Private DNA Sequencing: Hiding Information in Discrete Noise

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Abstract—When an individual's DNA is sequenced, sensitive medical information becomes available to the sequencing laboratory. A recently proposed way to hide an individual's genetic information is to mix in DNA samples of other individuals. We assume these samples are known to the individual but unknown to the sequencing laboratory. Thus, these DNA samples act as "noise" to the sequencing laboratory, but still allow the individual to recover their own DNA samples afterward. Motivated by this idea, we study the problem of hiding a binary random variable X (a genetic marker) with the additive noise provided by mixing DNA samples, using mutual information as a privacy metric. This is equivalent to the problem of finding a worst-case noise distribution for recovering X from the noisy observation among a set of feasible discrete distributions. We characterize upper and lower bounds to the solution of this problem, which are empirically shown to be very close. The lower bound is obtained through a convex relaxation of the original discrete optimization problem, and yields a closed-form expression. The upper bound is computed via a greedy algorithm for selecting the mixing proportions.

Index Terms—DNA sequencing, genetic privacy, additive discrete noise, worst-case noise distribution.

I. INTRODUCTION

Advances in DNA sequencing technologies have led to the generation of human genetic data at an unprecedented rate [1]. This offers exciting prospects for biomedical research, and recent studies have leveraged the genetic data of hundreds of thousands of individuals to identify genetic markers associated with many traits and diseases [2–5].

Genetic testing for disease predisposition [6] and popular direct-to-consumer genomics services [7, 8] can provide us with important and actionable information about our health. However, these services require the submission of a blood or saliva sample, making an individual's entire DNA available to the testing center. This raises significant privacy concerns regarding genetic data [9], particularly with respect to the potential use of this information by insurance companies [10].

Given the potential privacy risks of DNA sequencing, an important question is whether it is possible to alter a physical DNA sample prior to submitting it to a laboratory, in order to "hide" some of its genetic information. One possible way to alter a sample could be to *mix* it with the DNA of other individuals. Upon sequencing, the lab would then observe a mixture of the data from the different samples, which would hinder its ability to retrieve individual genetic variants.

The general idea of mixing samples to attain genetic privacy was proposed in [11] (and later extended in [12]). Suppose Alice wants to have her DNA sequenced and has at her disposal the DNA samples of K other people who already know their DNA sequence. Alice can then mix all K+1 DNA samples and send them to the sequencing lab. From the lab's perspective, the DNA of the K additional individuals plays the role of noise, impairing the lab's ability to recover Alice's DNA. However, upon receiving the sequencing data back, the contribution of the "noise individuals" can be removed, and Alice can recover her DNA sequence information. This approach is illustrated in Figure 1.

Motivated by this idea, we study how to *optimally mix* DNA samples in order to maximize the privacy achieved. We focus on a single *biallelic site s* on the genome; i.e., a location on the human genome that admits two possible alleles, and can thus be modeled as a single variable $X \in \{0,1\}$. It should be noted that the vast majority of locations where a variant has been observed are biallelic [13]. A biallelic site could model, for example, the presence of the mutation on the BRCA2 gene that increases the likelihood of breast cancer [14] and many other disease genetic markers.

In order to hide her genotype X from the sequencing lab,

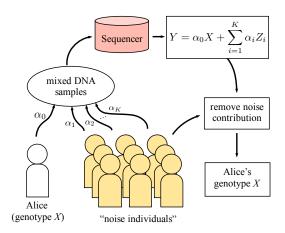


Fig. 1. In order to hide her genotype X at a given locus s, Alice mixes her DNA sample with that of K individuals in amounts $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_K$. Upon receiving the sequencing data from the lab, Alice can remove the contribution from the "noise individuals" (whose genotype at s is known) to recover X.

Alice mixes into her sample the samples of K individuals using proportions $\alpha_0,\alpha_1,...,\alpha_K$, where $\sum_{i=0}^K \alpha_i = 1$. We model the lab's observation of site s as $Y = \alpha_0 X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i$, where $Z_i \in \{0,1\}$ is the allele value of the ith noise individual. This is motivated by the fact that, if the lab uses shotgun sequencing technologies [15], each reading of site s is effectively a $\operatorname{Ber}\left(\alpha_0 X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i\right)$ random variable. Via repeated readings of s, Y can thus be obtained with arbitrary accuracy, so we assume for simplicity that Y is observed exactly. We refer to Section VII for additional motivation and discussion on model assumptions.

Following [11], we model $X, Z_1, ..., Z_K$ as i.i.d. random variables with $\Pr(X=1) = p \in [0,0.5]$. We refer to p as the minor allele frequency, a parameter that is known in practice for genetic loci of interest. As in [11], we utilize the mutual information as our privacy metric. If we let $\alpha = (\alpha_0, ..., \alpha_K)$ and $Z_\alpha = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_k Z_k$, our goal is thus to solve

$$\min_{\alpha \in \mathbb{R}^{K+1}: \ \alpha > 0, \ \sum_{i=0}^{K} \alpha_i = 1} I\left(X; \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha\right), \tag{1}$$

i.e., choose the mixing coefficients $\alpha_0,...,\alpha_K$ to minimize the mutual information between X and the lab's observation. Here, $\alpha>0$ means that all entries of α are positive. We discuss the connection between our problem formulation and the work in [11, 12] in more detail in Section IV.

The problem in (1) is equivalent to maximizing the conditional entropy H(X|Y); i.e., the residual uncertainty in X after observing $Y = \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha$, and can thus be understood as maximizing the privacy of X. It can also be thought of as the problem of finding a worst-case noise Z_α among those of the form $\sum_k \alpha_k Z_k$, with Z_k being i.i.d. $\mathrm{Ber}(p)$. Our main result is that the solution to (1) is lower-bounded as

$$\min_{\alpha \in \mathbb{R}^{K+1}: \alpha > 0, \sum_{i=0}^{K} \alpha_i = 1} I\left(X; \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha\right) \geqslant I\left(X; X + G\right),\tag{2}$$

where $G \sim \operatorname{Geom}\left((1-p)^K\right)$ and G is independent of X. The right-hand side of (2) can be computed explicitly as a function of p and K. Moreover, we verify empirically that this lower bound is very close to an upper bound provided by a greedy algorithm that sets $\alpha_0=1$ and selects $\alpha_1,\alpha_2,...,\alpha_K$ sequentially to minimize the resulting mutual information, establishing $I\left(X;X+G\right)$ as a good approximation to the solution of (1). We derive (2) via a convex relaxation of (1), and use KKT conditions to show the lower bound.

We note that some of the assumptions in our problem setup such as Alice choosing $\alpha_i s$ exactly are not very realistic, and we discuss these assumptions in Section VII.

II. PROBLEM SETTING AND PRELIMINARIES

Our goal is to characterize the mixing proportions $\alpha_0, ..., \alpha_K$ that minimize the mutual information in (1). Notice that we do not need to constrain the mixing proportions to add up to 1, since scaling the observation Y does not change the

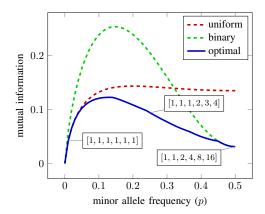


Fig. 2. Optimal value of (3) for integral α_i s compared to the uniform scheme and the binary scheme, for K=5 and $p\in[0,0.5]$. At p=0.5, the optimal scheme is $\alpha=[1,1,2,4,8,16]$. At p=0.25, the optimal scheme is $\alpha=[1,1,1,2,3,4]$. At p=0.01, the optimal scheme is $\alpha=[1,1,1,1,1,1,1]$.

mutual information. As a result, we can restrict ourselves to solving the optimization problem

$$\min_{\alpha \in \mathbb{R}^{K+1}: \ \alpha > 0} I(X; \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha), \tag{3}$$

where $\alpha=(\alpha_0,...,\alpha_K)$, $Z_\alpha=\sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i$, and $X,Z_1,...,Z_K$ are independent $\mathrm{Ber}(p)$ random variables.

The optimization problem in (3) is surprisingly complex. The symmetry between the variables $\alpha_0,...,\alpha_K$ may suggest that $\alpha_i=1$ for i=0,...,K would be an optimal solution. However, a brute-force solution to (3) over integer α_i s for small values of K shows that optimal solutions $(\alpha_0,...,\alpha_K)$ vary widely for different values of p, as illustrated in Figure 2. Observe that the curve appears to be only piecewise smooth. At p=0.5, the optimal solution is given by [1,1,2,4,8,16], at p=0.25, the optimal solution is given by [1,1,1,2,3,4], and at p=0.01, the optimal solution is given by [1,1,1,1,1,1].

As it turns out, the optimal solution to (3) can be exactly characterized in the two extremes cases of p. More precisely, if we define the *uniform* scheme to be $\alpha_i = 1$ for i = 0, ..., K, and we define the *binary* scheme to be $\alpha_0 = 1$ and $\alpha_i = 2^{i-1}$ for i = 1, ..., K, we have the following result.

Theorem 1. Fix some $K \in \mathbb{N}$. Then there exists some $p^* > 0$ such that the uniform scheme is optimal for $p < p^*$. Moreover, the binary scheme is optimal for p = 0.5.

The two statements in Theorem 1 are divided into Lemma 7 and Lemma 9, which are proved in the appendix. Aside from the cases p=0.5 and $p\approx 0$, there does not appear to be a simple expression for the optimal solution α .

Notation: Throughout the paper we use \mathbb{N} to denote the set of natural numbers excluding 0, \mathbb{N}_0 to denote the set of natural numbers including 0, and [N] to denote the set of natural numbers in $\{1,2,...,N\}$ for an integer N. For a vector v, v>0 means that all entries of v are positive.

III. MAIN RESULTS

In order to tackle the discrete optimization problem in (3) in the entire interval $p \in [0, 0.5]$, we seek to bound its optimal solution. Our main result is the following lower bound.

Theorem 2. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$ and $p \in [0, 0.5]$, we have

$$\min_{\alpha \in \mathbb{R}^{K+1} : \alpha > 0} I(X ; \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha) \geqslant I(X ; X + G), \quad (4)$$

where G is a geometric random variable, independent of X, with $\Pr(G = i) = (1 - p)^K (1 - (1 - p)^K)^i$ for $i \in \mathbb{N}_0$.

Intuitively, Theorem 2 says that the noise distribution of G is worse than the worst-case noise Z_{α} . This lower bound can in fact be explicitly computed as

$$I(X; X+G) = H(p)$$

$$-(p-1)\left((1-p)^{K}-1\right)\log\left(\frac{1-(1-p)^{K+1}}{(p-1)\left((1-p)^{K}-1\right)}\right)$$

$$-p\log\left(\frac{1-(1-p)^{K+1}}{p}\right). \tag{5}$$

Observe that this formula is quickly computable for any value of K and p, making it attractive from a computational stand-point. To assess how tight the lower bound is, we empirically compare it to an upper bound that is computed with a greedy algorithm in Figure 3. For a given p and K, the greedy algorithm chooses $\alpha_0 = 1$, $\alpha_1 = 1$, and sequentially chooses

$$\alpha_j = \underset{a \in \mathbb{N} : 1 \leqslant a \leqslant 1 + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i}{\arg \min} I(X; X + aZ_j + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i Z_i)$$
 (6)

for $2 \leqslant j \leqslant K$. At the jth step we consider all values of α_j between 1 and $1 + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i$ because setting $\alpha_j > 1 + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i$ can not decrease the mutual information from when $\alpha_j = 1 + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i$.

As seen in Figure 3, I(X; X+G) serves as a tight lower bound when compared with the upper bound. A similar picture can be obtained for other values of K. This is surprising, because for a given K, it is not possible in general to choose α_i s to make the pmf of $\sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \alpha_i Z_i$ look like the pmf of G (or a shifted version of it), as illustrated in Figure 4.

While finding the greedy solution $(\alpha_0, ..., \alpha_K)$ requires $\Omega(2^K)$ time in the worst case, similar plots to Figure 3 can be obtained for larger values of K using a more computationally efficient variation of the greedy algorithm.

At a high level, we prove the lower bound in Theorem 2 by forming a convex relaxation of the minimization problem, perturbing the relaxation to form a problem that is analytically solvable using KKT conditions, and using perturbation analysis to find a lower bound on the relaxation.

IV. CONNECTION TO PRIOR WORK

Our problem formulation (1) is motivated by the problem studied in [11]. In [11], the authors consider the same high-level problem of providing privacy to genotype information through the mixture of distinct samples prior to sequencing.

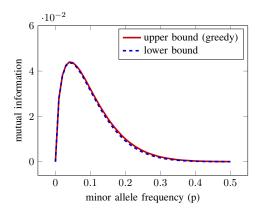


Fig. 3. Comparison between the lower bound from (4) and the upper bound provided by the greedy algorithm for K=15.

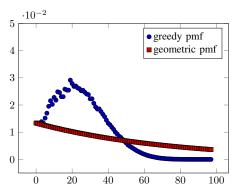


Fig. 4. Comparison of the pmf of Z_{α} produced by the greedy algorithm ($\alpha=[1,1,1,1,2,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,12,16,19]$) and the (truncated) Geometric pmf in the lower bound (4), for K=15 and p=0.25.

But there are several differences in the focus of the analysis in [11]. In addition to considering the privacy of Alice's genotype information, they also consider the probability of Alice being able to correctly recover her genotype. Moreover, they assume the presence of sequencer noise. This means that each reading the sequencer makes is incorrect with some probability. The authors of [11] propose a scheme that uses $U \in \mathbb{N}$ noncommunicating sequencers to sequence U unknown DNA samples with privacy and reconstruction guarantees. Similar to our problem formulation, they also use K noise individuals to generate privacy. However, they do not study the problem of optimizing the proportions of each DNA sample sent to the sequencers to maximize privacy. In contrast, our paper uses only one sequencing laboratory to sequence the DNA of one unknown DNA sample, and optimizes the privacy without considering sequencer noise or the reconstruction condition.

The proposed solution in [11] involves the sequencing of the unknown DNA of U individuals simultaneously using U non-communicating sequencing laboratories and K noise individuals. The mixture of the DNA samples of all K noise individuals and all unknown DNA samples except the ith one is sent to the ith sequencing laboratory. For each mixture sent to a sequencing laboratory, the included DNA samples are mixed in equal proportion. Observe that each sequencing

laboratory observes a mixture that includes U-1 unknown DNA samples. Therefore, the analysis in our paper is directly applicable to the strategy from [11] when two unknown samples and two non-communicating sequencing laboratories are used because this is the only case where only one unknown DNA sample is included in the mixture sent to each sequencer. In this case, the scheme used in [11] is the uniform scheme in the language of our paper, which we showed generates optimal privacy for p close to 0.

In [12], the unknown DNA samples of U individuals are mixed with the samples of K=U noise individuals and then sequenced using one sequencing laboratory. Both the ith unknown sample and the ith noise sample are mixed in with amount $\alpha_i=2^i\alpha_0$ for i=0,1,...,K-1. While our analysis only applies to the case U=K=1 of their problem setting, it is interesting that they choose the proportion of each noise individual according to the binary scheme, which we showed is optimal in our problem formulation for p=0.5.

V. Proof of Theorem 2

We obtain the lower bound on $I(X; \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha) = H(p) - H(X \mid \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha)$ by finding a lower bound on $-H(X \mid \alpha_0 X + Z_\alpha)$. Therefore, we consider

$$\min_{\alpha \in \mathbb{R}^{K+1}: \alpha > 0} -H\left(X \mid \alpha_0 X + \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_k Z_k\right). \tag{7}$$

Observe that the pmf of the random variable $Z_{\alpha} = \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i$ has probability $(1-p)^K$ at its lowest support value. More precisely, 0 is the minimum value that Z_{α} can take, which occurs with probability $(1-p)^K$. A relaxation to (7) can then be obtained by ignoring all constraints on the pmf of Z_{α} except the constraint on the minimum pmf value. Thus, for a fixed value of α_0 , a relaxation to (7) is given by

$$\min_{Q} -H\left(X \mid \alpha_{0}X + Q\right)$$
 subject to: Q is a discrete random variable Q is independent of X

$$Pr(Q = 0) = (1 - p)^{K}$$

 $Pr(Q = i) = 0 \text{ for } i < 0.$

Furthermore, as we prove in Lemma 3 in Section VI, fixing $\alpha_0=1$ in (8) and constraining the support of Q to be integer does not change the optimal value. We assume these additional constraints throughout.

Let $q_{(i)}$ be the pmf of Q; i.e., $q_{(i)} = \Pr(Q = i)$ for $i \ge 0$. In order to write (8) explicitly in terms of q under the assumption that Q has integer support and $\alpha_0 = 1$, we define

$$g_{j}(q) \triangleq -H(X|X+Q=j) \Pr(X+Q=j)$$

$$= \Pr(Q+X=j)$$

$$\times \left[\frac{(1-p)q_{(j)}}{\Pr(Q+X=j)} \log \left(\frac{(1-p)q_{(j)}}{\Pr(Q+X=j)} \right) + \frac{pq_{(j-1)}}{\Pr(Q+X=j)} \log \left(\frac{pq_{(j-1)}}{\Pr(Q+X=j)} \right) \right]$$

$$= (1-p)q_{(j)} \log \left(\frac{(1-p)q_{(j)}}{(1-p)q_{(j)} + pq_{(j-1)}} \right) + pq_{(j-1)} \log \left(\frac{pq_{(j-1)}}{(1-p)q_{(j)} + pq_{(j-1)}} \right).$$
(9)

Assuming integer support for Q and fixing $\alpha_0 = 1$, we have that (8) written in terms of $g_j(q)$ is given by

$$\min_{q_{(i)} \geqslant 0: i \in \mathbb{N}_0} \sum_{j \in \mathbb{N}} g_j(q)$$
subject to:
$$q_{(0)} = (1 - p)^K$$

$$\sum_{j=0}^{\infty} q_{(j)} = 1.$$

$$(10)$$

Observe that (10) is a convex minimization problem with infinitely many variables. For such problems, to the best of our knowledge, a solution to the KKT conditions is not in general guaranteed to yield an optimal solution. For that reason, we do not seek to directly solve the KKT conditions and, instead, we consider a *support-constrained* version of (10), where the support of the pmf of Q is restricted to $\{0, ..., n\}$, and let $n \to \infty$. The support-constrained version of (10) is given by

$$\min_{\substack{q_{(i)} \geqslant 0: \ i \in \{0, \dots, n+1\} \\ \text{subject to:}}} \sum_{j=1}^{n+1} g_j(q)$$

$$\sup_{\substack{j=0 \\ j=0}} (1-p)^K, \quad q_{(n+1)} = 0$$

Note that this is no longer a relaxation to the original problem. In order to ensure that the derivative of the objective function exists at all feasible $q_{(i)}$, and ultimately find a lower bound on the optimal value of (11) through perturbation analysis, we change the constraints in (11) from $q_{(i)} \geqslant 0$ to $q_{(i)} > 0$ and from $q_{(n+1)} = 0$ to $q_{(n+1)} = \epsilon$ where $\epsilon > 0$, obtaining

$$\min_{\substack{q_{(i)} > 0: i \in \{0, \dots, n+1\} \\ \text{subject to: } q_{(0)} = (1-p)^K, \quad q_{(n+1)} = \epsilon}} \sum_{j=0}^{n+1} q_{(j)} = 1.$$
(12)

Let V_n^* be the optimal value of (11) and let $V_{n,\epsilon}^*$ be the optimal value of (12) for a given ϵ . Due to the continuity of the objective function in (11), we have $V_n^* \geqslant \inf_{\epsilon > 0} V_{n,\epsilon}^*$. More precisely, for any solution to (11), it follows that (12) can get arbitrarily close to the corresponding value as $\epsilon \to 0$ due to the continuity of the objective function.

While we do not know the solution to (11) or (12), we will perturb (12) to form a problem we can solve analytically, then use perturbation analysis to lower bound the optimal value of (12), and ultimately lower bound the optimal value of (11). Let $\beta \triangleq (1-p)^K$. The perturbed version of (12) is given by

$$\min_{q_{(i)}>0:\ i\in\{0,\dots,n+1\}} \sum_{j=1}^{n+1} g_j(q)$$
(13)

subject to:
$$q_{(0)} = \beta$$
, $q_{(n+1)} = \beta (1 - \beta)^{n+1}$
$$\sum_{j=0}^{n+1} q_{(j)} = 1 - (1 - \beta)^{n+2}.$$

Observe that as n increases, we have that $\beta(1-\beta)^{n+1} \to 0$ and $1-(1-\beta)^{n+2} \to 1$. In other words, the constraints in (13) approach the constraints in (11). We can solve (13) by solving the KKT conditions since the problem is convex, Slater's condition holds, and the objective function and constraint functions are differentiable on the domain $q_{(i)} > 0$. Let $f_0(q)$ be the objective function of (13). The Lagrangian is given by

$$L(q, v, \lambda) = f_0(q) + v_1 \left(\sum_i q_{(i)} - 1 + (1 - \beta)^{n+2} \right) + v_2 \left(q_{(0)} - \beta \right) + v_3 \left(q_{(n+1)} - \beta (1 - \beta)^{n+1} \right).$$
 (14)

The perturbation values in (13) are carefully chosen so that the KKT conditions yield an optimal solution given by

$$q_{(i)} = \beta(1-\beta)^i \text{ for } i \in \{0, ..., n+1\}.$$
 (15)

This corresponds to the first n+2 terms of the pmf of a Geometric distribution. The derivation of (15) and the optimal Lagrange multipliers v_1^*, v_2^*, v_3^* are provided in Lemma 4.

Let U_n^* be the solution to (13), obtained by plugging in (15). Using the perturbation analysis from Section 5.6.1 of [16], we see that the optimal value of (12), $V_{n,\epsilon}^*$, is lower bounded as

$$V_{n,\epsilon}^* \geqslant U_n^* - v_1^* \left((1 - \beta)^{n+2} \right) - v_3^* \left(-\beta (1 - \beta)^{n+1} + \epsilon \right), \tag{16}$$

where v_1^* and v_3^* are the optimal Lagrange multipliers for (13) described in Lemma 4 in Section VI. Taking the infimum of (16) over $\epsilon > 0$ then yields

$$V_n^* \geqslant U_n^* - v_1^* \left((1 - \beta)^{n+2} \right) - v_3^* \left(-\beta (1 - \beta)^{n+1} \right).$$
 (17)

The sequence V_n^* of optimal values returned by (11) is non-increasing in n. Thus, letting $n \to \infty$ in (17) implies that $\lim_{n\to\infty} U_n^*$ is a lower bound to $-H(X\mid\alpha_0X+Z_\alpha)$ for any choice of α_i 's. Notice that, as $n\to\infty$, $q_{(j)}$ in (15) converges to the pmf of a Geometric random variable G with $\Pr(G=i)=\beta(1-\beta)^i=(1-p)^K(1-(1-p)^K)^i$ for $i\in\mathbb{N}_0$. Since the objective function of (13) is $-H(X\mid X+Q)$ where Q has pmf $q_{(j)}$, this concludes our proof.

VI. AUXILIARY LEMMAS

Lemma 3. Fixing $\alpha_0 = 1$ and constraining the support of Q to be intergal in the optimization problem (8) does not change the optimal value.

Proof: Let $\alpha_0 \in \mathbb{N}$. Let Q be any discrete random variable such that its pmf has minimum support value at t=0. Observe that

$$I(X; \ \alpha_0 X + Q) = I(X; \ \frac{\alpha_0 X + Q}{\alpha_0}) = I(X; \ X + D)$$

where $D = \frac{1}{\alpha_0}Q$. For a real number $x \in \mathbb{R}$, we define $x \mod 1$ as $x - \lfloor x \rfloor$ where $\lfloor \cdot \rfloor$ is the floor function. Let $\hat{D} = D + S$, where $S = (-D) \mod 1$. Then

$$I(X; \alpha_0 X + Q) = I(X; X + D)$$

$$= I(X; X + \hat{D} - S)$$

$$\stackrel{(i)}{=} I(X; X + \hat{D}, S)$$

$$\geqslant I(X; X + \hat{D})$$
(18)

where (i) follows since from $X + \hat{D} - S$, we can compute

$$S = (-(X + \hat{D} - S)) \mod 1,$$

 $X + \hat{D} = (X + \hat{D} - S) + S.$

Therefore it suffices to fix $\alpha_0 = 1$ and only consider discrete random variables Q with integer support and minimum support value at 0 in the optimization.

Lemma 4. A solution to the KKT conditions for (13) is

$$q_{(i)} = \beta (1 - \beta)^{i} \text{ for } i \in \{0, ..., n + 1\}$$

$$v_{1} = -p \log \left(\frac{p}{(1 - p)(1 - \beta) + p}\right)$$

$$- (1 - p) \log \left(\frac{(1 - p)(1 - \beta)}{(1 - p)(1 - \beta) + p}\right)$$

$$v_{2} = (1 - p) \log \left(\frac{(1 - p)(1 - \beta)}{(1 - p)(1 - \beta) + p}\right)$$

$$v_{3} = p \log \left(\frac{p}{(1 - p)(1 - \beta) + p}\right). \tag{19}$$

Proof: Let $f_0(q)$ be the objective function of (13). The Lagrangian of (13) is given in (14). The derivative of $f_0(q)$ with respect to $q_{(j)}$ is given by

$$p \log \left(\frac{pq_{(j)}}{(1-p)q_{(j+1)} + pq_{(j)}} \right) + (1-p) \log \left(\frac{(1-p)q_{(j)}}{pq_{(j-1)} + (1-p)q_{(j)}} \right)$$
(20)

for $j \in \{1, ..., n\}$. For j = 0 and j = n + 1, the derivative can be similarly computed and the KKT conditions are

$$q_{(0)} = (1-p)^{K},$$

$$q_{(n+1)} = (1-p)^{K}(1-(1-p)^{K})^{n+1},$$

$$\sum_{j=0}^{n+1} q_{(j)} = 1 - (1-(1-p)^{K})^{n+2},$$
for $j = 1, ..., n$, $p \log \left(\frac{pq_{(j)}}{(1-p)q_{(j+1)} + pq_{(j)}}\right)$

$$+ (1-p) \log \left(\frac{(1-p)q_{(j)}}{pq_{(j-1)} + (1-p)q_{(j)}}\right) + v_{1} = 0,$$

$$p \log \left(\frac{pq_{(0)}}{(1-p)q_{(1)} + pq_{(0)}}\right) + v_{1} + v_{2} = 0,$$

$$(1-p) \log \left(\frac{(1-p)q_{(n+1)}}{pq_{(n)} + (1-p)q_{(n+1)}}\right) + v_{1} + v_{3} = 0. \quad (21)$$

The last three conditions can be rewritten as

for
$$j = 1, ..., n$$
, $p \log \left(\frac{p}{(1-p)\frac{q_{(j+1)}}{q_{(j)}} + p} \right)$
 $+ (1-p) \log \left(\frac{(1-p)}{p\frac{q_{(j-1)}}{q_{(j)}} + (1-p)} \right) + v_1 = 0,$
 $p \log \left(\frac{p}{(1-p)\frac{q_{(1)}}{q_{(0)}} + p} \right) + v_1 + v_2 = 0,$ (22)
 $(1-p) \log \left(\frac{(1-p)}{p\frac{q_{(n)}}{p(n)} + (1-p)} \right) + v_1 + v_3 = 0.$ (23)

Notice that, if the ratio $\frac{q_{(j+1)}}{q_{(j)}}$ between consecutive values of $q_{(j)}$ is the same for all j, then v_1 , v_2 , v_3 can be chosen so that these derivatives equal 0 for all j. Setting

$$\frac{q_{(j+1)}}{q_{(j)}} = (1 - (1-p)^K),$$

we have that (19) is a solution to all equations in (21).

Lemma 5. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$, $p \in [0, 0.5]$, and $\alpha_i > 0$, $i \in [0, 1, ..., K]$, we have that

$$I(X ; \alpha_0 X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i) \geqslant H(p) - 1 + p^{K+1} + (1-p)^{K+1}.$$

Proof: Define $S_{\alpha} = \sum_{i=0}^{K} \alpha_i$, and let T_Y be the set of support values of $Y = \alpha_0 X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i$. Clearly, S_{α} is the maximum element in T_Y . We have that

$$I(X ; Y)$$
= $H(p) - H(X | Y)$
 $\geq H(p) - (1 - p^{K+1} - (1 - p)^{K+1})$
= $H(p) - 1 + p^{K+1} + (1 - p)^{K+1}$

where the third line follows because

$$\begin{split} &H(X \mid Y) \\ &= \sum_{t \in T_Y} \Pr(Y = t) H(X \mid Y = t) \\ &= \Pr(Y = 0) \cdot H(X \mid Y = 0) \\ &+ \Pr(Y = S_{\alpha}) \cdot H(X \mid Y = S_{\alpha}) \\ &+ \sum_{t \in T_Y \setminus \{0, S_{\alpha}\}} \Pr(Y = t) H(X \mid Y = t) \\ &= (1 - p)^{K + 1} \cdot 0 + p^{K + 1} \cdot 0 \\ &+ \sum_{t \in T_Y \setminus \{0, S_{\alpha}\}} \Pr(Y = t) H(X \mid Y = t) \\ &\leqslant \sum_{t \in T_Y \setminus \{0, S_{\alpha}\}} \Pr(X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i = t) \\ &= 1 - p^{K + 1} - (1 - p)^{K + 1}. \end{split}$$

Lemma 6. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$, $p \in [0, 0.5]$, we have that

$$I(X; X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} 2^{i-1} Z_i)$$

$$= H(p) - \sum_{i=1}^{K} (p^i (1-p) + p(1-p)^i) H\left(\frac{1}{1 + \frac{p(1-p)^i}{p^i (1-p)}}\right).$$

Proof: We will prove this by induction on $K \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $p \in [0, 0.5]$. For K = 1, we have that

$$I(X ; X + Z_1)$$

= $H(p) - H(X | X + Z_1)$
= $H(p) - 2p(1-p)H(0.5)$

which matches the formula. Assume the formula holds for the (K-1)th case where K>1. Consider the Kth case:

$$\begin{split} &I\left(X\;;\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K}2^{i-1}Z_{i}\right)\\ &=H(p)-H\left(X\;|\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K}2^{i-1}Z_{i}\right)\\ &=H(p)-(1-p)H\left(X\;|\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K-1}2^{i-1}Z_{i}\right)\\ &-pH\left(X\;|\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K-1}2^{i-1}Z_{i}\right)\\ &-(p^{K}(1-p)+p(1-p)^{K})H\left(\frac{p^{K}(1-p)}{p^{K}(1-p)+p(1-p)^{K}}\right)\\ &=H(p)-H\left(X\;|\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K-1}2^{i-1}Z_{i}\right)\\ &-(p^{K}(1-p)+p(1-p)^{K})H\left(\frac{1}{1+\frac{p(1-p)^{K}}{p^{K}(1-p)}}\right)\\ &=H(p)-\sum_{i=1}^{K}(p^{i}(1-p)+p(1-p)^{i})H\left(\frac{1}{1+\frac{p(1-p)^{i}}{p^{i}(1-p)}}\right). \end{split}$$

Lemma 7. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$, the binary scheme is optimal for p = 0.5.

Proof: For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$ and p = 0.5, the performance of the binary scheme is given by

$$I\left(X; X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} 2^{i-1} Z_i\right)$$

$$= H(0.5) - 2\sum_{i=1}^{K} (0.5)^{i+1} H(0.5)$$

$$= 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{K} (0.5)^i$$

$$= 1 - \left(\frac{1 - (0.5)^{K+1}}{0.5} - 1\right)$$
$$= (0.5)^{K}$$
$$= 1 - 1 + (0.5)^{K+1} + (0.5)^{K+1}$$

Thus, the performance of the binary scheme matches the lower bound for p=0.5.

Lemma 8. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$, $p \in [0, 0.5]$, we have that

$$I\left(X \; ; \; X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} Z_i\right)$$

$$= H(p) - \sum_{i=1}^{K} (1-p)^{K+1-i} p^i \binom{K+1}{i} H\left(\frac{i}{K+1}\right)$$

Proof: We have that

$$\begin{split} I\left(X \; ; \; X + \sum_{i=1}^K Z_i\right) \\ &= H(p) - H\left(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^K Z_i\right) \\ &= H(p) \\ &- \sum_{t=0}^{K+1} \Pr\left(X + \sum_{i=1}^K Z_i = t\right) H\left(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^K Z_i = t\right) \end{split}$$

and

$$\Pr\left(X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} Z_i = t\right) = (1 - p)^{K+1-t} p^t {K+1 \choose t}.$$

Due to Bayes rule, we have

$$\Pr\left(X = 1 \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} Z_i = t\right) = \frac{t}{K+1},$$

and thus,

$$H\left(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} Z_i = t\right) = H\left(\frac{t}{K+1}\right). \tag{24}$$

Thus,

$$\begin{split} &I\left(X\;;\;X+\sum_{i=1}^{K}Z_{i}\right)\\ &=H(p)\\ &-\sum_{t=0}^{K+1}\Pr\left(X+\sum_{i=1}^{K}Z_{i}=t\right)H\left(X\mid X+\sum_{i=1}^{K}Z_{i}=t\right)\\ &=H(p)-\sum_{t=0}^{K+1}(1-p)^{K+1-t}p^{t}\binom{K+1}{t}H\left(\frac{t}{K+1}\right)\\ &=H(p)-\sum_{t=1}^{K}(1-p)^{K+1-t}p^{t}\binom{K+1}{t}H\left(\frac{t}{K+1}\right). \end{split}$$

Lemma 9. For any $K \in \mathbb{N}$, there exists some $p^* > 0$ such that the uniform scheme is optimal for $p < p^*$.

Proof: Consider the optimization problem (1) with α_0 fixed to 1. We can assume this without loss of generality since scaling all α_i s by the same constant does not change the mutual information. We have that

$$I(X \; ; \; X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i) = H(p) - H(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i)$$

and

$$H(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^{K} \alpha_i Z_i)$$

$$= \sum_{t \in \mathbb{N}_0} \Pr(X + Z_\alpha = t) H(X \mid X + Z_\alpha = t)$$
 (25)

Observe that as $p \to 0$, we have that $H(p) \to 0$, and $H(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i) \to 0$ since $0 \leqslant H(X \mid X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i) \leqslant H(p)$. Thus, $I(X ; X + \sum_{i=1}^K \alpha_i Z_i) \to 0$ as $p \to 0$. We will show that each nonzero term in (25) decreases like O(p), except the t=1 term which decreases like $\Theta(p)$ if there exists some $\alpha_i=1$ for $i\geqslant 1$. Therefore, we will show that the uniform scheme maximizes the coefficient in the asymptotic expression for the t=1 term, proving that the uniform scheme is optimal as $p\to 0$.

For any t such that $0 \le t < 1$, we have that $H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = t) = 0$ because if X = 1, then $X + Z_{\alpha} \ge 1$.

Next, consider the term $\Pr(X+Z_{\alpha}=1)H(X\mid X+Z_{\alpha}=1)$. Observe that

$$Pr(X + Z_{\alpha} = 1)$$

$$= (1 - p) Pr(Z_{\alpha} = 1)$$

$$+ p Pr(Z_{\alpha} = 0)$$

and

$$Pr(Z_{\alpha} = 1) = p(1 - p)^{K-1} |\{i : \alpha_i = 0\}| + O(p^2),$$

$$Pr(Z_{\alpha} = 0) = (1 - p)^K,$$

where the $O(p^2)$ term in expression for $\Pr(Z_{\alpha}=1)$ follows because it is possible for 2 or more Z_i s to equal 1 such that the corresponding α_i s add up to 1. If $|\{i: \alpha_i=0\}| \geqslant 1$, we have that

$$\begin{aligned} &\Pr(X + Z_{\alpha} = 1)H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = 1) \\ &= (p(1-p)^{K}(1 + |\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(p)) \\ &\times H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = 1) \\ &= (p(1-p)^{K}(|\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(p)) \\ &\times \log\left(\frac{p(1-p)^{K}(1 + |\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(p)}{p(1-p)^{K}|\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}| + o(p)}\right) \\ &+ p(1-p)^{K}\log\left(\frac{p(1-p)^{K}(1 + |\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(p)}{p(1-p)^{K}}\right) \\ &= (p(1-p)^{K}(|\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(p)) \\ &\times \log\left(\frac{(1 + |\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}|) + o(1)}{|\{i : \alpha_{i} = 1\}| + o(1)}\right) \end{aligned}$$

$$+ p(1-p)^{K} \log((1+|\{i:\alpha_{i}=1\}|) + o(1))$$

$$\sim p\left(|\{i:\alpha_{i}=1\}| \log\left(1+\frac{1}{|\{i:\alpha_{i}=1\}|}\right) + \log(1+|\{i:\alpha_{i}=1\}|)\right)$$
(26)

The coefficient of p in the asymptotic expression for $\Pr(T(K) = 1)H(X \mid T(K) = 1)$ above is maximized when $|\{i : \alpha_i = 1\}| = K$. This is because

$$\frac{d}{dx}\left(x\log\left(1+\frac{1}{x}\right) + \log(1+x)\right) > 0$$

for all x > 0. In contrast, suppose that $|\{i : \alpha_i = 0\}| = 0$. Then, we have that

$$Pr(Z_{\alpha} = 1)$$
= $b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a})$ (27)

for some $a \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $a \geqslant 2$, and therefore,

$$\Pr(X + Z_{\alpha} = 1)H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = 1)$$

$$= (p(1-p)^{K} + b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a}))$$

$$\times H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = 1)$$

$$= (b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a}))$$

$$\times \log\left(\frac{(p(1-p)^{K} + b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a}))}{b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a})}\right)$$

$$+ p(1-p)^{K}\log\left(\frac{(p(1-p)^{K} + b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a}))}{p(1-p)^{K}}\right)$$

$$= (b(1-p)^{K+1-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a}))\log\left(1 + \frac{(1-p)^{a-1}}{bp^{a-1} + o(p^{a-1})}\right)$$

$$+ p(1-p)^{K}\log\left((1+b(1-p)^{1-a}p^{a-1} + o(p^{a-1}))\right)$$

$$\sim bp^{a}\log\left(\frac{1}{bp^{a-1}}\right) + p(1-p)^{K}\frac{bp^{a-1}}{\ln(2)}$$

$$= o(p). \tag{28}$$

Now consider any t > 1. For such a value of t, we have that

$$\Pr(Z_{\alpha} = t - 1) = d(1 - p)^{K - c} p^{c} + o(p^{c})$$

for some $c\in\mathbb{N},\ c\geqslant 1$ and $d\in\mathbb{N}$ because there must be at least one $i\in[K]$ such that $Z_i=1$ in this case. Furthermore, we have

$$\Pr(Z_{\alpha} = t) = b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a} + o(p^{a})$$

for some $a\in\mathbb{N},\ a\geqslant 1$ and $b\in\mathbb{N}$ because there must be at least one $i\in[K]$ such that $Z_i=1$ in this case. Thus,

$$\Pr(X + Z_{\alpha} = t)H(X \mid X + Z_{\alpha} = t)$$

$$= (d(1 - p)^{K - c + 1}p^{c} + o(p^{c}))$$

$$\times \log(1 + \frac{b(1 - p)^{K - a}p^{a + 1}) + o(p^{a + 1})}{d(1 - p)^{K - c + 1}p^{c} + o(p^{c})})$$

$$+ (b(1 - p)^{K - a}p^{a + 1} + o(p^{a + 1}))$$

$$\times \log(1 + \frac{d(1 - p)^{K - c + 1}p^{c} + o(p^{c})}{b(1 - p)^{K - a}p^{a + 1} + o(p^{a + 1})})$$

$$= o(p). (29)$$

Thus, the only term in (25) that decays like $\Theta(p)$ as $p \to 0$ is the t=1 term when there is at least one $i \in [K]$ such that $\alpha_i=1$. Furthermore, the uniform scheme maximizes the coefficient for this term. Thus, there exists some $p^*>0$ such that the uniform scheme is optimal for $p < p^*$.

We now justify the last line in (29). Consider the first term above in the second line of (29). If c < a + 1, it follows that

$$\begin{split} &(d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c+o(p^c))\\ &\times \log\left(1+\frac{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1})+o(p^{a+1})}{d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c+o(p^c)}\right)\\ &=(d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c+o(p^c))\\ &\times \log\left(1+\frac{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1-c}+o(p^{a+1-c})}{d(1-p)^{K-c+1}+o(1)}\right)\\ &\sim (d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c+o(p^c))\\ &\times \frac{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1-c}+o(p^{a+1-c})}{\ln(2)(d(1-p)^{K-c+1}+o(1))}\\ &=o(p). \end{split}$$

If $c \geqslant a+1$, it follows that

$$(d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c))$$

$$\times \log \left(1 + \frac{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})}{d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c)}\right)$$

$$\leq (d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c))$$

$$\times \log \left(\frac{1}{d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c)}\right)$$

$$\leq (d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c)) \log \left(\frac{1}{(1-p)^Kp^K}\right)$$

$$= K(d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c))$$

$$\times \log \left(\frac{1}{p(1-p)}\right)$$

$$= o(p).$$

Finally, consider the second term. It follows that

$$\begin{split} &(b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})) \\ &\times \log \left(1 + \frac{d(1-p)^{K-c+1}p^c + o(p^c)}{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})}\right) \\ &\leqslant (b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})) \\ &\times \log \left(\frac{1}{b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})}\right) \\ &\leqslant (b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})) \\ &\times \log \left(\frac{1}{(1-p)^Kp^K}\right) \\ &= K(b(1-p)^{K-a}p^{a+1} + o(p^{a+1})) \\ &\times \log \left(\frac{1}{p(1-p)}\right) \\ &= o(p). \end{split}$$

VII. DISCUSSION OF MODEL ASSUMPTIONS

The model proposed in this paper represents an initial attempt at studying the problem of providing privacy to genetic information through the physical mixing of samples prior to sequencing. In this section we provide additional discussion and motivation for some of the modeling assumptions made.

While the idea of achieving privacy by forcing the sequencing lab to sequence a mixture of DNA samples may seem odd at first, to a certain extent, it already occurs in standard DNA sequencing pipelines. A person's DNA is made up of two copies of each chromosome: a paternal chromosome and a maternal chromosome. Hence, an individual's DNA can be thought of as a 50-50 mixture of the DNA of two unrelated individuals: the father and the mother. Once a person's DNA is sequenced using next-generation sequencing technologies, the sequencing reads are aligned to the human reference genome, and genetic variants are identified. These reads are equally likely to have come from the paternal and maternal chromosomes. In Figure 5, we show the alignment of Illumina sequencing data from one individual to the BRCA2 gene (in chromosome 13) [14]. In the highlighted position, out of the eight reads that cover it, four have the reference allele and four have the alternative allele. This can be seen as a real-life illustration of the privacy strategy discussed in our paper, since it is not possible to know whether it is the person's father or mother that has the minor allele. If the DNA samples of K individuals were mixed, the picture will be similar to the one in Figure 5, except that the minor allele counts will correspond to the mixture of 2K chromosomes.

One drawback of the model we study (and also the model in [11]) is that the allele at different loci are implicitly assumed to be independent. In reality, genetic variants that are close in the genome are more likely to be inherited together, leading to what is known as *linkage disequilibrium* [18]. This creates dependence across different the alleles at different loci, which tends to reduce the privacy at any given locus. One way to deal with this would be to extend our problem setup to

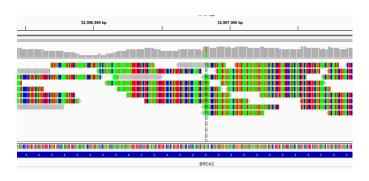


Fig. 5. Alignment of Illumina sequencing data from one individual to the BRCA2 gene (in chromosome 13) on the human reference genome, visualized with the Integrative Genome Viewer [17]. In the dashed column (\sim 13,906,980), out of the eight reads that cover it, four have the reference allele and four have the alternative allele. Given this data, one cannot infer whether it is the individual's father or mother chromosome that carries the minor allele.

simultaneously consider the privacy of a group of nearby correlated locations.

Our problem setup also relies on the fact that the locations that admit more than one allele are observed in separate reads. In the context of shotgun sequencing, this is equivalent to the locations being far enough apart in the genome that a single read (150bp for standard Illumina platforms) cannot simultaneously cover two loci. This is often the case, as the number of single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) analyzed by standard genomic services is around one million, while the length of the human genome is roughly 3 billion. Furthermore, standard direct-to-consumer genomic services utilize SNP arrays for sequencing, which essentially probe specific SNPs the genome, rather than obtaining shotgun sequencing reads that could simultaneously cover multiple variants [19].

It should be noted that our current results do not take into account the noise from the sequencing machine itself. Moreover, by assuming that the observation Y is the precise proportion of the minor allele we are essentially assuming that a very high coverage is used for sequencing. To make the setup more realistic, a noise term should be added to the observation Y. Another practical challenge is that Alice would not be able to choose the proportions $\alpha_0, \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_K$ with arbitrary precision. The inclusion of noise terms in the observation Y would also mitigate the unrealistic nature of this assumption.

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