_0}.$$

Proof The main idea of the proof is to show that the variation distance between a random walk of length τ_0 on H and a random walk on G, *conditioned* not to visit v is sufficiently small.

(a) Fix $w \neq v$ and $y \in N_H(v)$. Let $\mathcal{W}_k(y)$ denote the set of walks in $H(v)$ which start at w, finish at y, are of length $2\tau_0$ and which *leave* a vertex in the neighbourhood $N_H(v)$ exactly k times. (Note that the walk can leave $y \in N_H(v)$ without necessarily leaving $N_H(v)$). Let $\mathcal{W}_k = \bigcup_y \mathcal{W}_k(y)$ and let $W = (w_0, w_1, \ldots, w_{2\tau_0}) \in \mathcal{W}_k(y)$. Let

$$\rho_W = \frac{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,G}(s) = w_s, s = 0,1,\ldots,2\tau_0)}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(s) = w_s, s = 0,1,\ldots,2\tau_0)}. \tag{5}$$

Then

$$1 \geq \rho_W \geq \left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^k.$$

This is because

$$\frac{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(s)=w_s \mid X_{w,H}(s-1)=w_{s-1})}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,G}(s)=w_s \mid X_{w,G}(s-1)=w_{s-1})} = \begin{cases} 1 & w_{s-1}\notin N_G(v) \\ \frac{d_G(w_{s-1})}{d_G(w_{s-1})-1} & w_{s-1}\in N_G(v) \end{cases}$$

If $\mathcal{E}=\{X_{w,G}(\tau)\neq v, 0\leq\tau\leq 2\tau_0\}$ then

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E}) &= \sum_{k\geq 0}\sum_{W\in\mathcal{W}_k}\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,G}(2\tau_0)=W) \\ &= \sum_{k\geq 0}\sum_{W\in\mathcal{W}_k}\rho_W\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=W) \\ &\geq \sum_{k\geq 0}p_k\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^k \end{aligned}$$

where

$$p_k=\sum_{W\in\mathcal{W}_k}\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=W)=\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}(2\tau_0)\in\mathcal{W}_k).$$

We will show in Lemma 4, below, that

$$p_0+p_1+p_2\geq 1-O((\log n)^{-1}) \tag{6}$$

which immediately implies that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E})\geq p_0+p_1\left(1-\frac{1}{\delta_v}\right)+p_2\left(1-\frac{1}{\delta_v}\right)^2\geq\left(1-\frac{1}{\delta_v}\right)^2-O((\log n)^{-1}).$$

Now fix y and write

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,G}(2\tau_0)=y\mid\mathcal{E}) &= \sum_{k\geq 0}\sum_{W\in\mathcal{W}_k(y)}\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,G}(2\tau_0)=W)\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E})^{-1} \\ &= \sum_{k\geq 0}\sum_{W\in\mathcal{W}_k(y)}\rho_W\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=W)\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E})^{-1}. \end{aligned}$$

Now if

$$\begin{aligned} p_{k,y} &= \frac{\mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}\in\mathcal{W}_k(y))}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y)} \\ &= \mathbf{Pr}(W_{w,H}(2\tau_0)\text{ leaves a vertex of }N_H(v)\ k\text{ times}\mid X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y) \end{aligned}$$

then

$$\sum_{k\geq 0}p_{k,y}\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^k\leq\frac{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,G}(2\tau_0)=y\mid\mathcal{E})}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y)}\leq\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{E})^{-1}.$$

We will show in Lemma 4, below, that

$$p_{0,y}+p_{1,y}+p_{2,y}\geq 1-O((\log n)^{-1}) \tag{7}$$

and so

$$\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^2-O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\leq\left|\frac{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,G}(2\tau_0)=y\mid\mathcal{E})}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y)}\right|\leq\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right).$$

Taking w as $X_{u,G}(t-2\tau_0-1)$, and conditioning on $\mathcal{A}_{t-2\tau_0-1}(v)$, we deduce that

$$\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^2 - O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right) \leq \left|\frac{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{u,G}(t-1)=y \mid \mathcal{A}_{t-1}(v))}{\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y)}\right| \leq \left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2 + O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right).$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_t(v) \mid \mathcal{A}_{t-1}(v)) &\geq 1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\sum_{y\in N_H(v)} P^{(2\tau_0)}_{w,H(v)}(y)\frac{1}{d(y)} \\
&= 1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\sum_{y\in N_H(v)}\left(\frac{d(y)-1}{2m-2d(v)}+O\left(\frac{1}{n^{10}}\right)\right)\frac{1}{d(y)} \\
&\geq 1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{1}{2m-2d(v)}\left(d(v)-\sum_{y\in N_H(v)}\frac{1}{d(y)}\right) \\
&= 1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v}{\delta_v-1}\right)^2+O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}.
\end{aligned}$$

Here we use **P2** to see that $\sum_{y\in N_H(v)}\frac{1}{d(y)} \leq \frac{40d(v)}{\log n}$.

Similarly,

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_t(v) \mid \mathcal{A}_{t-1}(v)) \leq 1-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v-1}{\delta_v}\right)^2-O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}$$

and the lemma follows immediately. □

Lemma 4. *Equations* (6),(7) *are valid.*

Proof Clearly, we only need to prove (7) and so fix $y \in N_H(v)$.

The main idea is to show that a random walk of length $2\tau_0$ from w to y is close in distribution to a random walk of length τ_0 from w to x followed by the reversal of a random walk W_3 of length τ_0 from y to x, where x is chosen from the the steady state of a walk. Each of W_1, W_3 is basically a random walk of length τ_0 and it easy to estimate the number of returns to $N_H(v)$ for such walks.

Let $\mathcal{W}(a,b,t)$ denote the set of walks in H from a to b of length t and for $W \in \mathcal{W}(a,b,t)$ let $\mathbf{Pr}(W) = \mathbf{Pr}(W_{a,H}(t)=W)$. Then for $x \in V(H)$ we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Pr}(X_{w,H}(\tau_0)=x \mid X_{w,H}(2\tau_0)=y) &= \sum_{\substack{W_1\in\mathcal{W}(w,x,\tau_0)\\ W_2\in\mathcal{W}(x,y,\tau_0)}} \frac{\mathbf{Pr}(W_1)\mathbf{Pr}(W_2)}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,y,2\tau_0))} \\
&= \pi_{x,H}^{-1} \sum_{\substack{W_1\in\mathcal{W}(w,x,\tau_0)\\ W_2\in\mathcal{W}(x,y,\tau_0)}} \frac{\mathbf{Pr}(W_1)\pi_{x,H}\mathbf{Pr}(W_2)}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,y,2\tau_0))}
\end{aligned}$$

and with W_3 equal to the reversal of W_2,

$$
\begin{aligned}
&= \pi_{x,H}^{-1}\pi_{y,H} \sum_{\substack{W_1\in\mathcal{W}(w,x,\tau_0)\\ W_3\in\mathcal{W}(y,x,\tau_0)}} \frac{\mathbf{Pr}(W_1)\mathbf{Pr}(W_3)}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,y,2\tau_0))} \\
&= \frac{\pi_{x,H}^{-1}\pi_{y,H}}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,y,2\tau_0))}\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,x,\tau_0))\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(y,x,\tau_0)) \\
&= \frac{\pi_{x,H}^{-1}\pi_{y,H}}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(w,y,2\tau_0))}(\pi_{x,H} - O(n^{-10}))^2 \\
&= \pi_{x,H} - O(n^{-9}\log n).
\end{aligned}
$$

It follows that the variation distance between $X_{w,H}(\tau_0)$ and a vertex chosen from the steady state distribution π_H is $O(n^{-8}\log n)$. Now given $x = X_{w,H}(\tau_0)$, $W_{w,H}(\tau_0)$ is a random walk of length τ_0 from w to x and $W_2 = (x = X_{w,H}(\tau_0), X_{w,H}(\tau_0+1), \ldots, y = X_{w,H}(2\tau_0))$ is a random walk of length τ_0 from x to y. For $W \in \mathcal{W}(y,x,\tau_0)$ let $\mathbf{Q}(W)$ be the probability that $(y, X_{w,H}(2\tau_0 - 1), \ldots, X_{w,H}(\tau_0)) = W$. Then we have

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Q}(W) &= (1+O(n^{-8}\log n))\frac{\pi_{x,H}\mathbf{Pr}(W^{reverse})}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(x,y,\tau_0))} \\
&= (1+O(n^{-8}\log n))\frac{\pi_{y,H}\mathbf{Pr}(W)}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(x,y,\tau_0))} \\
&= (1+O(n^{-8}\log n))\frac{\pi_{y,H}\pi_{x,H}\mathbf{Pr}(W)}{\pi_{x,H}\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(x,y,\tau_0))} \\
&= (1+O(n^{-8}\log n))\frac{\pi_{y,H}\pi_{x,H}\mathbf{Pr}(W)}{\pi_{y,H}\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(y,x,\tau_0))}
\end{aligned}
$$

Thus if $W = (w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_{\tau_0} = x)$ then

$$
\mathbf{Q}(W \mid X_{w,H}(\tau_0) = x) = (1+O(n^{-8}\log n))\frac{\mathbf{Pr}(W)}{\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}(y,x,\tau_0))}
$$

and so the distribution of $W_2^{reverse}$ is within variation distance $O(n^{-8}\log n)$ of that of a random walk of length τ_0 from y to a vertex x chosen with distribution π_H.

Thus the variation distance between the distribution of a random walk of length $2\tau_0$ from w to y and that of $W_1, W_3^{reversed}$ is $O(n^{-8}\log n)$ where W_1, W_3 are obtained by (i) choosing x from the steady state distribution and then (ii) choosing a random walk W_1 from w to x and a random walk W_3 from y to x. Furthermore, the variation distance between the distribution of W_1 and a random walk of length τ_0 from w is $O(n^{-9})$. Similarly, the variation distance between distribution of W_3 and a random walk of length τ_0 from y is $O(n^{-9})$.

Now consider W_1 and let Z_t be the distance of $X_{w,H}(t)$ from v. We observe from **P2** and **P7** that except for at most one value $\bar{a} \in J = [1, \frac{\log n}{2(\log\log n)^2}]$ we have

$$
\mathbf{Pr}(Z_{t+1} = a+1 \mid Z_t = a) \geq 1 - \frac{20}{\log n}, \qquad a \in I \setminus \bar{a}.
$$

and this will enable us to prove

$$
\mathbf{Pr}(W_1 \text{ or } W_3 \text{ make a } \textit{return} \text{ to } N_H(v)) = O(1/\log n) \tag{8}
$$

and this implies (7). (Note that a move from $N_H(v)$ to $N_H(v)$ has to be counted as a return here.)

To prove (8), let t_0 be the first time that W_1 visits $N_H(v)$. We have to estimate the probability that W_1 returns to $N_H(v)$ later on and so we can assume w.l.o.g. that $w \in N_H(v)$ i.e. $Z_0 = 1$.

It follows from **P2** and **P7** that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(Z_i = i+1,\ i = 1, \ldots, 6 \mid Z_0 = 1) \geq \left(1 - \frac{40}{\log n}\right)^6. \tag{9}$$

To check this consider two possiblilites: Let $N^7(v)$ denote the set of vertices within distance 7 or less of v in G.

(a) $N^7(v)$ does not contain a small vertex. Since there is at most one edge joining two vertices in $N^7(v)$, we see that $\mathbf{Pr}(Z_{i+1} > Z_i) = 1 - \frac{40}{\log n}$ for $i = 1, \ldots, 6$ and (9) follows.

(b) On the other hand, if there is a small vertex x in $N^7(v)$ then with probability $\geq 1 - \frac{20}{\log n}$ the first move from w takes us further away from x and (9) follows as before.

If $Z_3 = 4$ and there is a return to $N_H(v)$ then there exists $\tau \leq \tau_0$ such that $Z_\tau = 4, Z_{\tau+1} = 3$ and $Z_{\tau+2} \leq 3$. If there is no small vertex within distance 4 of v then **P2** and **P7** imply

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists \tau \leq \tau_0 :\ Z_\tau = 4, Z_{\tau+1} = 3, Z_{\tau+2} \leq 3) = O\left(\frac{\tau_0}{(\log n)^2}\right). \tag{10}$$

If there is a *unique* small vertex within distance 4 of v and $Z_6 = 7$ and there is a return to $N_H(v)$ then there exists $\tau \leq \tau_0$ such that $Z_\tau = 7, Z_{\tau+1} = 6$ and $Z_{\tau+2} = 5$ (no short cycles close to v now). We can then argue as in (10) that the probablity of this $O\left(\frac{\tau_0}{(\log n)^2}\right)$. This completes the proof of part (a) of the lemma.

(b) We simply run through the proof as in (a), replacing v by v, v': $H = H(v, v') = G - \{v, v'\}$, $N_H(v, v') = N_G(v) \cup N_G(v')$. The proof of (7) remains valid because v, v' are far apart. □

4.1 The upper bound on cover time

From here on, $A_1, A_2, \ldots$ are a sequence of unspecified positive constants.

Let $t_0 = \lceil 2m \log \frac{c}{c-1} \rceil$. We now prove for typical graphs, that for any vertex $u \in V$

$$C_u \leq t_0 + o(m). \tag{11}$$

Let $T_G(u)$ be the time taken to visit every vertex of G by the random walk W_u. Let U_t be the number of vertices of G which have not been visited by W_u at step t. We note the following:

$$\mathbf{Pr}(T_G(u) > t) = \mathbf{Pr}(U_t > 0) \leq \min\{1, \mathbf{E}\, U_t\}, \tag{12}$$

$$C_u = \mathbf{E}\, T_G(u) = \sum_{t>0} \mathbf{Pr}(T_G(u) > t) \tag{13}$$

It follows from (12,13) that for all t

$$C_u \leq t + \sum_{s>t} \mathbf{E}\, U_s = t + \sum_{v \in V} \sum_{s>t} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)). \tag{14}$$

Now, by Lemma 3, for $s > 2\tau_0$,

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) &\leq \left(1 - \left(\left(\frac{\delta_v - 1}{\delta_v}\right)^2 - \frac{A_1}{\log n}\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}\right)^{s-2\tau_0} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v)) \\
&\leq \exp\left(-\frac{sd(v)}{2m}\left(1 - \frac{A_2}{\log n}\right)\right), \qquad \text{if } \delta_v \geq \alpha \log n
\end{aligned}$$

where α is as in **P1**.

Then from **P4**,

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{E}\, U_s &\leq \sum_{i=1}^{3} \sum_{k \in K_i} \sum_{\substack{d(v)=k \\ v \notin X}} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) + \sum_{v \in X} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) \\
&\leq \sum_{i=1}^{3} \sum_{k \in K_i} D(k) \exp\left(-\frac{kd(v)}{2m}\left(1 - \frac{A_2}{\log n}\right)\right) + \sum_{v \in X} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_s(v)) \\
&\leq T_3(s) + T_1(s) + T_2(s) + T_X(s) \qquad (15)
\end{aligned}$$

where

$$T_3(s) = 2\sum_{k=1}^{n-1} n \binom{n-1}{k} p^k (1-p)^{n-1-k} e^{-\frac{sk}{2m}\left(1 - \frac{A_2}{\log n}\right)},$$

$$T_i(s) = \sum_{k \in K_i} D(k) e^{-\frac{sk}{2m}\left(1 - \frac{A_2}{\log n}\right)}, \qquad i = 1, 2$$

and

$$\begin{aligned}
T_X(s) &= \sum_{v \in X} \left(1 - \left(\left(\frac{\delta_v - 1}{\delta_v}\right)^2 - O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right)\frac{d(v)}{2m}\right)^{s-2\tau_0} \\
&\leq 2\sum_{v \in X} \exp\left\{-\left(\left(\frac{\delta_v - 1}{\delta_v}\right)^2 - \frac{A_3}{\log n}\right)\frac{sd(v)}{2m}\right\}.
\end{aligned}$$

Now for $\gamma > 0$,

$$\sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} e^{-\gamma s} = \frac{1}{e^{\gamma} - 1} e^{-\gamma t_0} \leq \gamma^{-1} e^{-\gamma t_0}. \qquad (16)$$

Let $\lambda = \frac{t_0}{2m}\left(1 - \frac{A_2}{\log n}\right)$. Applying (16) we get

$$\begin{aligned}
\sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} T_3(s) &\leq 3m \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} \frac{n}{k} \binom{n-1}{k} p^k (1-p)^{n-k-1} e^{-k\lambda} \\
&\leq 6\frac{m}{p} e^{\lambda} \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} \binom{n}{k+1} p^{k+1} (1-p)^{n-k-1} e^{-(k+1)\lambda} \\
&< 7\frac{m}{p} \frac{c}{c-1} \left(1 - p + pe^{-\lambda}\right)^n \\
&\leq 7\frac{mn}{(c-1)\log n} e^{-np+npe^{-\lambda}} \\
&\leq 8\frac{me^{2A_2}}{(c-1)\log n} \\
&= o(m). \qquad (17)
\end{aligned}$$

We have used the estimation,

$$\begin{aligned}
npe^{-\lambda} &\leq (c\log n)\left(\frac{c-1}{c}\right)\left(1 + \frac{1}{c-1}\right)^{A_2/\log n} \\
&\leq (1 + O(n^{-1}))((c-1)\log n)\left(1 + \frac{2A_2}{(c-1)\log n}\right).
\end{aligned}$$

Note that we have used $(c-1)\log n \to \infty$ to get the second line.

Continuing we get

$$\begin{aligned}
\sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} T_1(s) &\leq A_4 m \sum_{k \in K_1} \frac{(\log\log n)^2}{k} e^{-k\lambda} \\
&= o(m) \qquad (18)
\end{aligned}$$

since either (i) $\omega \geq (\log n)^{2/3}$ and $K_1 = \emptyset$ or (ii) $\omega < (\log n)^{2/3}$ and $e^{\lambda} \geq (1 - o(1))(\log n)^{1/3}$.

$$\begin{aligned}
\sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} T_2(s) &\leq A_5 m \sum_{k \in K_2} \frac{(\log n)^4}{k} e^{-k\lambda} \\
&= o(m) \qquad (19)
\end{aligned}$$

since either (i) $\omega \geq (\log n)^{2/3}$ and $\min\{k \in K_2\} \geq (\log n)^{1/2}$ and $|K_2| = O(\log\log n)$ or (ii) $\omega < (\log n)^{2/3}$ and $e^{\lambda} \geq (1 - o(1))(\log n)^{1/3}$.

Note now that $\delta_v \geq 2$ and if $v \in X$ (see **P6**) then from **P2** $d(v) \geq \log n/20$. Thus

$$\begin{aligned}
\sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} T_X(s) &\leq \sum_{s=t_0+1}^{\infty} \sum_{v \in X} \exp\left\{-\frac{sd(v)}{10m}\right\} \\
&\leq \sum_{v \in X} \frac{10m}{d(v)} \exp\left\{-\frac{t_0 d(v)}{10m}\right\} \\
&\leq \sum_{v \in X} \frac{200m}{\log n} \exp\left\{-\frac{t_0 \log n}{200m}\right\} \qquad \text{by } \mathbf{P2} \\
&\leq \sum_{v \in X} \frac{200m}{\log n} \left(\frac{c-1}{c}\right)^{\log n/201} \\
&= o(m) \qquad (20)
\end{aligned}$$

since either (i) $c \geq 1+e^{-500}$ and $X = \emptyset$ or (ii) $c < 1+e^{-500}$, in which case we use $(c-1)/c \leq e^{-500}$.

As $C_G = \max_{u \in V} C_u$, the upper bound on C_G now follows from (11), (15), (17), (18), (19), (20) and (14) with $t = t_0$. □

4.2 The lower bound on cover time

For any vertex u, we can find a set of vertices S such that at time $t_1 = t_0(1-\epsilon)$, $\epsilon \to 0$, the probability the set S is covered by the walk W_u tends to zero. Hence $T_G(u) > t_1$ **whp** which implies that $C_G \geq (1-o(1))t_0$.

We construct S as follows. Let k^*, V^*, B^* be as defined in Property **P6**.

Let $S^* = V^* \setminus (B^* \cup X)$ and let

$$\epsilon = \frac{10}{(c-1)\log c/(c-1)} \frac{\log\log n}{\log n} = o(1) \text{ and } \delta = \frac{(\log n)^3}{|S^*|}.$$

Note that

$$\overline{D}(k^*) = \Omega\left(\frac{n^{(c-1)\ln(c/(c-1))}}{\sqrt{(c-1)\log n}}\right) = \Omega((\log n)^a) \qquad (21)$$

for any constant $a > 0$. Then **P6** implies that $|S^*| = \Omega((\log n)^a)$ for any constant $a > 0$.

Now for $v, w \neq u$ let $\mathcal{A}_t(v,w)$ be the event that W has not visited v or w by step t.
Let $Q \subseteq S^*$ be given by

$$Q = \{v \in S^* : \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v)) < 1-\delta, \text{ or } \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v,w)) < (1-\delta)^2, \text{ for some } w \in S^*\}.$$

Now in time $2\tau_0$, W can visit at most $2\tau_0 + 1$ vertices and so

$$\sum_{v \in V} \mathbf{Pr}(\overline{A}_{2\tau_0}(v)) \leq 2\tau_0 + 1 \text{ and } \sum_{v,w \in V} \mathbf{Pr}(\overline{A}_{2\tau_0}(v,w)) \leq \binom{2\tau_0+1}{2}.$$

Thus

$$|Q| \leq \frac{2\tau_0+1}{\delta} + \frac{2\tau_0(2\tau_0+1)}{2(1-(1-\delta)^2)} = o(|S^*|).$$

Therefore, if $S = S^* \setminus Q$,

$$|S| \geq \frac{\overline{D}(k^*)}{3}.$$

Let $S(t)$ denote the subset of S which has not been visited by W by time t. Now

$$\mathbf{E}\ |S(t)| \geq \sum_{v \in S} \left(1 - \left(1 + \frac{A_6}{\log n}\right) \frac{k^*}{2m}\right)^{t-2\tau_0} \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{A}_{2\tau_0}(v)).$$

Setting $t = t_1$ we have

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{E}\ |S(t_1)| &= \Omega\left(\frac{n^{(c-1)\log c/(c-1)}}{\sqrt{(c-1)\log n}} \exp\left(-\frac{k^*}{2m} t_1\right)\right) \\ &= \Omega\left(\frac{n^{\epsilon(c-1)\log c/(c-1)}}{\sqrt{(c-1)\log n}}\right) \\ &= \Omega((\log n)^9). \end{aligned} \tag{22}$$

Let $Y_{v,t}$ be the indicator for the event that $W_u(t)$ has not visited vertex v at time t. As $v, w \in S$ are not adjacent, and have no common neighbours, when we delete v, w the total degree of $H(v, w)$ is $2m - 2d(v) - 2d(w)$, and $d(v) = d(w) = k^*$. It follows from Lemma 3(b) that for $v, w \in S$

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{E}\ (Y_{v,t_1} Y_{w,t_1}) &\leq \left(1 - \left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right)\right) \frac{k^*}{m}\right)^{t_1 - 2\tau_0} \\ &\leq (1 + o(1)) \mathbf{E}\ Y_{v,t_1} \mathbf{E}\ Y_{w,t_1}. \end{aligned} \tag{23}$$

It follows therefore that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(S(t_1) \neq 0) \geq \frac{(\mathbf{E}\ |S(t_1)|)^2}{\mathbf{E}\ |S(t_1)|^2} = \frac{1}{\frac{\mathbf{E}|S_{t_1}|(|S_{t_1}|-1)}{(\mathbf{E}|S(t_1)|)^2} + (\mathbf{E}\ |S_{t_1}|)^{-1}} = 1 - o(1)$$

from (22) and (23). □

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5 Appendix: Typical graph properties

A proof of **P0**,**P1** can be found in Bollobás [2] or Janson, Łuczak and Ruciński [9].
A proof of **P2** can be found in [3].

P3: **Case of** $1 \leq s = |S| \leq n/(c \log n)$**.**

We first prove that **whp** $e_G(S,S) \leq s \log\log n$. Now

$$\begin{aligned}
&\mathbf{Pr}(\exists S : e_G(S,S) \geq s \log\log n) \\
&\leq \binom{n}{s}\binom{\binom{s}{2}}{s\log\log n} p^{s\log\log n} \leq \left(\frac{ne}{s}\right)^s \left(\frac{spe}{2\log\log n}\right)^{s\log\log n} \\
&\leq \exp\left(-s\left(\log\log n \cdot \log\left(\frac{2n\log\log n}{cse\log n}\right) - \log\frac{ne}{s}\right)\right) \\
&= o(n^{-2}).
\end{aligned}$$

By property **P0** and the definition of H, both G and H contain no isolated vertices and hence $d(S) > 0$. We write $e(S, \overline{S})/d(S) = 1 - 2e(S,S)/d(S)$. Partition S into sets S_1 and S_2, where S_1 are the vertices of S of degree at most $(\log n)/10$. Let T_1 be the neighbour set of S_1 in S_2 and let T_2 be the neighbour set of S_1 in $\overline{S}$. By property **P1** the set S_1 induces no edges, and the neighbours of vertices of S_1 are distinct. Thus

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{2e_H(S,S)}{d_H(S)} &\leq \frac{2(|T_1| + |S_2|\log\log n)}{2|T_1| + |T_2| + |S_2|((\log n)/10 - |L|)} \\
&\leq \frac{2 + \log\log n}{(\log n)/10} = o(1).
\end{aligned}$$

Now use

$$d_H(S) = e_H(S, \overline{S}) + 2e_H(S,S).$$

Case of $n/(c \log n) \leq s \leq n/2$**.**

The expected value of $e_H(S,\overline{S})$ is at least $\mu = s(n-s-4)p$. Thus from Chernoff bounds, for fixed s,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbf{Pr}(\exists S: e_H(S,\overline{S}) \leq \mu/2) &\leq \binom{n}{s} e^{-\frac{c}{9}\frac{s(n-s-4)}{n}\log n} \\ &\leq \exp\left(-s\left(\frac{c}{18}\log n - \log\frac{ne}{s}\right)\right) \\ &= o(n^{-2}).\end{aligned}$$

We note that $\mathbf{E}\ d_H(S) = 2\binom{s}{2}p + s(n-s-|L|)p$. Thus

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbf{Pr}(\exists S: d_H(S) \geq \frac{3}{2}\mathbf{E}\ d_H(S)) &\leq \binom{n}{s} e^{-\frac{c}{20}s\log n} \\ &\leq \exp\left(-s\left(\frac{c}{20}\log n - \log\frac{ne}{s}\right)\right) \\ &= o(n^{-2}).\end{aligned}$$

Thus

$$\frac{e_H(S,\overline{S})}{d_H(S)} \geq \frac{\frac{1}{2}s(n-s-4)p}{\frac{3}{2}(2\binom{s}{2}p + s(n-s)p)} \geq \frac{1}{6}.$$

P4a: First observe that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists k \in K_0:\ D(k) > 0) \leq \sum_{k\in K_0} \overline{D}(k) = \frac{|K_0|}{(\log n)^2} = O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right).$$

Then

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists k \in K_1:\ D(k) > (\log\log n)^2) \leq \sum_{k\in K_1} \frac{\overline{D}(k)}{(\log\log n)^2} = O\left(\frac{1}{\log\log n}\right).$$

Similarly,

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists k \in K_2:\ D(k) > (\log n)^4) \leq \sum_{k\in K_2} \frac{\overline{D}(k)}{(\log n)^4} = O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right).$$

A simple calculation gives that for our range of values of p

$$\mathbf{E}\ (D(k)(D(k)-1)) = \overline{D}(k)^2\left(1 + O\left(\frac{\log n}{n}\right)\right).$$

Thus

$$\mathbf{Var} D(k) = \overline{D}(k)\left(1 + O\left(\frac{\overline{D}(k)\log n}{n}\right)\right).$$

Applying the Chebychef inequality we see that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(D(k) \leq \frac{1}{2}\overline{D}(k) \text{ or } D(k) \geq 2\overline{D}(k)) \leq \frac{4\mathbf{Var}D(k)}{\overline{D}(k)^2} = \frac{4}{\overline{D}(k)}\left(1 + O\left(\frac{\log n}{n}\right)\right).$$

So, as $|K_3| = O(\log n)$,

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists k \in K_3:\ D(k) \leq \frac{1}{2}\overline{D}(k) \text{ or } D(k) \geq 2\overline{D}(k)) = O\left(\frac{1}{\log n}\right).$$

P4b: The sequence $(\overline{D}(k),\ k \geq 0)$ is unimodal and

$$\frac{\overline{D}(k+1)}{\overline{D}(k)} \sim \frac{c \log n}{k+1} \qquad \text{when } k = O(\log n). \tag{24}$$

Moreover, for $k \leq \Delta_0$ there is a positive constant $A = A(k)$ such that

$$\overline{D}(k) \sim A n^{1-c} \left(\frac{ce \log n}{k} \right)^k \frac{1}{k^{1/2}}. \tag{25}$$

Suppose first that there exists $k \in K_1 \cup K_2$ such that $k < (\log n)^{1/2}$. It follows from (25) that $c - 1 < (\log n)^{-1/3}$, for if $c - 1 \geq (\log n)^{-1/3}$ and $k < (\log n)^{1/2}$ then $\overline{D}(k) = o((\log n)^{-2})$.

Now suppose that $k \in K_2$ implies $k \geq (\log n)^{1/2}$. Observe from (25) that both $\overline{D}(\lfloor (c - c^{1/3}) \log n \rfloor)$ and $\overline{D}(\lfloor (c + c^{1/3}) \log n \rfloor)$ are much greater than $(\log n)^2$ Thus either $k \leq (c - c^{1/3}) \log n$ or $k \geq (c + c^{1/3}) \log n$. In either case, we see from iterating (24) that $|K_2| = O(\log \log n)$.

P5: This follows immediately from Chernoff bounds.

P6: From (21) we see that $\lceil (c-1) \log n \rceil \in K_3$ for c constant. That $|V^*| \geq \frac{1}{2} \overline{D}(k^*)$ now follows from **P3**. Now $|B^*| \leq |\{(v,w) \in (V^*)^2 : \ dist(v,w) \leq d = \frac{10 \log n}{(\log \log n)^2}\}|$. Therefore

$$\mathbf{E}\, |B^*| \leq \overline{D}(k^*)^2 \sum_{k=1}^{d} n^k p^{k+1} = o(\overline{D}(k^*)),$$

and the second part of **P6** follows from the Markov inequality. The third part is a similar first moment calculation.

P7: A proof of similar results can be found in [3].

P8: The expected number of triangles tends to infinity and we can use the Chebychef inequality to show that one exists **whp** . The same argument will work for 5-cycles. □