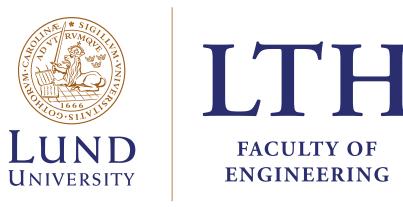
## **Average-Case Hardness in Proof Complexity** (with focus on clique and colouring)

16 November 2023

Oxford-Warwick Complexity Seminar

#### Susanna F. de Rezende

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- Natural question: Are hard problems rare? Or are most problems hard?
- Relations to:
  - Pseudorandomness
  - Cryptography
  - □ Learning
  - □ Meta-complexity
- Candidate hard instances for unconditional lower bounds
  - Lower bounds for algorithmic paradigms
  - Techniques that captures "what makes the problem hard"

#### Why study average-case?



#### Plan outline

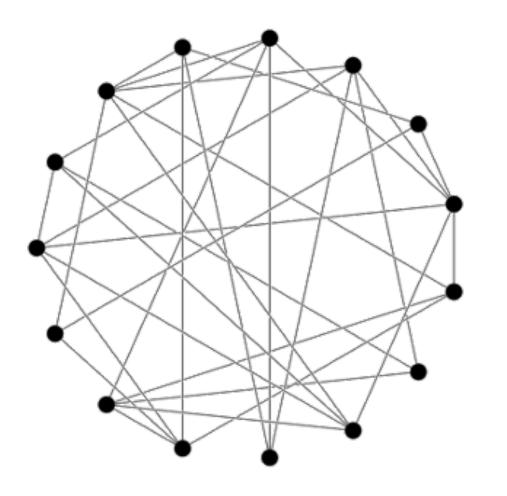
- Planted clique
- Proof systems (and algorithms)
- Proof complexity lower bounds for planted clique
- Planted colouring and lower bounds
- New techniques for clique
- Open problems



#### Planted clique problem

#### Erdős–Rényi random graph: $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$

whp largest clique has size  $\omega(G) \approx 2 \log n$ 

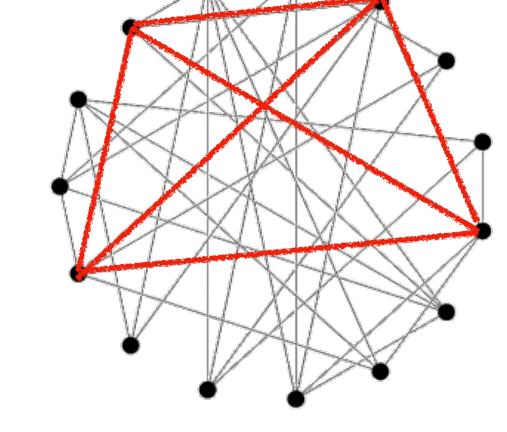


Polynomial time algorithm that distinguishes?



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- Planted *k*-clique:  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2, k)$
- $G' + K_k$  where  $G' \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$  and  $K_k$  a random k-clique





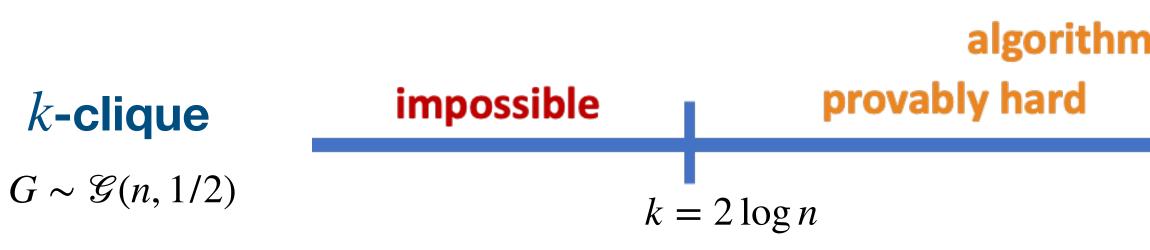
#### Planted clique problem

#### Given G, decide if $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$ or $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2, k)$

- Naïve  $n^{O(\log n)}$  algorithm since max clique in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$  has size  $\sim 2\log n$
- Polynomial-time algorithm when  $k \ge \Omega(\sqrt{n})$  [AKS '98]
- Otherwise believed to be hard: planted clique conjecture

**Goal:** Prove planted clique conjecture for bounded computational models

- Trace of algorithms give proof in some *proof* system
- Lower bound on size of proof  $\rightarrow$  lower bound on running time



algorithmically hard

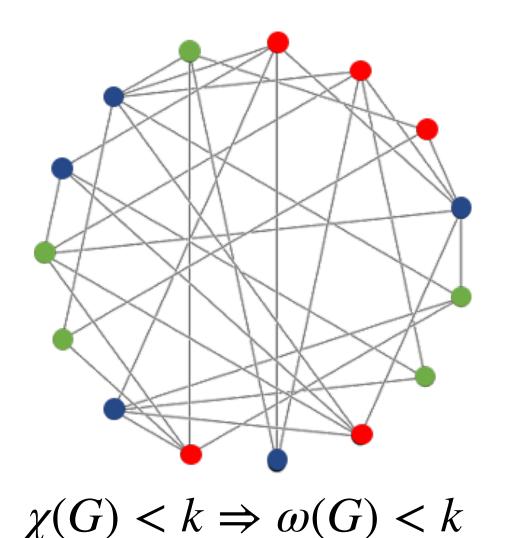
algorithmically easy provably easy  $k = \Omega(\sqrt{n})$ [AKS '98]



#### Planted clique problem

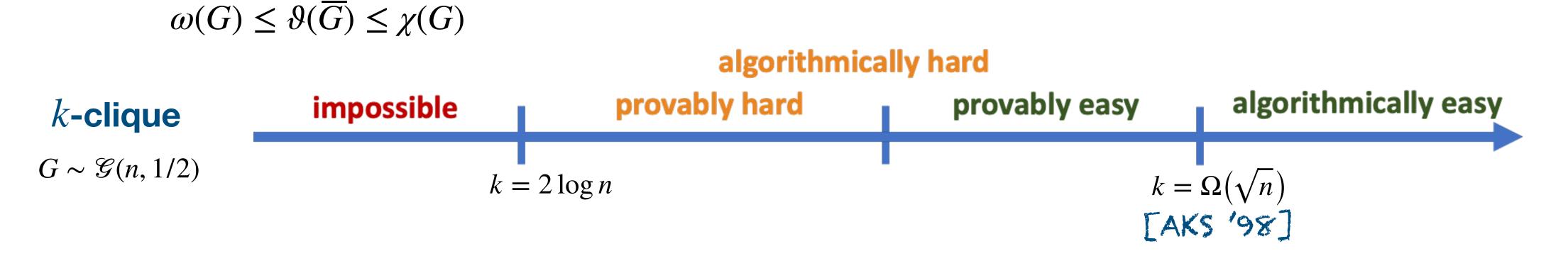
#### Erdős–Rényi random graph: $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2)$

whp largest clique has size  $\omega(G) \approx 2 \log n$ 

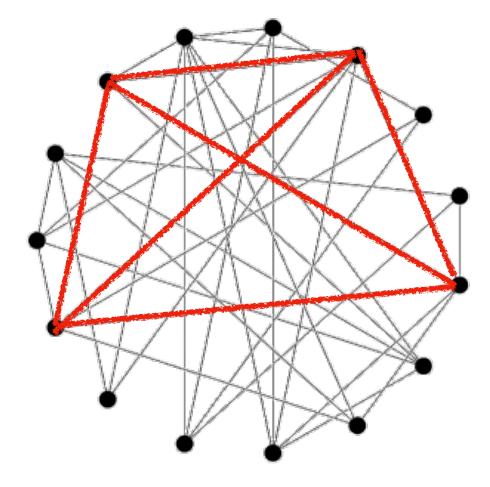


Three variations:

- Search: Given  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2, k)$ find *k*-clique ▶ Refutation: Given  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2)$ prove no k-clique ▶ Decision: Given  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2)$  or
- $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2, k)$  decide which



Planted k-clique:  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2, k)$  $G' + K_k$  where  $G' \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$  and  $K_k$  a random k-clique

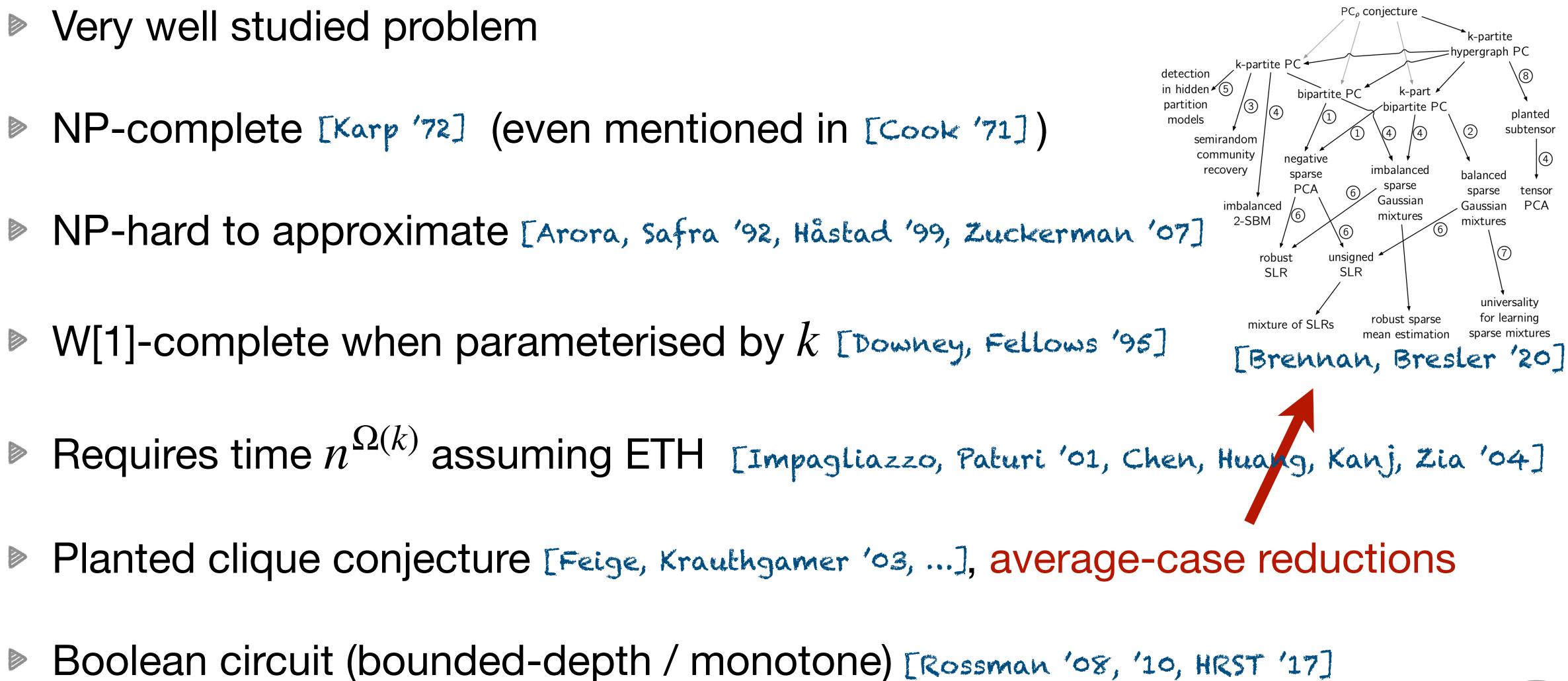




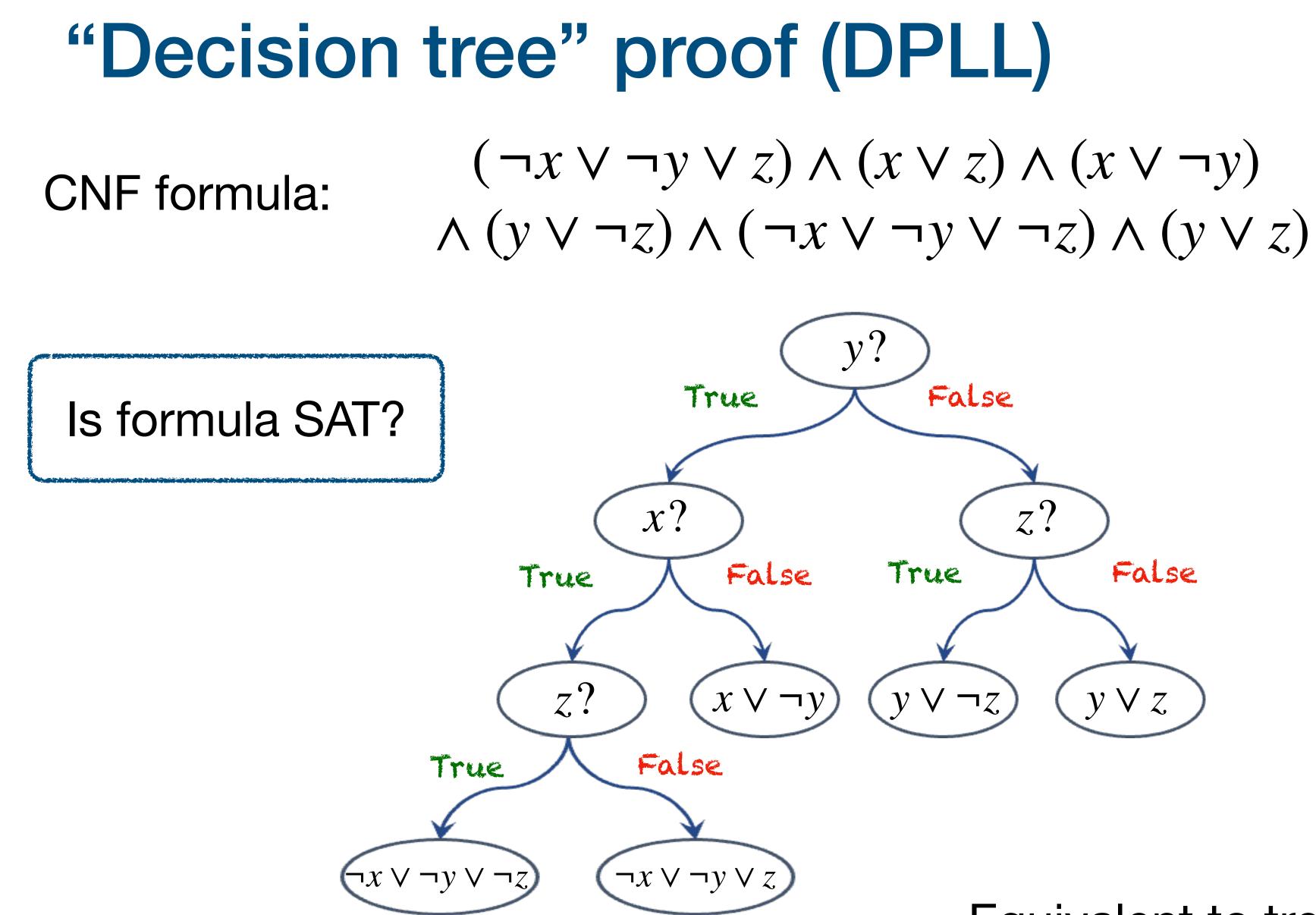


- Very well studied problem
- ▶ NP-complete [Karp '72] (even mentioned in [Cook '71])
- NP-hard to approximate [Arora, Safra '92, Håstad '99, Zuckerman '07]
- $\mathbb{W}[1]$ -complete when parameterised by k [Downey, Fellows '95]

#### Why clique?







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#### Equivalent to tree-like resolution



# **Resolution proof (CDCL SAT solvers)**

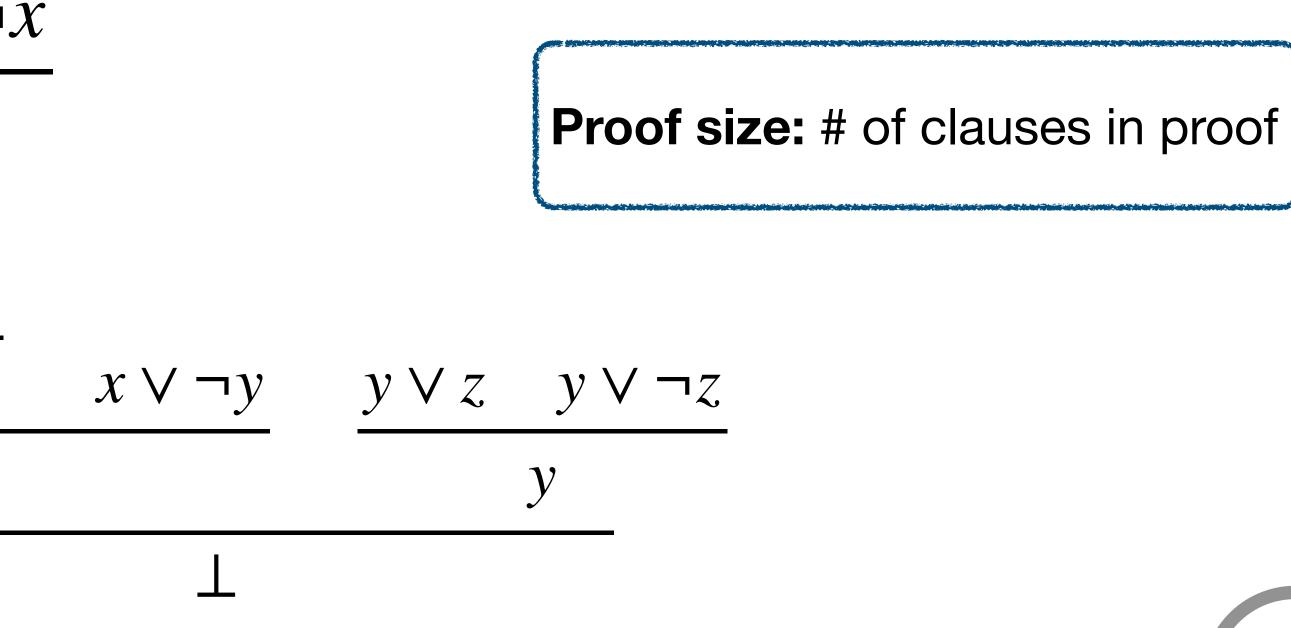
CNF formula:

 $(\neg x \lor \neg y \lor z) \land (x \lor z) \land (x \lor \neg y)$  $\land (y \lor \neg z) \land (\neg x \lor \neg y \lor \neg z) \land (y \lor z)$ 

Resolution refutation of F: derivation of empty clause  $\perp$  from formula using resolution rule  $\frac{A \lor x \quad B \lor \neg x}{A \lor B}$ 

$$\neg x \lor \neg y \lor z \quad \neg x \lor \neg y \lor \neg z$$
$$\neg x \lor \neg y \qquad \neg y$$
$$\neg y$$

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Average-Case Hardness in Proof Complexity



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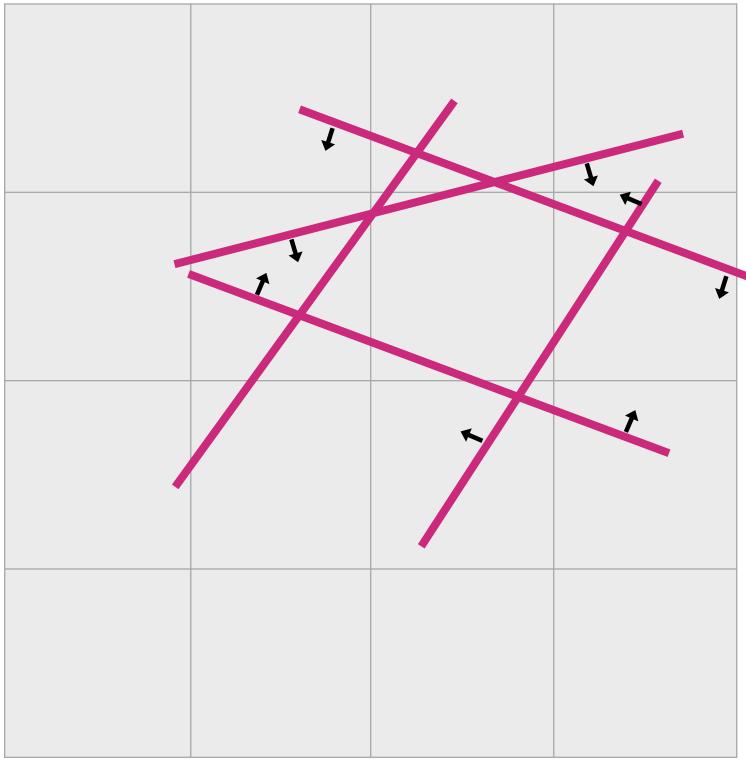
# Cutting planes (integer linear programming)

Constraints: inequalities instead of clauses

 $x \lor y \lor \neg z \implies x + y + (1 - z) \ge 1$ 

Boolean constraints:  $0 \le x \le 1$ 

- Rules: linear combination, integer reasoning
- ▶ e.g.,  $2x + 2y \ge 1$  →  $x + y \ge 1$
- Refutation: derive  $1 \leq 0$



**Proof size:** # of inequalities in proof



# Algebraic and semi-algebraic proof systems

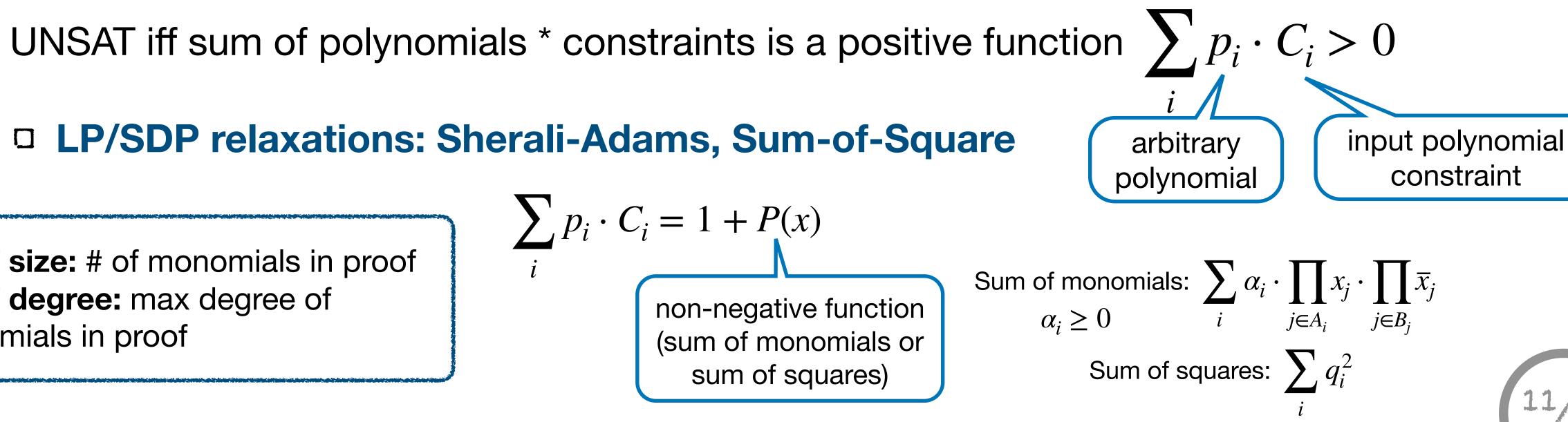
- Constraints: polynomials instead of clauses  $x \lor y \lor \neg z \implies (1 - x)(1 - y)z = 0 \implies \overline{x} \overline{y} z = 0$ Boolean constraints:  $x^2 = x$  (and  $\overline{x} + x = 1$ )
- UNSAT iff no common roots

#### Hilbert's Nullstellensatz, Polynomial Calculus (Gröbner basis computation)

#### LP/SDP relaxations: Sherali-Adams, Sum-of-Square

**Proof size:** # of monomials in proof **Proof degree:** max degree of monomials in proof







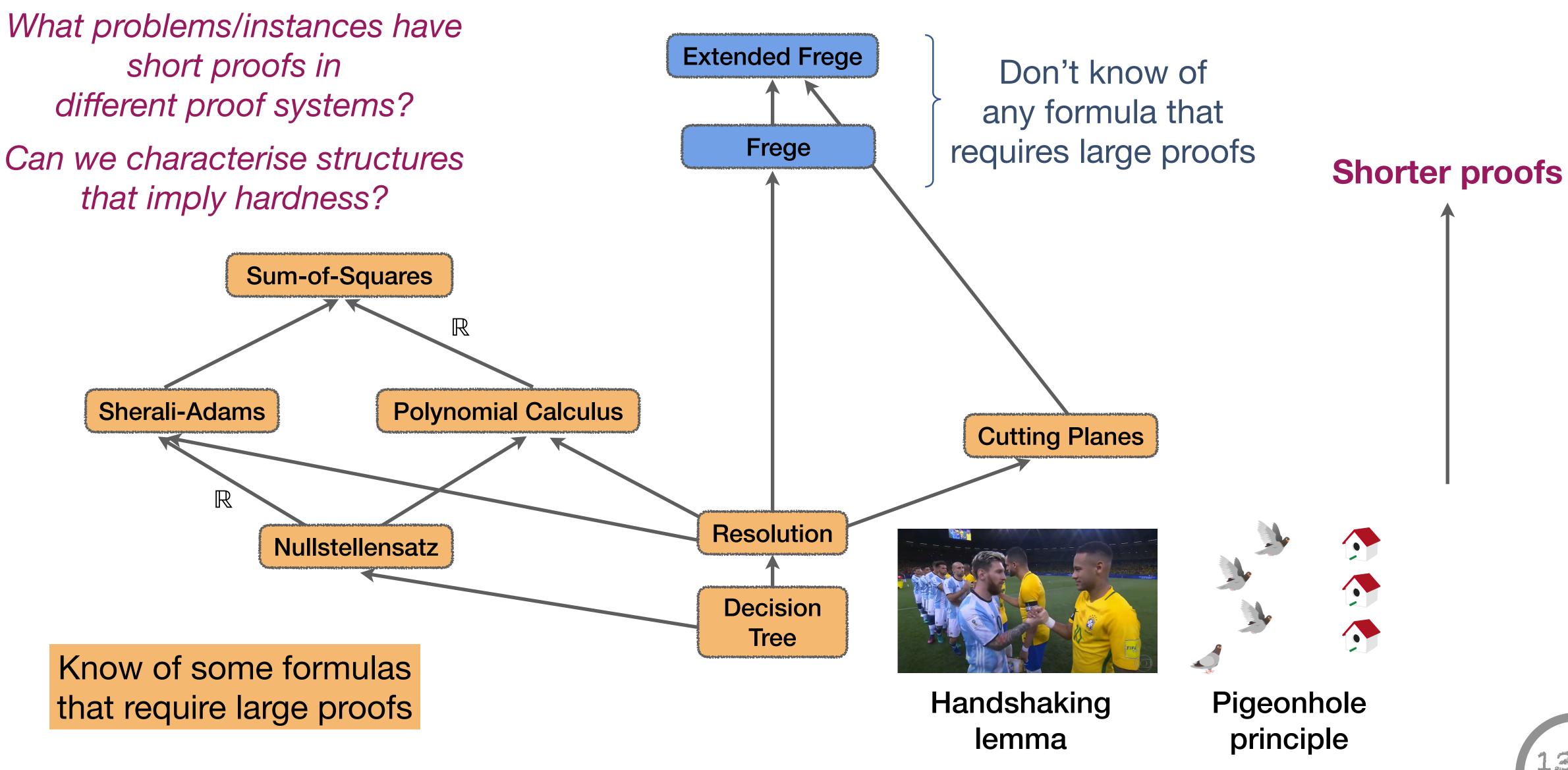


### Why sum of squares?

- Can count (refute pigeonhole principle in degree 2)
- Strongest known algorithmic technique for many optimisation problems
- Some bounds optimal under Unique Games Conjecture
- Captures many polynomial time algorithms
- Degree-2 captures spectral algorithms
- In general, sum of squares exponentially stronger than Sherali-Adams
- For some problems, Sherali-Adams just as powerful as sum of squares



# Hierarchy of proof systems



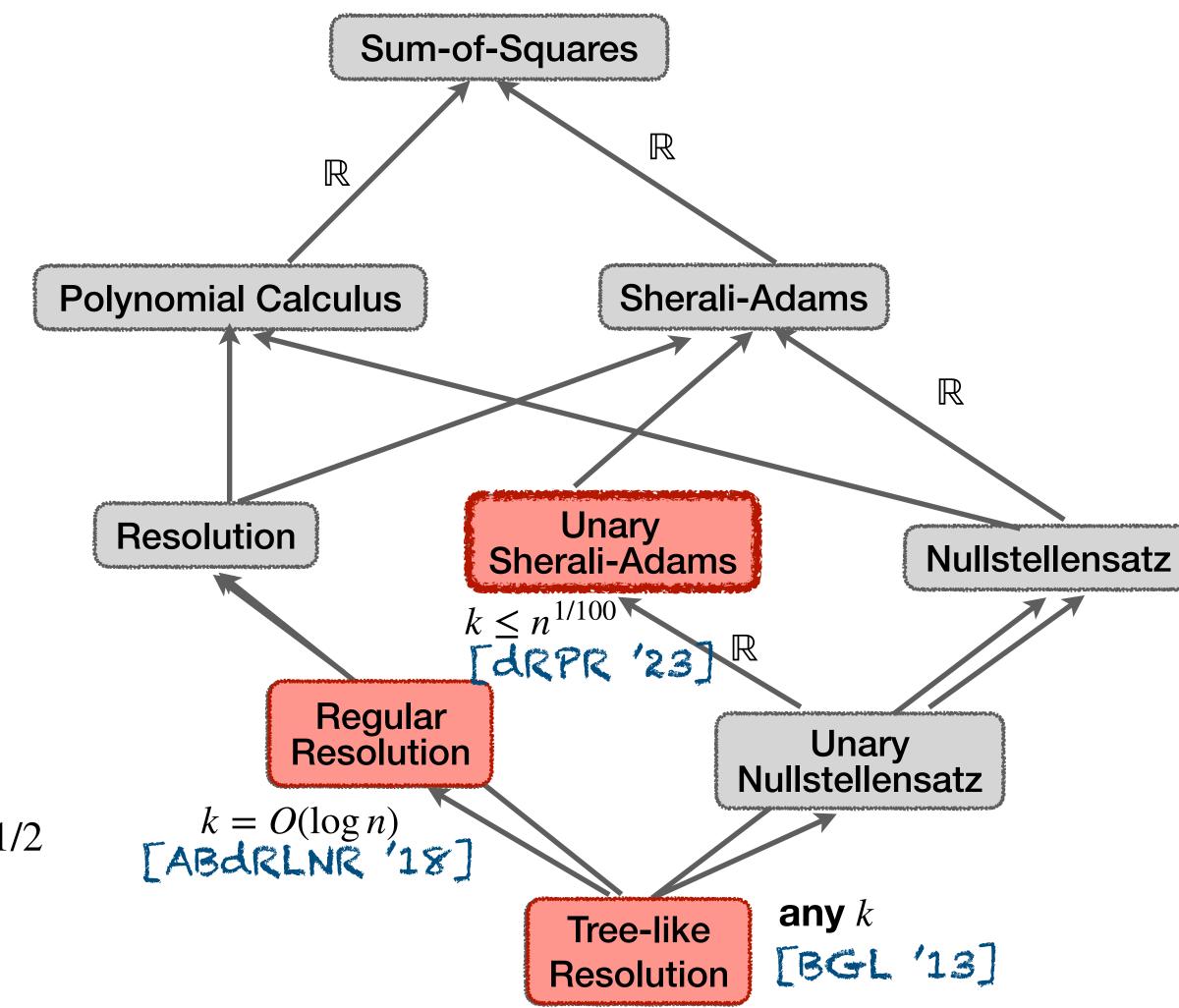
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# Size lower bounds of $n^{\Omega(\log n)}$ for planted clique

- Similar Graphs  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$
- ▶ Upper bound  $n^{O(\log n)}$  for  $k > 2\log n$
- Some related results:
- Resolution: [BIS '07, Pang '21]
  Denser graphs (non-tight)
  - D binary encoding [LPRT '17, DGGM '20]
- Degree lower bounds for SoS for  $k < n^{1/2}$ [MPW '15, BHKKMP '19, Pang '21]







#### **Resolution complexity of clique**

- Resolution captures state-of-the-art algorithms

- $\triangleright$  Prove this for tree-like resolution (proof size  $\geq$  # of maximal cliques)

Backtracking search with branch-and-bound strategy: if clear that current search-branch will not lead to larger clique, cut off search and backtrack

▷ Can we prove that resolution requires size  $n^{\Omega(\log n)}$  for planted clique? [Beversdorff-Galesi-Lauria '13]

Prove for regular resolution  $n^{\Omega(\log n)}$  lower bound for  $k = O(\log n)$  [ABARLNR '18]





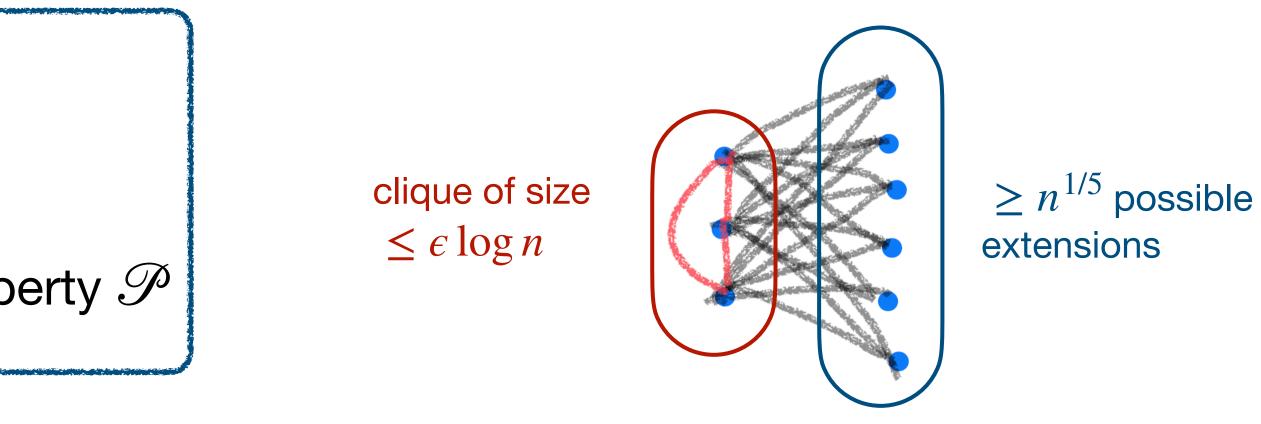
#### Proof strategy for average-case lower bounds

Define property  $\mathscr{P}$  s.t.

- If G has property  $\mathscr{P}$  then lower bound holds
- ▶ With high probability  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, 1/2)$  has property  $\mathscr{P}$

#### For tree-like resolution:

- - $\Box$  If G has rich extension property, then tree-like resolution size  $n^{\Omega(\log n)}$
  - $\Box G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$  has the rich extension property



# **Rich extensions property**: every clique of size $\leq \epsilon \log n$ has $\geq n^{1/5}$ possible extensions

Other graphs that have rich extension property: complete  $\ell$ -partite graphs, for  $\ell < 2\log n$ 



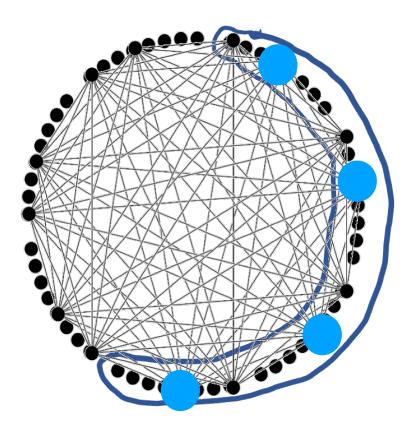


#### What makes random graphs hard?

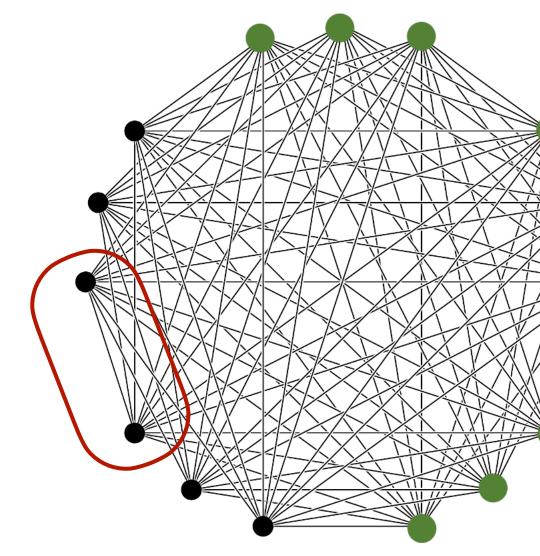
- $\triangleright$  Complete  $\ell$ -partite graphs, for  $\ell < 2\log n$ , not hard!
- Not even for regular resolution, upper bound  $2^{O(\ell)} \cdot n^{O(1)}$

**For regular resolution:** 

- Rich extensions property
- Small error sets property: any large set of vertices "almost" has rich



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extension property, i.e., not many "error cliques" with few extensions





#### What makes random graphs hard?

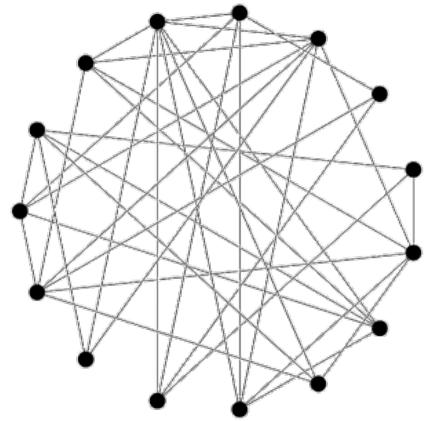
#### **For unary Sherali-Adams:**

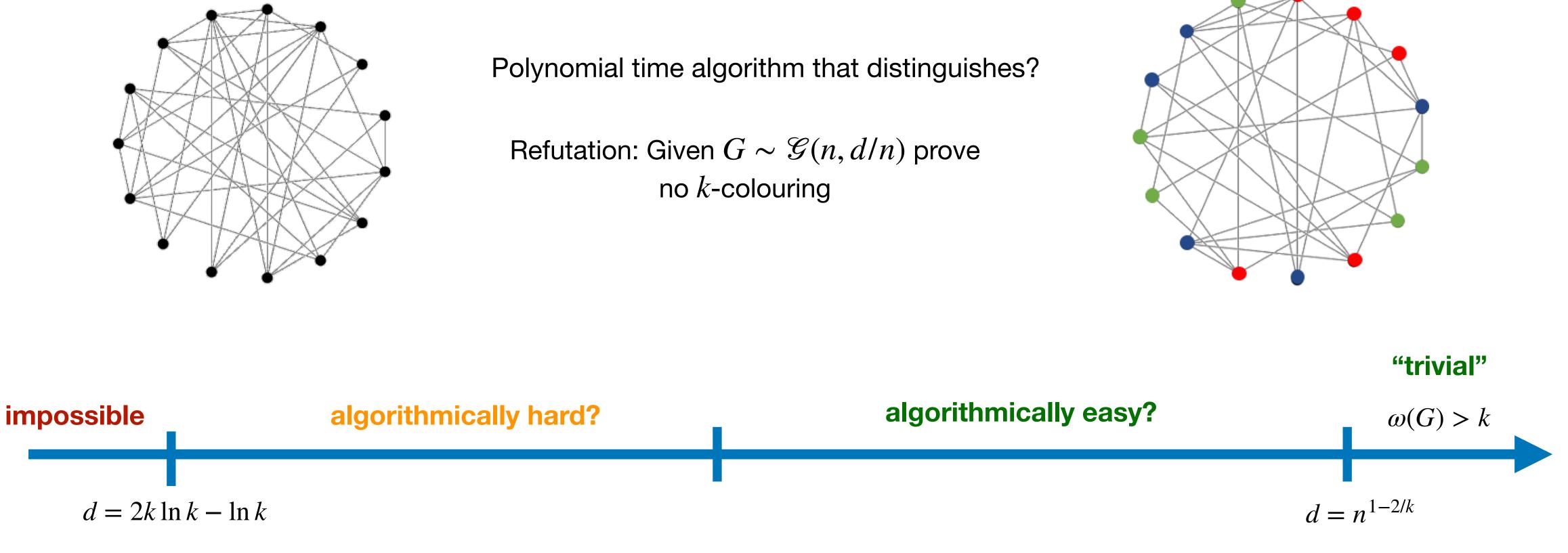
- Rich extensions property
- Small error sets property
- Also need to analyse Fourier characters!
  - Much more complicated (pseudo-calibration)
  - Not combinatorial
  - We will get back to this later



- Erdős–Rényi random graph:  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, d/n)$
- ▶ or *d*-regular random graph:  $G \sim \mathscr{G}_{n,d}$

where  $d \ge 2k \ln k - \ln k$ 





#### Planted k-colouring

- ▶ Planted *k*-colouring:  $G \sim \mathscr{G}_k(n, d/n)$  or  $G \sim \mathscr{G}_{n,d,k}$
- fix k-colouring and sample graph respecting colouring





### **Complexity of colouring**

Can we colour G with k colours without monochromatic edges?

- k-colouring is NP-hard for  $k \ge 3$  [Karp '72]
- No known average-case reduction from planted clique
- Approximating  $\chi(G)$  is hard [..., Zuckerman '07]

Appears to be hard on average for  $G \sim \mathcal{G}_{n,d}$  or  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, d/n)$ , where  $d \approx 2k \ln k$ 

Worst-case / average-case complexity of colouring? [Beame, Culberson, Mitchell, Moore '05]

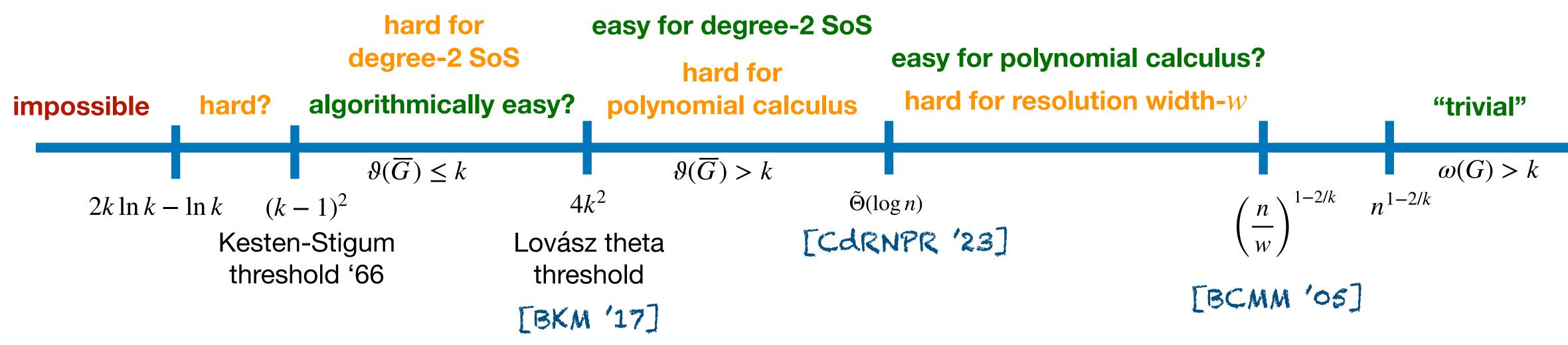




### **Complexity of colouring random graphs**

Algorithms solving colouring for  $G \sim$ 

- McDiarmid calculus '84: captured by resolution [Beame, Culberson, Mitchell, Moore '05]
- Algebraic methods: captured by Nullstellensatz and polynomial calculus
- Lovász theta function: captured by SoS [Banks, Kleinberg, Moore '17]



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$$\mathscr{G}_{n,d}$$
 or  $G \sim \mathscr{G}(n, d/n)$ :





# Simplified summary

	k-clique	k-coloring		3-SAT	3-XOR	
Tree-like Resolution	HARD [Beyersdorff, Galesi, Lauria '11]	HARD	$\begin{array}{l} \mbox{HARD [Chvátal, Szemerédi '88]} \\ \mbox{Improved [Ben-Sasson, Galesi '01] (size } \exp(n/\Delta^{1+\epsilon}))  \Delta=m/n \end{array}$			
Resolution	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(1)</sup>	[Beame, Culberson, Mitchell, Moore '05]	HARD [Chvátal, Szemerédi '88] $\exp(n/\Delta^{2+\epsilon})$ Improved [Beame, Karp, Pitassi, Saks '98], [Ben-Sasson '01]			
Polynomial Calculus	OPEN	HARD [Conneryd, <b>dR</b> ,	$\mathbb{F} \neq 2$	HARD [Ben-Sasson, Impagliazzo '99]		
		Nordström, Pang,	$\mathbb{F}=2$	HARD [Alekhnovich, Razborov '01]	EASY	
Sherali- Adams	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(2)</sup>	OPEN		HARD		
Sum of Squares	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(3)</sup> $\mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$ : degree = $\Theta(\log n)$	<b>OPEN</b> [Kothari, Manohar '21] $\mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$ : $d \ge \Omega(\log n)$	[Grigoriev '01, Schoenebeck '08]			
Cutting Planes	OPEN	OPEN	-	OPEN $\Theta(\log n)$ -SAT ming, Pankratov, Pitassi, e '17] [Hrubeš, Pudlák '17]	Quasi-poly EASY [Fleming, Göös, Impagliazzo, Pitassi, Robere, Tan, Wigderson '21] [Dadush, Tiwari '20]	

<sup>(1)</sup> [Beame, Impagliazzo, Sabharwal '01], [Pang '21], [Atserias, Bonacina, **dR**, Lauria, Nordström, Razborov '18], [Lauria, Pudlák, Rödl, Thapen '13]

<sup>(2)</sup> [**dR**, Potechin, Risse '23]

<sup>(3)</sup> [Meka, Potechin, Wigderson '15], ..., [Barak, Hopkins, Kelner, Kothari, Moitra, Potechin '16], [Pang '21]

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### Back to planted clique

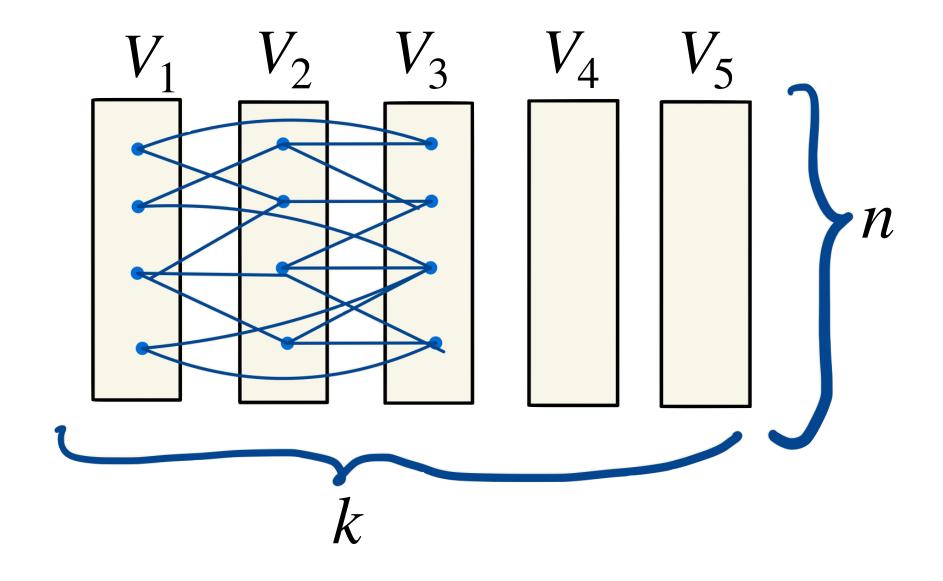
# Clique formula Clique(G, k)

Block encoding

Variables:  $x_v$  for every vertex v

Clauses:

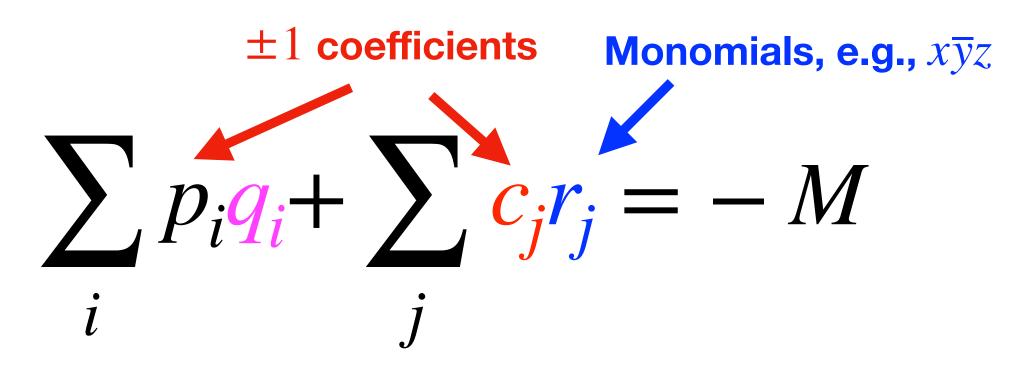
 $\sum x_v = 1$  for each block  $V_i$  $v \in V_i$  $x_v x_u = 0$  non-edge  $(u, v) \notin E(G)$ 





## How to prove uSA size lower bounds

**Unary Sherali-Adams refutation** 



"Pseudo-measure"  $\mu$  mapping polynomials to  $\mathbb{R}$ , linear Ø

$$\Box -\delta \le \mu(p_i q_i) \le \delta$$

$$\Box \ \mu(r_j) \geq -\delta$$

Size lower bound:  $\mu(1)/\delta$ 

should be defined for all polynomials (not only bounded degree!)

 $\mu$  defined on monomials and extended linearly to polynomials

( $\mu$  is the dual object for linear system with objective minimize sum of coefficients)



# Clique formula Clique(G, k)

Block encoding

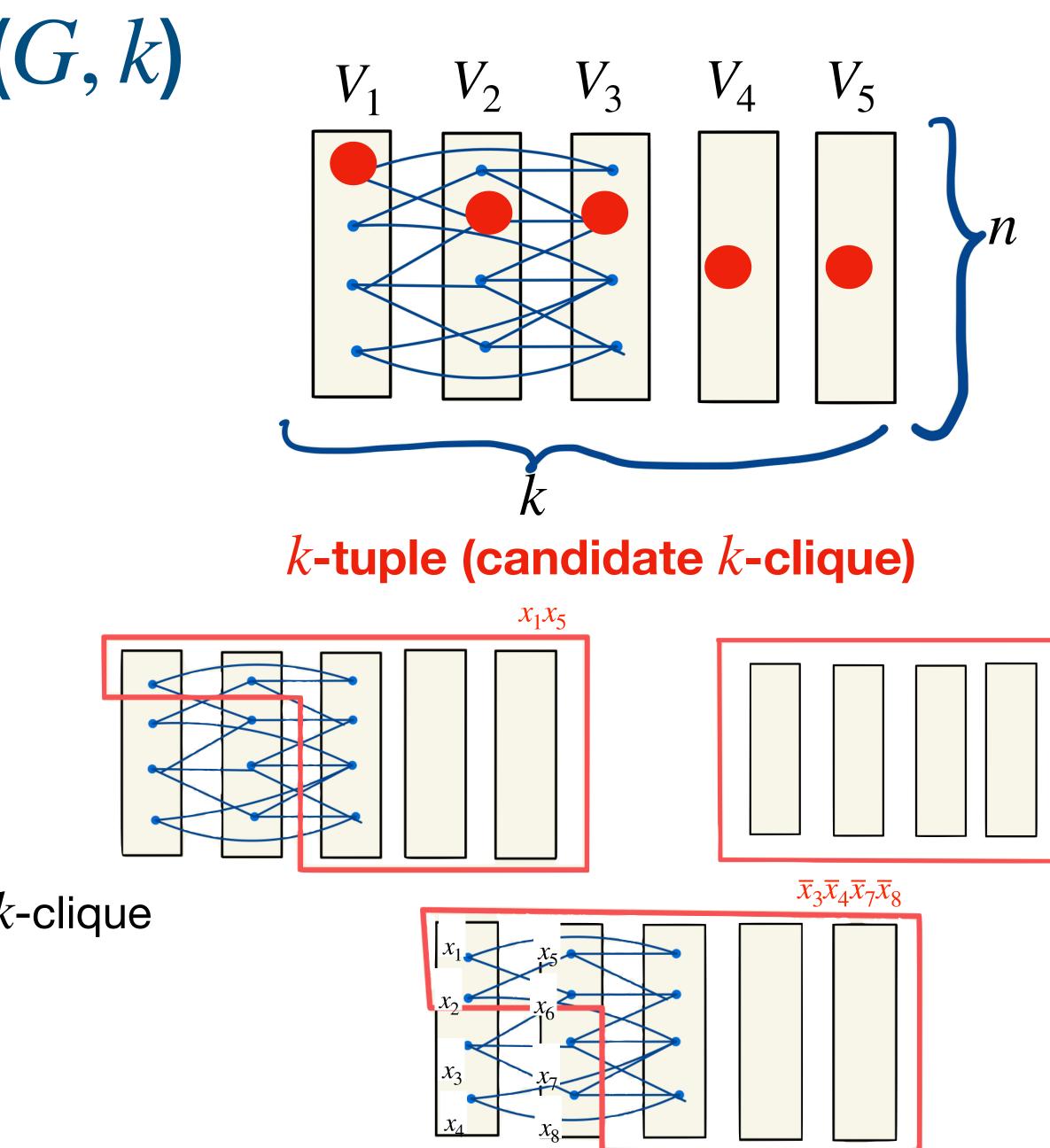
Variables:  $x_v$  for every vertex v

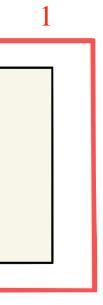
Clauses:

 $\sum_{v \in V_i} x_v = 1 \text{ for each block } V_i$  $x_v x_u = 0 \text{ non-edge } (u, v) \notin E(G)$ 

- Monomial = rectangle Q
  - $\Box$  Set of k-tuples ruled out as candidate k-clique
  - $\Box$  k-dimensional hypercube
  - □ Cartesian product of  $Q_i \subseteq V_i$

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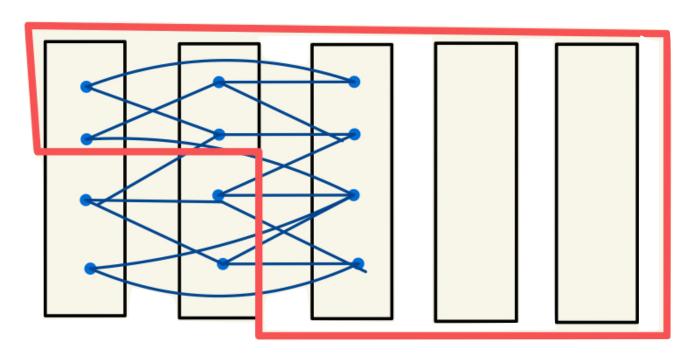




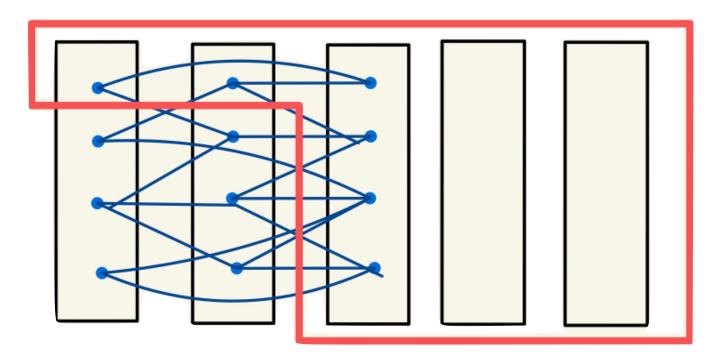


## Pseudo-measure is a measure of progress

- Measure we define satisfies much more: captures progress
- How much progress does a monomial/rectangle Q represent?



- Axioms should represent small progress
- Set of all tuples should represent complete progress
- For general Q? The smallest derivation of Q

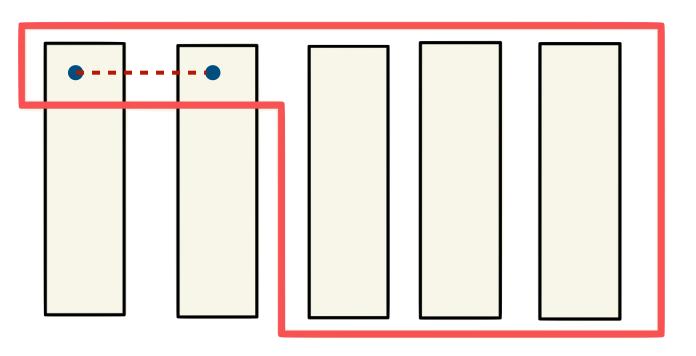


Min # of axioms needed to derive Q(between 1 and  $n^2$ ) — useful for degree/ width lower bound



### Expected behavior of a progress measure

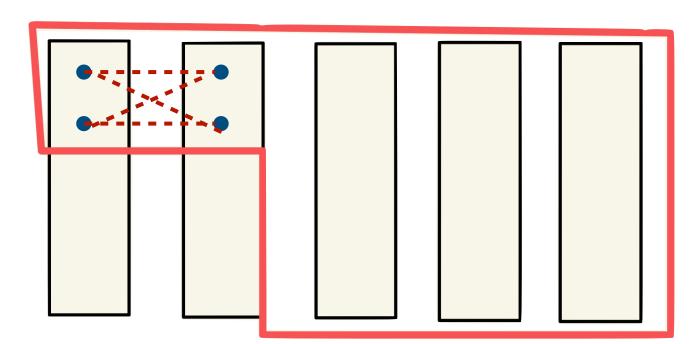
Axioms  $\approx 0$ 



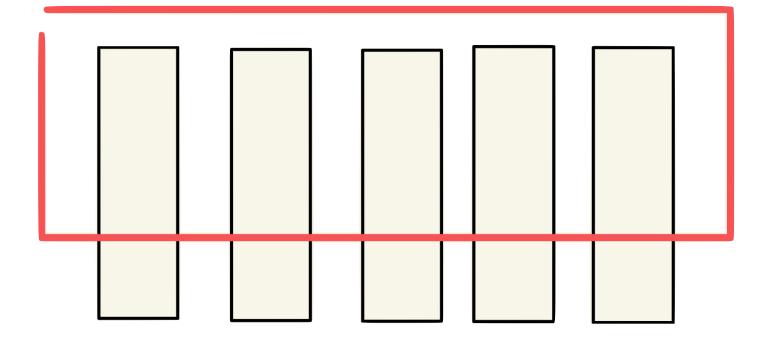
Large rectangle progress  $\approx$  size of rectangle 

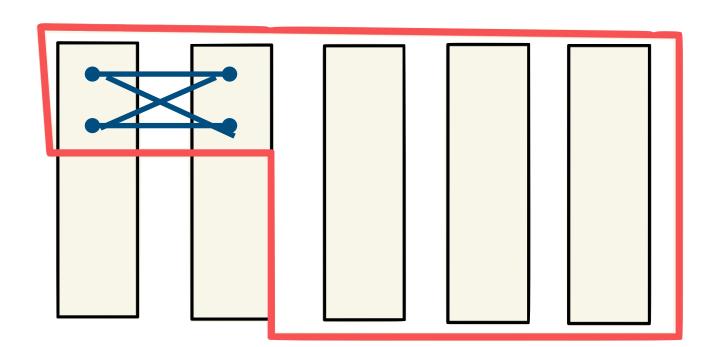
(Large then should behave "random" / as expected)

If rectangle contains small blocks? Depends... 

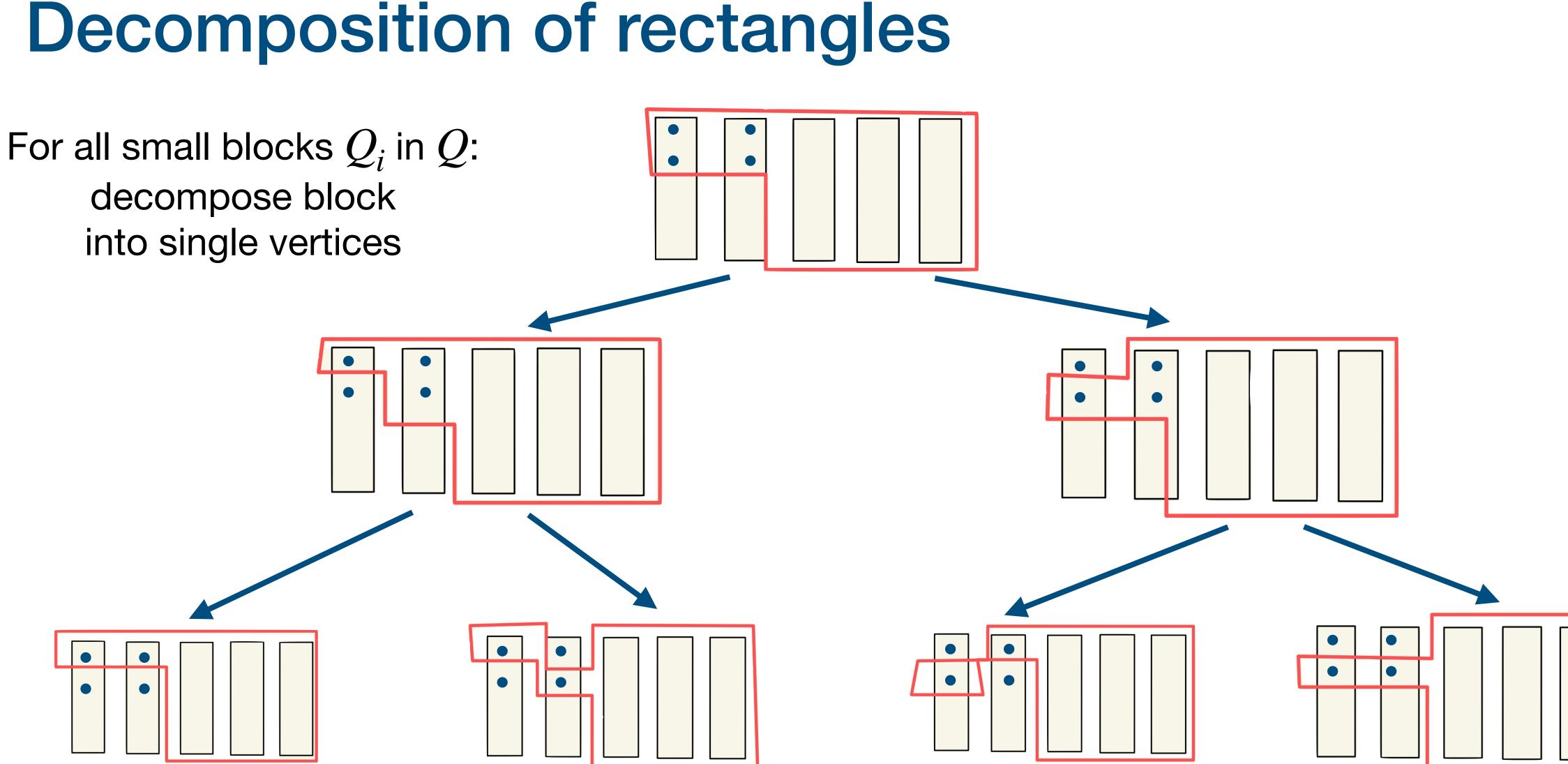


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 $Q = \{\text{rectangles at leaves}\}\$  is a partition of Qcan analyse if blocks with only 1 vertex are axioms or are interesting

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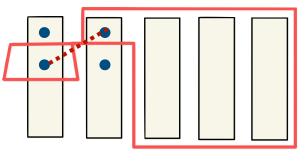




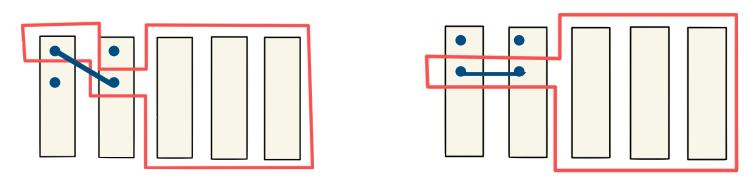
# **Decomposition of rectangles**

- Given rectangle Q: partition Q into family of rectangles Q s.t.  $\forall R \in Q$ : <sup> $\Box$ </sup> Either R is an axiom (or contained in an axiom)

,	- •		Г
	•		



<sup> $\Box$ </sup> Or *R* is a clique on small blocks + large blocks (good rectangles)

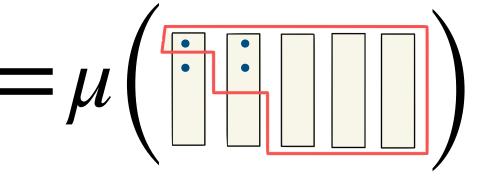


- $\mu(\text{small } R) \leq \text{negligible}$  $\Box$  Or R is so small, it represents negligible progress
- Want to define  $\mu$  that satisfies this and also additivity •  $\mu(\mathbf{p})$

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 $\mu(\text{axioms}) \approx 0$ 

 $\mu(\text{good } R) \approx |R|$ 



 $\mu(Q) = \sum \mu(R)$ 

 $R \in Q$ 



# Defining the measure (failed attempts)

- Size of rectangle:  $\mu_1(Q) = |Q|$  Fails on axioms

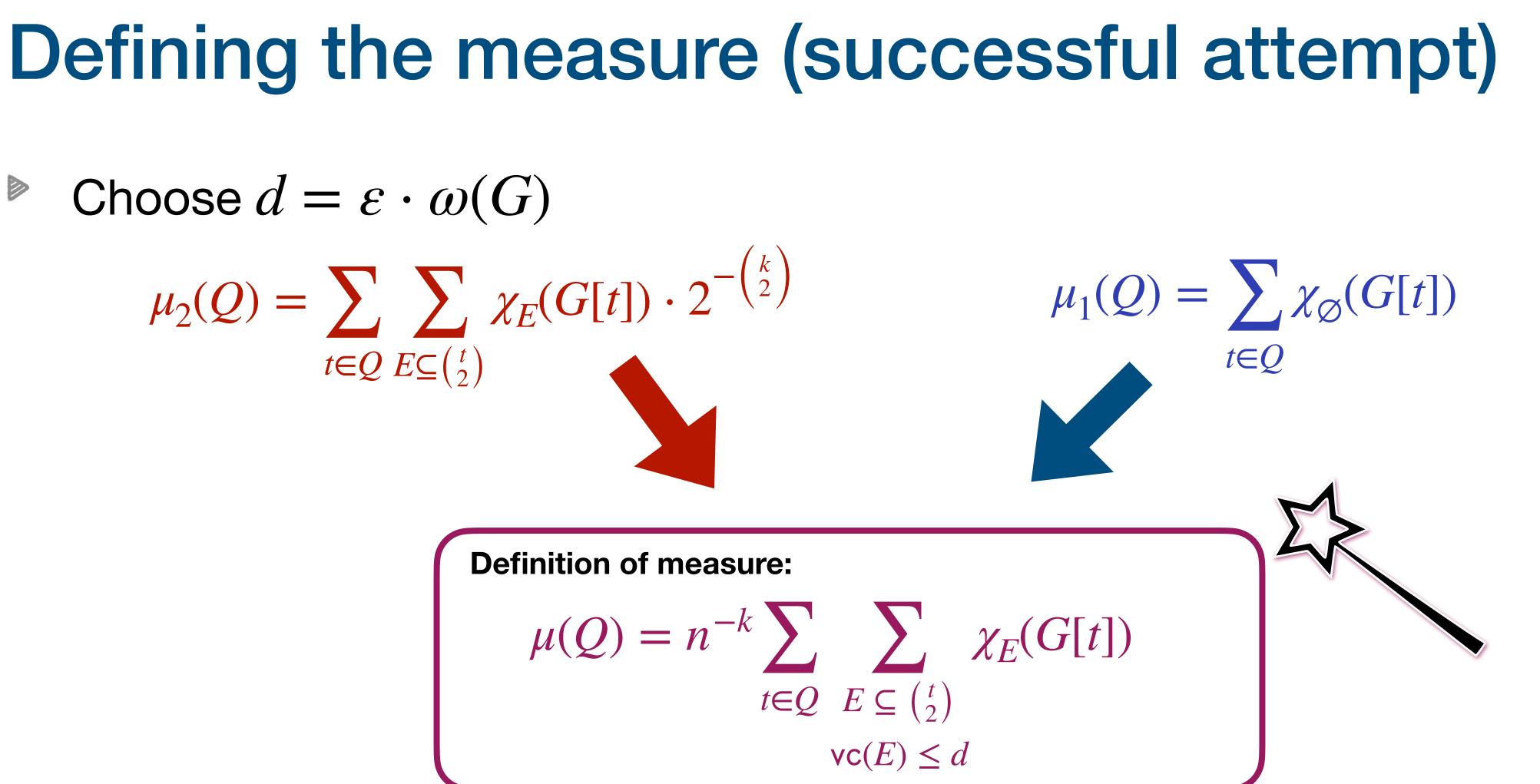
Progress is to rule out cliques: 
$$\mu_2(Q) = \{ \# k \text{-cliques in } Q \}$$
 Fails on whole space
Let's rewrite failed attempts
For  $E \subseteq \binom{t}{2}$ , we have  $\chi_E(G[t]) = \prod_{e \in E} \chi_e(G[t])$ 
It is a clique =  $\sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{2}} \chi_E(G[t]) \cdot 2^{-\binom{k}{2}}$ 
 $\chi_Q(G[t]) = \sum_{I \in Q} \sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{3}} \chi_E(G[t]) \cdot 2^{-\binom{k}{2}}$ 
 $\mu_2(Q) = \sum_{I \in Q} \sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{3}} \chi_E(G[t]) \cdot 2^{-\binom{k}{2}}$ 
 $\mu_1(Q) = \sum_{I \in Q} \chi_Q(G[t])$ 

$$\mathbf{1}_{t \text{ is a clique}} = \sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{2}} \chi_{E}(G[t]) \cdot 2^{-\binom{k}{2}}$$
$$\mu_{2}(Q) = \sum_{t \in Q} \sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{2}} \chi_{E}(G[t]) \cdot 2^{-\binom{k}{2}}$$

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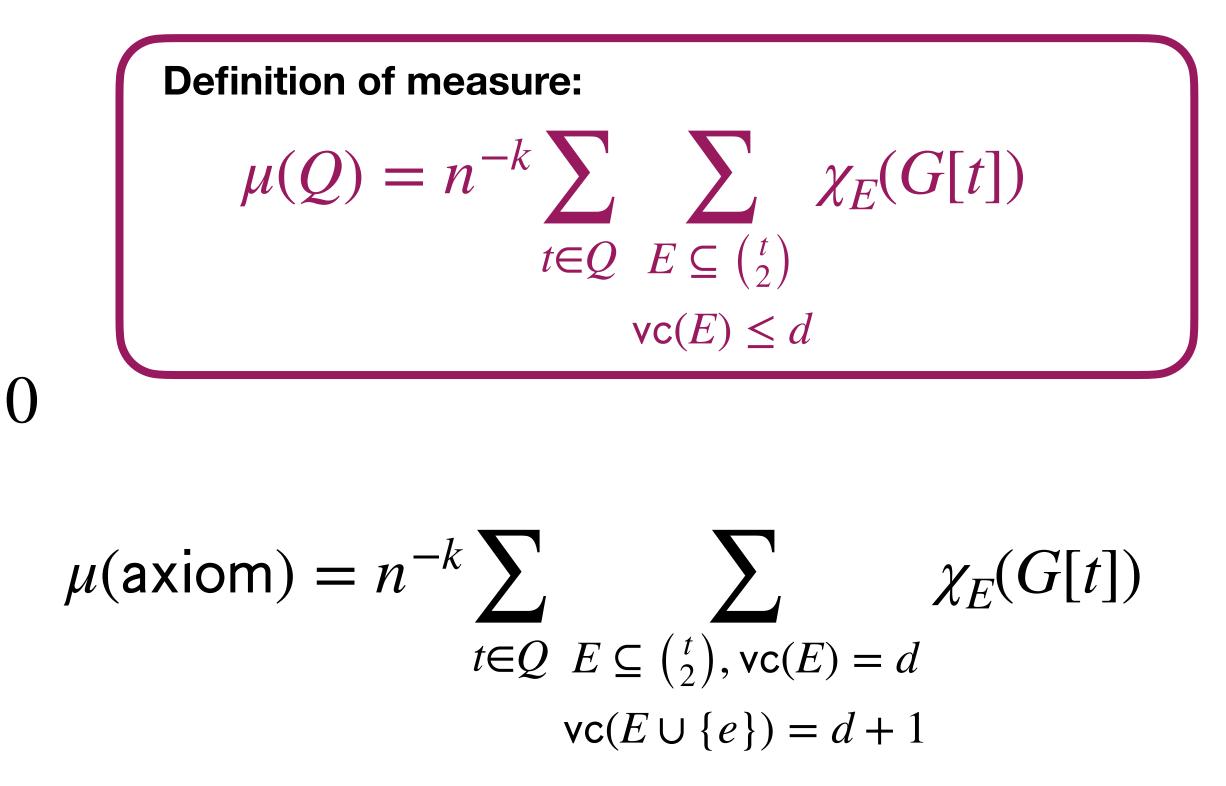


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# Defining the measure (successful attempt)

- Choose  $d = \varepsilon \cdot \omega(G)$
- Clearly additive!
- Note that if  $E \neq \emptyset$ , then  $\mathbb{E}[\chi_F(G[t])] = 0$
- In expectation, measure satisfies:
  - □ Whole space has measure 1
  - $\Box$  Rectangle Q has measure  $|Q|/n^k$
  - $\Box$  Axioms (conditioned on non-edge e = (u, v)) has measure 0
- "Just" need to show concentration...



(There are  $2^{kn}$  rectangles)



# Well-behaved graphs (property of random G)

1. Rich extension property: all small tuples have many common neighbours on every block

- 2. Small error sets (similar to "clique-denseness" from [ABARLNR '18], but more natural :)
  - Q has common neighbourhoods of expected size if: all small tuples have expected # of common neighbours in every block of Q
  - For all large Q,  $\exists$  small  $S \subseteq V$  s.t.  $Q \setminus S$  has common neighbourhoods of expected size





# Well-behaved graphs (property of random G)

$$\left|\sum_{t \in Q} \chi_E(G[t])\right| \leq |Q| n^{-\varepsilon \cdot \operatorname{vc}(E)}$$
  
We rely on a notion related to vertex-co  
Kernels as used in FPT algorithms  
$$\mu(Q) = n^{-k} \sum_{t \in Q} \chi_{\emptyset}(G[t]) + n^{-k} \sum_{t \in Q} \sum_{E \subseteq \binom{t}{2}, E \neq \emptyset} \chi_E(G[t]) \approx (1 - n^{-\varepsilon}) \frac{|Q|}{n^k}$$
$$\operatorname{vc}(E) \leq d$$

- Step 1: Prove that random graphs are whp well-behaved
- Step 2: Prove that clique is hard for uSA on well-behaved graphs

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3. Bounded character sum for every edge set E in class (simplified\*\* version):





### Random graphs have bounded character sums

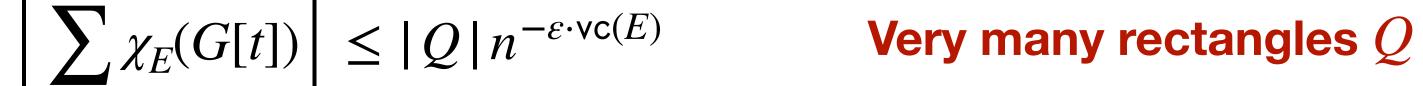
Simplified statement

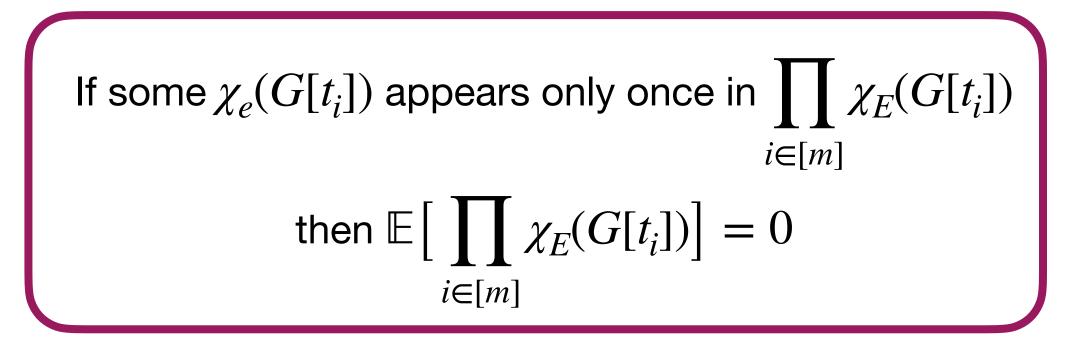
 $t \in O$ 

Markov inequality:  $\Pr\left[\left|\sum_{t\in Q}\chi_{E}(G[t])\right| > s\right] \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}\left[\left(\sum_{t\in Q}\chi_{E}(G[t])\right)^{m}\right]}{s^{m}}$ 

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\left(\sum_{t\in Q}\chi_{E}(G[t])\right)^{m}\right] = \sum_{t_{1},\dots,t_{m}\in Q}\mathbb{E}\left[\prod_{i\in[m]}\chi_{E}(G[t_{i}])\right]$$
$$\leq \sum_{t_{1},\dots,t_{m}\in Q}\left|\mathbb{E}\left[\prod_{i\in[m]}\chi_{E}(G[t_{i}])\right]\right]$$

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Note: E has a matching M of size  $\geq vc(E)/2$ 



### Planted clique

- Some take aways:
  - Discover properties of random graphs that imply hardness
  - We build on previous properties (tree-like resolution, regular resolution, unary Sherali-Adams)
  - Lower bound for unary Sherali-Adams essentially independent of encoding
  - Probably useful: progress measure, decomposition of rectangles
- Open problems:
  - Size lower bounds for other proof systems: Resolution, SA, NS over  $\mathbb{F}_p$ , SoS, ...
  - Improve result for planted clique of size  $\sqrt{n}$  (regular resolution, uSA)
  - Combinatorial description of "bounded character sums" property? Of  $\mu$ ?

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### Final remarks

- Average-case hardness in proof complexity
  - Lower bound for classes of algorithms
  - Candidate hard-instances
  - Guide us to understand properties that make instances hard
- Open problems:
  - Upper bounds for different thresholds (e.g., colouring)
  - Lower bounds for other proof systems and other problems (e.g., MCSP)
  - Average-case reduction within a proof system?



### More open problems

	k-clique	k-coloring				
Tree-like Resolution	HARD [Beyersdorff, Galesi, Lauria '11]	HARD				
Resolution	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(1)</sup>	[Beame, Culberson Mitchell, Moore '0				
Polynomial Calculus	OPEN	HARD [Conneryd, <b>dR</b> , Nordström, Pang, Risse '23]				
Sherali- Adams	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(2)</sup>	OPEN				
Sum of Squares	OPEN Some partial results <sup>(3)</sup> $\mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$ : degree = $\Theta(\log n)$	OPEN [Kothari, Manohar '2 $\mathcal{G}(n, 1/2)$ : $d \ge \Omega(\log n)$				
Cutting Planes	OPEN	OPEN				

<sup>(1)</sup> [Beame, Impagliazzo, Sabharwal '01], [Pang '21], [Atserias, Bonacina, **dR**, Lauria, Nordström, Razborov '18], [Lauria, Pudlák, Rödl, Thapen '13]

 $^{(2)}$  [**dR**, Potechin, Risse '23]

<sup>(3)</sup> [Meka, Potechin, Wigderson '15], ..., [Barak, Hopkins, Kelner, Kothari, Moitra, Potechin '16], [Pang '21]

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