# Finding paths in sparse random graphs requires many queries

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#### Abstract

We discuss a new algorithmic type of problem in random graphs studying the minimum number of queries one has to ask about adjacency between pairs of vertices of a random graph  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  in order to find a subgraph which possesses some target property with high probability. In this paper we focus on finding long paths in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  when  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  for some fixed constant  $\varepsilon > 0$ . This random graph is known to have typically linearly long paths.

To have  $\ell$  edges with high probability in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  one clearly needs to query at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p}\right)$  pairs of vertices. Can we find a path of length  $\ell$  economically, i.e., by querying roughly that many pairs? We argue that this is not possible and one needs to query significantly more pairs. We prove that any randomised algorithm which finds a path of length  $\ell = \Omega\left(\frac{\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}{\varepsilon}\right)$  with at least constant probability in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  with  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  must query at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}\right)$  pairs of vertices. This is tight up to the  $\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  factor.

#### 1 Introduction

Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be a monotone increasing graph property (that is, a property of graphs that cannot be violated by adding edges). Suppose that the edge probability p = p(n) is chosen so that a random graph Gdrawn from the probability space  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  has  $\mathcal{P}$  with high probability (whp). How many queries of the type "is  $(i,j) \in E(G)$ ?" are needed for an adaptive algorithm interacting with the probability space  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  in order to reveal whp a subgraph  $G' \subseteq G$  possessing  $\mathcal{P}$ ?

This fairly natural algorithmic setting (see the excellent survey of Frieze and McDiarmid [10] for an extensive coverage of a variety of problems and results in Algorithmic Theory of Random Graphs) has been considered implicitly in several papers on random graphs (e.g. [14], [5]), but apparently has been stated explicitly only in the companion paper [9] of the authors. Notice that in this framework the issue of concern is not the amount of computation required for the algorithm to find a target structure, but rather the amount of its interaction with the underlying probability space.

In the discussion below, we assume some basic familiarity with results about the probability space  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$ ; the reader is advised to consult monographs [11] and [6] for background on the subject.

In general, given a monotone property  $\mathcal{P}$ , what can we expect? If all *n*-vertex graphs belonging to  $\mathcal{P}$  have at least m edges, then the algorithm should get at least m positive answers to hit the

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target property with the required absolute certainty. This means that the obvious lower bound in this case is at least (1 + o(1))m/p queries. Perhaps one of the simplest graph properties to consider in this respect is connectedness: for any connected graph G on n vertices a spanning tree can be found after n-1 queries with positive answers – the algorithm starts with an arbitrary vertex  $v \in V(G)$ , and each time queries the pairs leaving the current tree until the first edge is found, the tree is then updated by appending this edge. Thus for the regime where  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  is who connected (which is when  $p(n) \geq \frac{\ln n + \omega(n)}{n}$  with  $\lim_{n \to \infty} \omega(n) = 1$ ), we get an algorithm who discovering a spanning tree after querying (1 + o(1))n/p pairs of vertices.

A much more challenging problem is that of Hamiltonicity, i.e., of finding a Hamilton cycle. In this case the trivial lower bound translates to n positive answers. In [9] we show that this lower bound is tight by providing an adaptive algorithm interacting with the probability space  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , which whp finds a Hamilton cycle in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  after obtaining only (1+o(1))n positive answers (provided p is above the sharp threshold for Hamiltonicity in  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$ ).

Yet another positive example is that of uncovering a giant component in the supercritical regime  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ . Though this was not the main concern in [14], the second and the third author presented there a very natural adaptive algorithm (essentially performing the Depth First Search (DFS) on a random input  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ ), typically discovering a connected component of size at least  $\epsilon n/2$  after querying  $\epsilon n^2/2$  vertex pairs.

Upon reviewing these results, the reader may arrive at a conclusion that the above stated trivial lower bound for this type of problems is nearly tight for almost every natural graph property. However, this happens **not** to be the case, and the main qualitative goal of the present paper is to provide such a negative example, including its analysis. Here we focus on the property of containing a path of length  $\ell$  in the supercritical regime in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , that is, when  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  for some fixed constant  $\varepsilon > 0$ . For this regime,  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  is known to contain whp a path of length linear in n, due to the classical result of Ajtai, Komlós and Szemerédi [3] (see [14] for a recent simple proof of this fact.) Note that in order to have  $\ell$  edges with high probability in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  one needs to query at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p}\right)$  pairs of vertices. Can we find a path of length  $\ell$  by asking roughly that many queries, as in the case of Hamiltonicity mentioned above? We show that in this case one actually needs to query significantly more pairs of vertices:

**Theorem 1.** There exists an absolute constant C > 0 such that the following holds. For every constant  $q \in (0,1)$  there exist  $n_0, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0,\varepsilon_0)$  and any  $n \ge n_0$  there is no adaptive algorithm which reveals a path of length  $\ell \ge \frac{3C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  with probability at least q in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , by querying at most  $\frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}$  pairs of vertices.

Notice that [14] presents a simple adaptive DFS algorithm, finding a path of length  $\frac{1}{5}\varepsilon^2 n$  with probability at least  $1 - \exp\left(\Omega(\varepsilon n)\right)$  in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  after querying only  $O\left(\varepsilon n^2\right)$  pairs of vertices. In fact, if one uses the same algorithm to find a path of length  $\ell \leq \frac{1}{5}\varepsilon^2 n$  in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  then the same argument shows that such a path is found with probability at least  $1 - \exp\left(\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{\varepsilon}\right)\right)$  after querying at most  $O\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon}\right)$  pairs of vertices. This shows that up to the  $\Theta\left(\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)\right)$  factor, Theorem 1 is tight.

The key ingredient of the proof of Theorem 1 is the following result of independent interest.

**Theorem 2.** There exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  we have who that a graph  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  does not contain a set of vertex disjoint paths of lengths at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  whose union covers at least  $13\varepsilon^2 n$  vertices.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. In Section 2 we provide auxiliary lemmas needed for the proofs of Theorem 1 and 2. In Section 3 we prove Theorem 1 assuming Theorem 2. In Section 4 we prove Theorem 2. Finally, in Section 5 we discuss some concluding remarks.

**Notation.** Our notation is fairly standard. Given a natural number n we use [n] to denote the set  $\{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$ . Moreover, given a set V we use  $S_V$  to denote the permutation group of V and  $\binom{V}{2}$  to denote the set of all (unordered) pairs of elements in V.

Given a subset S of the vertex set of a graph G, G[S] denotes the subgraph of G induced by the vertices in S, i.e. the graph with vertex set S whose edges are the ones of G between vertices in S.

A subgraph P of the graph G is called a *path* if  $V(P) = \{v_1, \ldots, v_\ell\}$  and the edges of P are  $v_1v_2$ ,  $v_2v_3$ , ...,  $v_{\ell-1}v_{\ell}$ . We shall oftentimes refer to P simply by  $v_1v_2 \ldots v_{\ell}$ . We say that such a path P has  $length \ \ell-1$  (number of edges) and  $size \ \ell$  (number of vertices).

If G is a graph then the 2-core of G is the maximal induced subgraph of G of minimum degree at least 2. If no such subgraph exists then the 2-core of G is the empty graph.

Given an ordered set V and a real number  $p \in [0, 1]$ , the binomial random graph model  $\mathcal{G}(V, p)$  is a probability space whose ground set consists of all labeled graphs on the vertex set V. We can describe the probability distribution of  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(V, p)$  by saying that each pair of elements of V forms an edge in G independently with probability p. If V = [n] then we will abuse notation slightly and use  $\mathcal{G}(n, p)$  to refer to  $\mathcal{G}([n], p)$ . Given a property  $\mathcal{P}$  (that is, a collection of graphs) and a function  $p = p(n) \in [0, 1]$ , we say that  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, p)$  has  $\mathcal{P}$  with high probability (or whp for brevity) if the probability that  $G \in \mathcal{P}$  tends to 1 as n tends to infinity.

## 2 Auxiliary Lemmas

#### 2.1 Concentration inequalities

We need to employ standard bounds on large deviations of random variables. The following well-known lemma due to Chernoff (commonly known as the "Chernoff bound") provides a bound on the upper tail of the Binomial distribution (see e.g. [4], [11]).

**Lemma 1.** Let 
$$X \sim \text{Bin}(n, p)$$
 and let  $\mu = \mathbb{E}[X]$ . Then  $\Pr[X \ge (1 + a)\mu] < e^{-\frac{a^2\mu}{3}}$  for any  $0 < a < \frac{3}{2}$ .

The next lemma is a concentration inequality for the edge exposure martingale in  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  which follows easily from Theorem 7.4.3 of [4].

**Lemma 2.** Suppose X is a random variable in the probability space  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  such that  $|X(G)-X(H)| \leq C$  if G and H differ in one edge. Then

$$\Pr\left[|X - \mathbb{E}[X]| > C\alpha\sqrt{n^2p}\right] \le 2e^{-\frac{\alpha^2}{4}}$$

for any positive  $\alpha < 2\sqrt{n^2p}$ .

#### 2.2 Galton-Watson trees and paths

A Galton-Watson tree is a random rooted tree, constructed recursively from the root where each node has a random number of children and these random numbers are independent copies of some random variable  $\xi$  taking values in  $\{0, 1, 2, \ldots\}$ . We let  $\mathcal{T}$  denote a (random) Galton-Watson tree. We view the children of each node as arriving in some random order, so that  $\mathcal{T}$  is an ordered, or plane tree.

We consider the *conditioned Galton-Watson tree*  $\mathcal{T}_t$ , which is the random tree  $\mathcal{T}$  conditioned on having exactly t vertices. In symbols,  $\mathcal{T}_t := (\mathcal{T} \mid |\mathcal{T}| = t)$ , where, for any tree T, |T| denotes its number of vertices.

For a rooted tree T, the depth h(v) of a vertex v is its distance to the root (in particular the root has depth 0). We define as usual the height of the rooted tree T by  $H(T) := \max\{h(v) : v \in T\}$ . The following lemma which appears in [1] provides essentially optimal uniform sub-Gaussian upper tail bounds on  $\frac{H(T_t)}{\sqrt{t}}$  for every offspring distribution  $\xi$  with finite variance.

**Lemma 3.** Suppose that  $\mathbb{E}[\xi] = 1$  and  $0 < Var[\xi] < \infty$ . Then there exist constants C, c > 0 (which may depend on  $\xi$ ) such that

$$\Pr\left[H(\mathcal{T}_t) \ge h\right] \le C \exp\left(-\frac{ch^2}{t}\right)$$

for all  $h \ge 0$  and  $t \ge 1$ .

As is well known, the distribution of the tree  $\mathcal{T}_t$  is not changed if  $\xi$  is replaced by another random variable  $\xi'$  whose distribution is created from that of  $\xi$  by tilting or conjugation (see e.g. [13]): if for every  $k \geq 0$  we have  $\Pr[\xi' = k] = c'\mu^k \Pr[\xi = k]$  for some  $\mu > 0$  and normalizing constant c'. Thus, we see that Lemma 3 remains true for  $\xi \sim \operatorname{Poisson}(\mu)$ , with  $\mu > 0$ , in which case the parameters C, c > 0 are universal constants which do not depend on the parameter  $\mu$ . It is also well known (see e.g. Section 6.4 of [7]) that if  $\xi \sim \operatorname{Poisson}(\mu)$  then  $\mathcal{T}_t$  is distributed as a random rooted labelled tree, that is, a tree picked uniformly from the  $t^{t-1}$  trees on vertices  $\{1, 2, \ldots, t\}$  in which one vertex is declared to be the root. From this we obtain an estimate to be used by us later.

**Lemma 4.** Given  $0 \le \ell \le t$  let  $p_{t,\ell}$  denote the proportion of (rooted) labeled trees on t vertices which contain a path of length at least  $\ell$ . There exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for any  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  if  $\ell = \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  and  $t_0 = \frac{15}{\varepsilon^2} \ln \left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  then

$$\sum_{\ell \le t \le t_0} p_{t,\ell} \le \varepsilon^3$$

*Proof of Lemma* 4. It follows from Lemma 3 and the considerations above that there exist constants C', c' > 0 such that for every  $t \le t_0$ :

$$p_{t,\ell} \le C' \exp\left(-\frac{c'\ell^2}{t}\right) \le C' \exp\left(-\frac{c'\left(\frac{C}{\varepsilon}\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)\right)^2}{\frac{15}{\varepsilon^2}\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}\right) = C'\varepsilon^{\frac{c'C^2}{15}}.$$

Thus, if  $C > \sqrt{\frac{90}{c'}}$  and if  $\varepsilon_0$  is sufficiently small then we see that for any  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $t \leq t_0$  we have  $p_{t,\ell} \leq \varepsilon^6$ . Using this we conclude that

$$\sum_{\ell \le t \le t_0} p_{t,\ell} \le \varepsilon^6 \cdot t_0 = 15\varepsilon^4 \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right) \le \varepsilon^3,$$

provided  $\varepsilon_0$  is sufficiently small, as claimed.

The next lemma concerns the sizes of Poisson Galton-Watson trees which contain long paths.

**Lemma 5.** For  $\varepsilon > 0$  let  $0 < \mu < 1$  be such that  $\mu e^{-\mu} = (1 + \varepsilon)e^{-(1+\varepsilon)}$ . Given  $\ell \geq 1$  consider a  $Poisson(\mu)$ -Galton-Watson tree  $\mathcal{T}$  and the random variable

$$T_{\ell} := \begin{cases} |\mathcal{T}| & \text{if } \mathcal{T} \text{ contains a path of length at least } \frac{\ell}{3} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise}, \end{cases}$$

where  $|\mathcal{T}|$  denotes the number of vertices of  $\mathcal{T}$ . Then there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $\ell = \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \right)$  we have  $\mathbb{E}[T_\ell] \leq 14\varepsilon^3$  and  $Var[T_\ell] \leq \frac{8}{\varepsilon^3}$ .

*Proof.* We have

$$\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\right] = \mathbb{E}\left[\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell} \mid |\mathcal{T}|\right]\right] = \sum_{t \geq 1} \Pr\left[|\mathcal{T}| = t\right] \cdot \mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell} \mid |\mathcal{T}| = t\right]. \tag{1}$$

It is well-known (see, e.g., Section 6.6 of [7]) that the size of the Poisson( $\mu$ )-Galton-Watson tree  $\mathcal{T}$  follows a Borel( $\mu$ ) distribution, namely,

$$\Pr\left[|\mathcal{T}| = t\right] = \frac{t^{t-1} \left(\mu e^{-\mu}\right)^t}{\mu \cdot t!}.$$

Moreover, as discussed in the remarks that follow Lemma 3, if we condition a Poisson( $\mu$ )-Galton-Watson tree on it having exactly t vertices then it is identically distributed to a random rooted labelled tree on t vertices. Thus, it follows that  $\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\mid |\mathcal{T}|=t\right]$  is equal to  $t\cdot p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}}$ , where  $p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}}$  denotes the proportion of rooted labelled trees on t vertices which contain a path of length at least  $\frac{\ell}{3}$ . Hence, setting  $t_0:=\frac{15}{\varepsilon^2}\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  with foresight, it follows from (1) that

$$\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\right] = \sum_{t\geq 1} \frac{t^{t-1} \left(\mu e^{-\mu}\right)^{t}}{\mu \cdot t!} \cdot t \cdot p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}}$$

$$\leq \frac{1}{\mu} \sum_{t\geq \frac{\ell}{3}} \frac{t^{t}}{t!} \cdot (1+\varepsilon)^{t} \cdot e^{-(1+\varepsilon)t} \cdot p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}}$$

$$\leq 2 \sum_{t\geq \frac{\ell}{3}} e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^{2}}{3}t} \cdot p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}}$$

$$\leq 2 \cdot \left(\sum_{\frac{\ell}{3} \leq t \leq t_{0}} p_{t,\frac{\ell}{3}} + \sum_{t\geq t_{0}} e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^{2}}{3}t}\right), \tag{2}$$

where in the second inequality we used the facts that  $\frac{t^t}{t!} \leq e^t$ , that  $(1+\varepsilon)^t \leq e^{\varepsilon t - \frac{\varepsilon^2}{3}t}$  (which holds since the first terms of the Taylor series expansion of  $\ln(1+\varepsilon)$  are  $\varepsilon - \frac{\varepsilon^2}{2}$ ) and that  $\frac{1}{\mu} \leq 2$  provided  $\varepsilon_0$  is chosen sufficiently small. By Lemma 4 there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that the first sum in (2) is at most  $\varepsilon^3$ . Moreover, the second sum in (2) is

$$\sum_{t>t_0} e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^2}{3}t} = e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^2}{3}t_0} \cdot \frac{1}{1 - e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^2}{3}}} \le \varepsilon^5 \cdot \frac{6}{\varepsilon^2} = 6\varepsilon^3, \tag{3}$$

where we used the fact that  $\frac{1}{1-e^{-x}} \leq \frac{2}{x}$  for x > 0 sufficiently small (which holds since the first terms of the Taylor series expansion of  $e^{-x}$  are 1-x). Thus, all in all, we conclude that there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that

$$\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\right] \le 2 \cdot (\varepsilon^3 + 6\varepsilon^3) = 14\varepsilon^3$$

as claimed. Since  $|\mathcal{T}| \sim \text{Borel}(\mu)$  it follows that

$$\operatorname{Var}\left[T_{\ell}\right] \leq \mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}^{2}\right] \leq \mathbb{E}\left[|\mathcal{T}|^{2}\right] = \frac{1}{(1-\mu)^{3}}.$$

Morever, it is straightforward to check that if  $\varepsilon_0$  is chosen sufficiently small then  $\mu \leq 1 - \frac{\varepsilon}{2}$ . Thus, we conclude that

 $Var\left[T_{\ell}\right] \leq \frac{8}{\varepsilon^3}$ 

as claimed.  $\Box$ 

**Lemma 6.** Let P = (V, E) be a path of length  $\ell$  and  $B \subseteq E$  a set of size  $|B| \le \alpha \ell$ , where  $\alpha \ge \frac{1}{\ell}$ . Let Q denote the graph obtained from P by deleting all the edges in B. Then there exist vertex disjoint subpaths  $\{Q^j\}_{j\in J}$  of Q such that each  $Q^j$  has length at least  $\frac{1}{3\alpha}$  and the subpaths  $\{Q^j\}_{i\in J}$  cover at least  $(\frac{1}{3} - \alpha) \ell$  vertices of V.

Proof of Lemma 6. Since P is a path, Q consists of a union of vertex disjoint paths  $\{Q^j\}_{j\in[k]}$  for some  $k \leq |B| + 1 \leq \alpha \ell + 1$ . Denoting by  $\ell_j$  the length of the path  $Q^j$  for  $j \in [k]$ , note that

$$\sum_{j \in [k]} \ell_j = \ell - |B| \ge (1 - \alpha)\ell. \tag{4}$$

Moreover, setting  $J := \{j \in [k] : \ell_j \ge \frac{1}{3\alpha}\}$  we see that

$$\sum_{j \notin J} \ell_j \le k \cdot \frac{1}{3\alpha} \le \frac{1}{3}\ell + \frac{1}{3\alpha} \le \frac{2}{3}\ell. \tag{5}$$

Putting (4) and (5) together we get that

$$\sum_{j \in J} \ell_j \ge \left(\frac{1}{3} - \alpha\right) \ell.$$

Thus, it follows that the paths  $\{Q^j\}_{j\in J}$  satisfy the desired conditions.

#### 2.3 Properties of random graphs

The next lemma provides bounds on the sizes of the largest and second largest connected components of  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  as well as the size of its 2-core when  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , where  $\varepsilon > 0$  is a small constant. This lemma is a simple consequence of Theorem 5.4 of [11] and Theorem 3 of [15].

**Lemma 7.** Let  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  where  $\varepsilon > 0$  is a constant. Then there exists a constant  $\varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  the following holds whp for  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n, p)$ :

- (a) the largest connected component of G has between  $\varepsilon n$  and  $3\varepsilon n$  vertices.
- (b) the second largest connected component of G has at most  $\frac{20}{\epsilon^2} \ln n$  vertices.
- (c) the 2-core of the largest connected component of G has at most  $2\varepsilon^2 n$  vertices.

In [8], Ding, Lubetzky and Peres established a complete characterization of the structure of the giant component  $C_1$  of  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  in the strictly supercritical regime  $(p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n})$  with  $\varepsilon > 0$  constant). This was achieved by offering a tractable contiguous model  $\tilde{C}_1$ , i.e. a model such that every graph property that is satisfied by  $\tilde{C}_1$  whp is also satisfied by  $C_1$  whp. In their model,  $\tilde{C}_1$  consists of a 2-core  $\tilde{C}_1^{(2)}$  where one attaches to each vertex of  $\tilde{C}_1^{(2)}$  one independent Poisson( $\mu$ )-Galton-Watson tree (where  $0 < \mu < 1$  is such that  $\mu e^{-\mu} = (1 + \varepsilon)e^{-(1+\varepsilon)}$ ). In light of this, any graph property that is satisfied whp by the disjoint union of  $|\tilde{C}_1^{(2)}|$  independent Poisson( $\mu$ )-Galton-Watson trees must also be satisfied whp by  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$ , the graph obtained from the giant component  $C_1$  by removing the edges of its 2-core  $C_1^{(2)}$ . As one would expect, the random variable  $|\tilde{C}_1^{(2)}|$  is tightly concentrated around its expectation, which agrees with the expected size of the 2-core  $C_1^{(2)}$  of  $C_1$ . By (c) of Lemma 7 this at most  $2\varepsilon^2 n$ . The next technical lemma which will be useful in the proof of Theorem 2 follows from the considerations above.

**Lemma 8.** Let  $C_1$  denote the largest connected component of  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  for  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , where  $\varepsilon > 0$  is fixed, let  $C_1^{(2)}$  denote its 2-core and let  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$  denote the graph obtained from  $C_1$  by removing the edges in  $C_1^{(2)}$ . Let  $0 < \mu < 1$  be such that  $\mu e^{-\mu} = (1+\varepsilon)e^{-(1+\varepsilon)}$  and consider  $2\varepsilon^2 n$  independent  $Poisson(\mu)$ -Galton-Watson trees  $\mathcal{T}_1, \ldots, \mathcal{T}_{2\varepsilon^2 n}$ . Then, for every  $\ell$  and m (which might depend on n) if whp the disjoint union of  $\mathcal{T}_1, \ldots, \mathcal{T}_{2\varepsilon^2 n}$  does not contain a set of vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\ell$  covering at least m vertices then the same holds whp for  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$ .

## 3 Proof of Theorem 1

We start this section by repeating the statement of Theorem 1 for the reader's convenience.

**Theorem 1.** There exists an absolute constant C > 0 such that the following holds. For every constant  $q \in (0,1)$  there exist  $n_0, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0,\varepsilon_0)$  and any  $n \ge n_0$  there is no adaptive algorithm which reveals a path of length  $\ell \ge \frac{3C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  with probability at least q in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , by querying at most  $\frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}$  pairs of vertices.

Proof of Theorem 1. Suppose Alg is an adaptive algorithm which with probability at least q finds a path of length  $\ell$  in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , after querying at most  $\frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}$  pairs of vertices. We consider implicitly that Alg takes an ordered vertex set as part of its input. We shall assume henceforth that n,C>0 are sufficiently large and  $\varepsilon>0$  is sufficiently small in order to obtain a contradiction. Note that, by restricting Alg to a set of n vertices, we get an algorithm which for any  $n' \geq n$  with probability at least q finds in  $G' \sim \mathcal{G}(n',p)$  a path of length  $\ell$  after querying at most  $\frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}$  pairs of vertices. We shall abuse notation slightly and call Alg to all these algorithms.

Define 
$$n' := \left(1 + \frac{720\varepsilon^2}{q}\right)n$$
,  $V_0 := [n']$ ,  $I_0 := \emptyset$  and  $s := \frac{720\varepsilon^2n}{q(\ell+1)}$ . For  $i = 1, \ldots, s$  do the following:

• Apply Alg to  $G_{i-1} \sim \mathcal{G}(V_{i-1}, p)$ , where the vertices in  $V_{i-1}$  are permuted according to a permutation  $\pi_i \in S_{V_{i-1}}$  chosen uniformly at random. Let  $L_i$  be the graph of all pairs of vertices queried and let  $K_i \subseteq L_i$  be the graph of edges present. By the algorithm we know that  $L_i$  has at most  $\frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon\ln(\frac{1}{\varepsilon})}$  edges. If  $K_i$  contains a path of length  $\ell$  then let  $P_i$  be one such path, define  $V_i := V_{i-1} \setminus V(P_i)$  and set  $I_i := I_{i-1} \cup \{i\}$ . Otherwise, set  $V_i := V_{i-1}$  and  $I_i := I_{i-1}$ .

Observe that  $|V_s| \geq n' - (\ell+1)s = \left(1 + \frac{720\varepsilon^2}{q}\right)n - \frac{720\varepsilon^2}{q}n = n$  and so we can indeed apply Alg to  $V_{i-1}$  for any  $i \in [s]$ . We define a random graph H with vertex set  $V_0$  in the following way. For every pair of vertices  $\{u,v\} \subseteq V_0$  if  $\{u,v\} \in E(L_i)$  for some  $i \in [s]$  then let  $i_0$  be the smallest such index and set  $\{u,v\}$  as an edge of H if and only if  $\{u,v\} \in E(K_{i_0})$ . Consider all the other pairs  $\{u,v\} \subseteq V_0$  as non-edges of H. From the procedure above it follows that for every  $\{u,v\} \subseteq V_0$  we have independently that

$$\Pr\left[\left\{u,v\right\} \in E(H)\right] \le p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n} = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n'} \cdot \frac{n'}{n} = \frac{(1+\varepsilon)\left(1+\frac{720\varepsilon^2}{q}\right)}{n'} \le \frac{1+2\varepsilon}{n'},$$

provided  $\varepsilon \leq \frac{q}{1440}$ . Thus, the graph H can be viewed as a subgraph of a graph sampled from  $\mathcal{G}\left(n',\frac{1+2\varepsilon}{n'}\right)$ . In particular, if with probability at least  $\frac{q^2}{4}$  the graph H contains a set of vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon}\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  which cover at least  $52\varepsilon^2n'$  vertices then the same must also hold with probability at least  $\frac{q^2}{4}$  in  $\mathcal{G}\left(n',\frac{1+2\varepsilon}{n'}\right)$ . However, this would contradict Theorem 2 and so it suffices to prove the following claim:

Claim. With probability at least  $\frac{q^2}{4}$  the graph H contains a set of vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \right)$  which cover at least  $52\varepsilon^2 n'$  vertices of  $V_0$ .

Define for each  $i \in I_s$  the graph  $H_i$  with vertex set  $V_{i-1}$  and edge set  $\left(\bigcup_{j=1}^{i-1} E(L_j)\right) \cap {V_{i-1} \choose 2}$  and note that

$$|E(H_i)| \le s \cdot \frac{q\ell}{8640Cp\varepsilon \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)} \le \frac{\varepsilon n^2}{12C\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)(1+\varepsilon)} \le \frac{\varepsilon}{6C\ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)} \cdot \binom{|V_{i-1}|}{2}. \tag{6}$$

Observe that for each  $i \in I_s$  the set  $V_{i-1} \setminus V_i$  consists of the vertex set of a path  $P_i$  in the graph  $K_i$ . For each such i set  $B_i := E(P_i) \cap E(H_i)$  and let  $Q_i$  denote the graph obtained from  $P_i$  by deleting all the edges in  $B_i$ . Note crucially that  $E(Q_i) \subseteq E(H)$  and that the graphs  $\{Q_i\}_{i \in I_s}$  are vertex disjoint.

Consider now the set  $I := \left\{ i \in I_s : |B_i| \le \frac{\varepsilon}{3C \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)} \ell \right\}$ . By Lemma 6 it follows that for any  $i \in I$  there exist vertex disjoint subpaths  $\{Q_i^j\}_{j \in J_i}$  of  $Q_i$  each of length at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  which cover at least  $\left(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{\varepsilon}{3C \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}\right) \ell \ge \frac{1}{4}(\ell+1)$  vertices of  $V(Q_i)$ . Thus, if  $|I| \ge \frac{1}{3}sq$  then  $\{Q_i^j\}_{i \in I, j \in J_i}$  forms a collection of vertex disjoint paths in H of length at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  which cover at least  $\frac{1}{4}(\ell+1) \cdot \frac{1}{3}sq = 60\varepsilon^2 n \ge 52\varepsilon^2 n'$  vertices of  $V_0$ . It suffices to show then that with probability at least  $\frac{q^2}{4}$  we have  $|I| \ge \frac{1}{3}sq$ .

Let  $I' := [s] \setminus I$  and note that for every  $i \in [s]$  we have

$$\Pr\left[i \in I'\right] = \Pr\left[i \notin I_s\right] + \Pr\left[i \in I' \mid i \in I_s\right] \cdot \Pr\left[i \in I_s\right]. \tag{7}$$

It is clear from the procedure above that for each  $i \in [s]$  we have  $\Pr[i \in I_s] \ge q$ . Note also crucially that, provided  $i \in I_s$ , the path  $P_i$  is a randomly mapped path of length  $\ell$  on the vertex set  $V_{i-1}$ . Indeed, this happens because before the i-th application of Alg we permuted the vertices of  $V_{i-1}$  according to a permutation  $\pi_i \in S_{V_{i-1}}$  chosen uniformly at random. Thus, by conditioning on the event that  $i \in I_s$ , on any possible graph  $H_i$  satisfying (6) and on the path  $\pi_i^{-1}(P_i)$ , we have for any  $e \in E\left(\pi_i^{-1}(P_i)\right)$ :

$$\Pr\left[\pi_i(e) \in E(H_i)\right] \le \frac{\varepsilon}{6C \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)},\,$$

and so, by linearity of expectation it follows that:

$$\mathbb{E}\left[|E(P_i) \cap E(H_i)|\right] \le \frac{\varepsilon}{6C \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)} \ell.$$

Thus, by Markov's inequality (see, e.g., [4]) we get that

$$\Pr\left[i \in I' \mid i \in I_s\right] \le \frac{1}{2},$$

and so by equation (7) we see that for any  $i \in [s]$  we have  $\Pr[i \in I'] \le 1 - \frac{1}{2} \Pr[i \in I_s] \le 1 - \frac{q}{2}$ . It follows then by linearity of expectation that  $\mathbb{E}[|I'|] \le s(1 - \frac{q}{2})$ . Hence, again by Markov's inequality we conclude that

$$\Pr\left[|I'| \geq \frac{s}{1+\frac{q}{2}}\right] \leq 1 - \frac{q^2}{4} \text{ , which implies } \frac{q^2}{4} \leq \Pr\left[|I| \geq \frac{sq}{2+q}\right] \leq \Pr\left[|I| \geq \frac{sq}{3}\right].$$

This completes the proof.

#### 4 Proof of Theorem 2

**Theorem 2.** There exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  we have whp that  $G \sim \mathcal{G}\left(n, \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}\right)$  does not contain a set of vertex disjoint paths of lengths at least  $\frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  whose union covers at least  $13\varepsilon^2 n$  vertices.

Proof of Theorem 2. Let  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ . Let  $\mathcal{C}_1$  denote the largest connected component of G, let  $\mathcal{C}_1^{(2)}$  denote the 2-core of  $\mathcal{C}_1$  and let  $\mathcal{C}_1 \setminus \mathcal{C}_1^{(2)}$  denote the graph obtained from  $\mathcal{C}_1$  by deleting the edges in  $\mathcal{C}_1^{(2)}$ . For  $\ell \geq 1$  consider the following random variables:

- $X_{\ell}$  = number of vertices which belong to connected components of G of size at most  $\frac{20}{\varepsilon^2} \ln n$  containing a path of length at least  $\ell$ .
- $Y_{\ell}$  = maximum number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\ell$  in  $\mathcal{C}_1$ .
- $Z_{\ell}$  = maximum number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{\ell}{3}$  in  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$ .

By (b) of Lemma 7 it follows that whp  $X_{\ell} + Y_{\ell}$  is an upper bound on the maximum number of vertices of G covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\ell$ . Note that we may assume that all the paths considered have size at most  $2\ell$  by splitting larger paths into several paths of length at least  $\ell$ . Moreover, if P is a path of length at least  $\ell$  in  $C_1$  then, since  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$  consists of a disjoint union of trees, there must exist a subpath P' of the path P with at least  $\frac{|P|}{3} \ge \frac{\ell}{3}$  vertices which lies in  $C_1^{(2)}$  or in  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$ . Since  $|P| \le 6|P'|$  it follows that  $Y_{\ell} \le 6|C_1^{(2)}| + 6Z_{\ell}$ .

By (c) of Lemma 7 we know that whp  $|\mathcal{C}_1^{(2)}| \leq 2\varepsilon^2 n$ , provided  $\varepsilon_0$  is chosen small enough. It suffices then to show that there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $\ell := \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  we have whp that

$$X_{\ell} < \varepsilon^3 n$$
 and  $Z_{\ell} < 29\varepsilon^5 n$ .

since in that case we have who that the maximum number of vertices of G covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\ell$  is at most

$$X_{\ell} + Y_{\ell} \le X_{\ell} + 6|\mathcal{C}_1^{(2)}| + 6Z_{\ell} < \varepsilon^3 n + 6 \cdot 2\varepsilon^2 n + 6 \cdot 29\varepsilon^5 n \le 13\varepsilon^2 n.$$

provided  $\varepsilon_0$  is chosen sufficiently small. Lemmas 9 and 10 complete the proof.

**Lemma 9.** There exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $\ell := \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \right)$  we have  $X_{\ell} < \varepsilon^3 n$  whp.

Proof of Lemma 9. Given a set  $S \subseteq [n]$  of size t, let  $\mathcal{S}_{\ell}(S)$  (resp.  $\mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)$ ) denote the set of possible connected graphs (resp. spanning trees) on the vertex set S which contain a path of length at least  $\ell$ . Let  $X_S$  denote the indicator random variable of the event that  $G[S] \in \mathcal{S}_{\ell}(S)$  and that there are no edges in G between S and  $[n] \setminus S$ . Note that  $G[S] \in \mathcal{S}_{\ell}(S)$  if and only if there exists  $T \in \mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)$  such that  $T \subseteq G[S]$ . Thus, by the union bound we have

$$\mathbb{E}\left[X_S\right] \le |\mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)| \cdot p^{t-1} \cdot (1-p)^{t(n-t)} \tag{8}$$

where the first term accounts for taking a union bound over all  $T \in \mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)$ , the second term accounts for the probability that the edges in T are present in G[S] and the last term accounts for the probability that none of the edges between S and  $[n] \setminus S$  are present in G. Note that  $|\mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)|$  does not depend on the set S and is equal to the number of labeled trees on t vertices which contain a path of length at least  $\ell$ . More specifically, if  $p_{t,\ell}$  denotes the proportion of labeled trees on t vertices which contain a path of length at least  $\ell$ , then  $|\mathcal{T}_{\ell}(S)| = p_{t,\ell} \cdot t^{t-2}$ . Observe now that the random variable  $X_{\ell}$  satisfies the following:

$$X_{\ell} \le \sum_{t=\ell}^{\frac{20}{\varepsilon^2} \ln n} \sum_{S \in \binom{[n]}{t}} t \cdot X_S.$$

We claim that for  $\ell := \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$ , where C > 0 is a large constant, and for some constant  $\varepsilon_0 > 0$ , if  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  is fixed then  $\Pr\left[X_\ell \ge \varepsilon^3 n\right] = o(1)$ . To prove this claim we start by estimating  $\mathbb{E}[X_\ell]$ . Setting  $t_0 := \frac{15}{\varepsilon^2} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$ , we have by the linearity of expectation and by (8) that if  $\varepsilon_0$  is sufficiently small then:

$$\mathbb{E}[X_{\ell}] \leq \sum_{t=\ell}^{\frac{20}{\varepsilon^{2}} \ln n} t \cdot \binom{n}{t} \cdot p_{t,\ell} \cdot t^{t-2} \cdot p^{t-1} \cdot (1-p)^{t(n-t)}$$

$$\leq \sum_{t=\ell}^{\frac{20}{\varepsilon^{2}} \ln n} t \cdot \left(\frac{en}{t}\right)^{t} \cdot p_{t,\ell} \cdot t^{t-2} \cdot \left(\frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}\right)^{t-1} \left(1 - \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}\right)^{t(n-t)}$$

$$\leq \sum_{t=\ell}^{\frac{20}{\varepsilon^{2}} \ln n} e^{t} \cdot t^{-1} \cdot n \cdot p_{t,\ell} \cdot \frac{e^{\varepsilon t - \frac{\varepsilon^{2}}{3}t}}{1+\varepsilon} \cdot e^{-(1+\varepsilon)t + \frac{(1+\varepsilon)t^{2}}{n}}$$

$$\leq \frac{(1+o(1))n}{\ell(1+\varepsilon)} \cdot \sum_{t\geq \ell} p_{t,\ell} \cdot e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^{2}}{3}t}$$

$$\leq \frac{n}{14} \cdot \left(\sum_{\ell \leq t \leq t_{0}} p_{t,\ell} + \sum_{t \geq t_{0}} e^{-\frac{\varepsilon^{2}}{3}t}\right)$$

$$(9)$$

where in the third inequality we used the fact that  $(1+\varepsilon)^t \leq e^{\varepsilon t - \frac{\varepsilon^2}{3}t}$  for sufficiently small  $\varepsilon > 0$ . By Lemma 4 there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that the first sum in (9) is at most  $\varepsilon^3$ . Moreover, by (3) the second sum in (9) is at most  $6\varepsilon^3$ . Thus, all in all, we conclude that there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that

$$\mathbb{E}\left[X_{\ell}\right] \leq \frac{n}{14} \cdot (\varepsilon^3 + 6\varepsilon^3) = \frac{\varepsilon^3 n}{2}.$$

Note that if G and H differ in precisely one edge then  $|X_{\ell}(G) - X_{\ell}(H)| \leq \frac{40}{\varepsilon^2} \ln n$  because one edge affects at most two connected components of size at most  $\frac{20}{\varepsilon^2} \ln n$ . Thus, by Lemma 2 it follows that

$$\Pr\left[X_{\ell} > \varepsilon^{3} n\right] \le \Pr\left[|X_{\ell} - \mathbb{E}[X_{\ell}]| > \frac{\varepsilon^{3} n}{2}\right] \le e^{-\Omega\left(\frac{n}{(\ln n)^{2}}\right)} = o(1).$$

Remark. An alernative approach to the proof of Lemma 9 would be to invoke the so called symmetry rule (see, e.g., Chapter 5.6 of [11]), postulating that in the supercritical regime  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , the subgraph of  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$  outside the giant component behaves typically as a random graph with subcritical edge probability. One can then estimate the likely contribution of paths of length at least  $\ell = \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  coming from the small components to the total volume of vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\ell$  and to show it to be  $O(\varepsilon^2 n)$  whp, using a direct first moment argument. Since we still need to treat the paths residing in the giant component outside the 2-core (the random variable  $Z_{\ell}$ ), we chose to adopt a unified approach using the machinery of Galton-Watson trees developed in Section 2.2, and to apply it here as well.

**Lemma 10.** There exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every fixed  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $\ell := \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \right)$  we have  $Z_{\ell} < 29\varepsilon^5 n$  whp.

Proof of Lemma 10. Recall that  $Z_{\ell}$  counts the maximum number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{\ell}{3}$  in  $C_1 \setminus C_1^{(2)}$ . Let  $0 < \mu < 1$  be such that  $\mu e^{-\mu} = (1+\varepsilon)e^{-(1+\varepsilon)}$  and consider  $2\varepsilon^2 n$  independent Poisson( $\mu$ )-Galton-Watson trees  $\mathcal{T}_1, \ldots, \mathcal{T}_{2\varepsilon^2 n}$ . By Lemma 8 it suffices for our purposes to show that whp the maximum number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{\ell}{3}$  in the disjoint union of  $\mathcal{T}_1, \ldots, \mathcal{T}_{2\varepsilon^2 n}$  is less than  $29\varepsilon^5 n$ , for appropriate  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$ .

For each  $1 \le i \le 2\varepsilon^2 n$  consider the following random variable:

$$T_{i,\ell} := \begin{cases} |\mathcal{T}_i| & \text{if } \mathcal{T}_i \text{ contains a path of length at least } \frac{\ell}{3} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

and set  $T_{\ell} = \sum_{i=1}^{2\varepsilon^2 n} T_{i,\ell}$ . Clearly  $T_{\ell}$  is an upperbound on the maximum number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length at least  $\frac{\ell}{3}$  in in the disjoint union of  $\mathcal{T}_1, \ldots, \mathcal{T}_{2\varepsilon^2 n}$ . To finish the proof, we show that whp  $T_{\ell} < 29\varepsilon^5 n$ , provided  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  are chosen appropriately.

By Lemma 5 we know that there exist constants  $C, \varepsilon_0 > 0$  such that for every  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$  and for  $\ell = \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \right)$  we have  $\mathbb{E}\left[ T_{i,\ell} \right] \leq 14\varepsilon^3$  and  $\operatorname{Var}\left[ T_{i,\ell} \right] \leq \frac{8}{\varepsilon^3}$ . Thus, since the random variables  $T_{i,\ell}$  are independent, we have that

$$\mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\right] \leq 14\varepsilon^{3} \cdot 2\varepsilon^{2} n = 28\varepsilon^{5} n \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{Var}\left[T_{\ell}\right] \leq \frac{8}{\varepsilon^{3}} \cdot 2\varepsilon^{2} n = \frac{16n}{\varepsilon}.$$

Thus, by Chebyshev's Inequality (see, e.g., [4]) we conclude that

$$\Pr\left[T_{\ell} \ge 29\varepsilon^{5}n\right] \le \Pr\left[|T_{\ell} - \mathbb{E}\left[T_{\ell}\right]| \ge \varepsilon^{5}n\right] \le \frac{\operatorname{Var}\left[T_{\ell}\right]}{\varepsilon^{10}n^{2}} \le \frac{16}{\varepsilon^{11}n} = o(1).$$

## 5 Concluding remarks

We have shown that in order to find a path of length  $\ell = \Omega\left(\frac{\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}{\varepsilon}\right)$  in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}\left(n,p\right)$  with at least some constant probability, where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  with  $\varepsilon > 0$  fixed, one needs to query at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)}\right)$  pairs of vertices. This is close to best possible since a randomised depth first search algorithm from [14] finds whp a path of length  $\ell$  after querying at most  $O\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon}\right)$  pairs of vertices. A natural question, which remains open, is to close the gap between these bounds. We believe that every adaptive algorithm which reveals whp a path of length  $\ell$  in  $G \sim \mathcal{G}(n,p)$ , where  $p = \frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$  with  $\varepsilon > 0$  fixed, has to query  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon}\right)$  pairs of vertices.

Recall that, to prove our main result, in Theorem 2 we bounded the total number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of size at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\log\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)\right)$  in a typical graph sampled from  $\mathcal{G}(n,p)$ ,  $p=\frac{1+\varepsilon}{n}$ , by  $O\left(\varepsilon^2 n\right)$ . Since a graph  $G\sim\mathcal{G}(n,p)$  contains who a path of length  $\Theta(\varepsilon^2 n)$  (see e.g. [11]), this is best possible up to a multiplicative constant. If one can show that a similar statement holds for paths of length  $\Omega\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  then one can modify our proof to obtain a  $\Omega\left(\frac{\ell}{p\varepsilon}\right)$  bound in Theorem 1.

In the proof of Theorem 2 we needed to bound the number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of a prescribed length  $\ell$  in a random tree of fixed size t (Lemma 5). Our estimate was a bit wasteful because for trees which contained a path of length  $\ell$  we used their total number of vertices t instead of the number of vertices covered by vertex disjoint paths of length  $\ell$ , which is most likely significantly smaller. A way to fix this is to obtain good bounds for the following question:

**Question.** Given  $a = a(t) \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $b = b(t) \in \mathbb{N}$  what is the probability that a random tree on t vertices contains b vertex disjoint paths, each of length at least a?

Note that, since the diameter of a random tree on t vertices is whp  $\Theta(\sqrt{t})$  (see e.g. [1]), the only interesting regime is when  $ab \geq C\sqrt{t}$  for some constant C > 0. Moreover, by splitting paths of length larger than 2a into smaller subpaths of length at least a, we may consider only paths of length between a and 2a.

One possible approach to this problem would be through a nice argument of Joyal ([12], see also [2]). It shows that a random tree  $\mathcal{T}$  on t vertices can be obtained from a random map  $f:[t] \to [t]$  as follows. First we create the directed graph D (possibly with loops) on vertex set [t] with edges  $i \to f(i)$  for each  $i \in [t]$ . Then we look at a maximal set of vertices  $M = \{i_1, \ldots, i_m\} \subseteq [t]$  such that  $f|_M$  is a permutation. We remove the directed edges inside M and replace them by the path  $f(i_1) \to f(i_2) \to \ldots \to f(i_m)$  (where  $i_1 < i_2 < \ldots < i_m$ ). By ignoring the orientations of the edges we obtain the desired tree  $\mathcal{T}$ . Note that, since the vertices in M form a path in  $\mathcal{T}$ , we must have  $|M| = O(\sqrt{t})$  whp. Moreover, if we have a path P in  $\mathcal{T}$  then a moment's thought reveals that either P has at least  $\frac{|V(P)|}{3}$  vertices in M or there are  $\frac{|V(P)|}{3}$  vertices of P which form a directed path in D. Thus, it follows that if we have a collection of b vertex disjoint paths in  $\mathcal{T}$  each of length between a and a covering at least  $\frac{(a+1)b}{3} - |M|$  vertices. Since  $|M| = O(\sqrt{t})$  whp and since we are interested only in the case when  $ab \geq C\sqrt{t}$  for some large constant C > 0, it follows that in that case we have, say, at least  $\frac{b}{10}$  such paths. Thus, up to changing a and b by constant multiplicative factors, it is enough to estimate the probability that the directed graph D obtained from a random map a is enough to estimate the vertex disjoint directed paths, each of length (at least) a.

We can give a simple upper bound on this probability by taking the union bound over all collections of b vertex disjoint directed paths of length a. This shows that the probability that we want to estimate is at most

$$\frac{t!}{(t-(a+1)b)!b!} \left(\frac{1}{t}\right)^{ab} = \frac{t^b}{b!} \prod_{i=1}^{(a+1)b-1} \left(1-\frac{i}{t}\right) \le e^{b+b\ln(t/b)-\binom{(a+1)b}{2}/t}.$$

Unfortunately, this upper bound is not strong enough to allow us to prove Theorem 2 for paths of length at least  $\Omega\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon}\right)$  because when b is roughly a constant and a is close to  $\sqrt{t}$  the positive term  $b \ln (t/b)$  in the exponent is much larger than the negative term  $\binom{(a+1)b}{2}/t$ . Thus, it would be nice to obtain tighter bounds for the probability in question.

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