Received: 6 August 2017 | Revised: 14 October 2018 | Accepted: 2 November 2018

DOI: 10.1002/jgt.22432

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

WILEY

The size-Ramsey number of powers of paths

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Funding information
FAPESP, Grant/Award Numbers: 2018/04876-1, 2013/11431-2, 2013/03447-6; CNPq, Grant/Award Numbers: 310974/2013-5, 459335/2014-6, 304733/2017-2; CAPES; CAPES/DAAD PROBRAL, Grant/Award Number: 430/15

Abstract

Given graphs G and H and a positive integer q, say that *G is q-Ramsey for H*, denoted $G \rightarrow (H)_q$, if every q-coloring of the edges of G contains a monochromatic copy of H. The *size-Ramsey number* $\hat{r}(H)$ of a graph H is defined to be $\hat{r}(H) = \min\{|E(G)|: G \rightarrow (H)_2\}$. Answering a question of Conlon, we prove that, for every fixed k, we have $\hat{r}(P_n^k) = O(n)$, where P_n^k is the kth power of the n-vertex path P_n (ie, the graph with vertex set $V(P_n)$ and all edges $\{u, v\}$ such that the distance between u and v in P_n is at most k). Our proof is probabilistic, but can also be made constructive.

KEYWORDS

powers of paths, Ramsey, size-Ramsey

1 | INTRODUCTION

Given graphs G and H and a positive integer q, say that *G is q-Ramsey for H*, denoted $G \rightarrow (H)_q$, if every q-coloring of the edges of G contains a monochromatic copy of H. When $q = 2$, we simply write $G \rightarrow H$. In its simplest form, the classical theorem of Ramsey [24] states that for any H there exists an integer N such that $K_N \rightarrow H$. The *Ramsey number* $r(H)$ of a graph H is defined to be the smallest such N. Ramsey problems have been well studied and many beautiful techniques have been developed to estimate Ramsey numbers. For a detailed summary of developments in Ramsey theory, see the excellent survey of Conlon et al [7].

A number of variants of the classical Ramsey problem are also under active study. In particular, Erdős et al [12] proposed the problem of determining the smallest number of edges in a graph G such that $G \to H$. Define the size-Ramsey number $\hat{r}(H)$ of a graph H to be

$$\hat{r}(H) := \min\{|E(G)|: G \to H\}.$$

In this paper, we are concerned with finding bounds on $\hat{r}(H)$ in some specific cases.

For any graph H, it is not difficult to see that $\hat{r}(H) \le \binom{r(H)}{2}$. A result due to Chvátal (see, eg, [12]) shows that in fact this bound is tight for complete graphs. For the n-vertex path P_n, Erdős [11] asked the following question.

Question 1.1. Is it true that

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{\hat{r}(P_n)}{n} = \infty \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{\hat{r}(P_n)}{n^2} = 0?$$

Answering Erdős' question, Beck [3] proved that the size-Ramsey number of paths is linear, that is, $\hat{r}(P_n) = O(n)$, by means of a probabilistic construction. Alon and Chung [2] provided an explicit construction of a graph G with $O(n)$ edges such that $G \to P_n$. Recently, Dudek and Prałat [10] gave a simple alternative proof for this result [21]. More generally, Friedman and Pippenger [14] proved that the size-Ramsey number of bounded-degree trees is linear [8,15,17] and it is shown in [16] that cycles also have linear size-Ramsey numbers.

A question posed by Beck [4] asked whether $\hat{r}(G)$ is linear for all graphs G with bounded maximum degree. This was negatively answered by Rödl and Szemerédi, who showed that there exists an n-vertex graph H and maximum degree 3 such that $\hat{r}(H) = \Omega(n \log^{1/60} n)$. The current best upper bound for bounded-degree graphs is proved in [19], where it is shown that for every Δ there is a constant c such that for any graph H with n vertices and maximum degree Δ,

$$\hat{r}(H) \le cn^{2-1/\Delta} \log^{1/\Delta} n.$$

For further results on size-Ramsey numbers, the reader is referred to [5,18,25].

Given an n-vertex graph H and an integer $k \ge 2$, the kth power H^k of H is the graph with vertex set $V(H)$ and all edges $\{u, v\}$ such that the distance between u and v in H is at most k. Answering a question of Conlon [6], we prove that all powers of paths have linear size-Ramsey numbers. The following theorem is our main result.

Theorem 1.2. *For any integer $k \ge 2$,*

$$\hat{r}(P_n^k) = O(n). \tag{1.1}$$

Since $C_n^k \subseteq P_n^{2k}$, the next corollary follows directly from Theorem 1.2.

Corollary 1.4. *For any integer $k \geq 2$,*

$$\hat{r}(C_n^k) = O(n). \quad (1.2)$$

Throughout the paper, we use big O notation with respect to $n \to \infty$, where the implicit constants may depend on other parameters. For a path P, we write $|P|$ for the number of vertices in P. For simplicity, we omit floor and ceiling signs when they are not essential.

The paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, we introduce some preliminary definitions and give an outline of the proof; the proof of Theorem 1.2 is given in Section 3; in Section 4, we mention some related open problems.

2 | OUTLINE OF THE PROOF

To prove Theorem 1.2, we will show that there exists a graph G with $O(n)$ edges such that $G \to P_n^k$.

To construct G we begin by taking a pseudorandom graph H with bounded degree. The existence of such an H will be proved in Lemma 3.1. Given H^k, we then take a *complete blow-up*, defined as follows.

Definition 2.1. Given a graph H and a positive integer t, the *complete t blow-up of H*, denoted H_t is the graph obtained by replacing each vertex v of H by a complete graph with $r(K_t)$ vertices, the *cluster* $C(v)$, and by adding, for every $\{u, v\} \in E(H)$, every edge between $C(u)$ and $C(v)$.

Note that we replace each vertex with a clique on $r(K_t)$ vertices rather than t vertices as might have been expected.

The following immediate fact states that the complete blow-ups of powers of bounded-degree graphs have a linear number of edges. This makes them valid candidates for showing $\hat{r}(P_n^k) = O(n)$.

Fact 2.2. Let k, t, a, and b be positive constants. If H is a graph with $|V(H)| = an$ and $\Delta(H) \leq b$, then $|E(H_t^k)| = O(n)$.

The heart of the proof is to show that, given any 2-coloring of the edges of H_t^k, we can find a monochromatic copy of P_n. To do this we will use the fact that H satisfies a particular property (Lemma 3.2). We shall also make use of the following result.

Theorem 2.3 (Pokrovskiy [23, Theorem 1.7]). *Let $k \geq 1$. Suppose that the edges of K_n are colored with red and blue. Then K_n can be covered by k vertex-disjoint blue paths and a vertex-disjoint red balanced complete $(k+1)$-partite graph.*

We remark that we do not need the full strength of this result, in the sense that we do not need the complete $(k+1)$-partite graph to be balanced; it suffices for us to know that the vertex classes are of comparable cardinality. Such a result can be derived easily by iterating Lemma 1.5 in [23], for which Pokrovskiy gives a short and elegant proof (see also [22, Lemma 1.10]).

We shall also use the classical Kővári–T. Sós–Turán theorem [20], in the following simple form.

Theorem 2.4. *Let G be a balanced bipartite graph with t vertices in each vertex class. If G contains no $K_{s,s}$, then G has at most $4t^{2-1/s}$ edges.*

Let us now give a brief outline of how we find our monochromatic copy of P_n^k in a 2-edge colored H_t^k. Suppose the edges of H_t^k have been colored red and blue by an arbitrary coloring χ. Recall that H_t^k is obtained by blowing up H^k; in particular, the vertices v of H^k become large complete graphs $C(v)$ in H_t^k. By the choice of parameters, Ramsey's theorem tells us that each such $C(v)$ contains a monochromatic copy $B(v)$ of K_t. We may assume without loss of generality that at least half of the $B(v)$ are blue.

Let F be the subgraph of H induced by the vertices v such that $B(v)$ is blue. We shall define an auxiliary edge-coloring χ' of F^k. By using Theorem 2.3 we shall be able to find either (i) a blue P_n in F^k under χ' or (ii) a P_n in F (not in F^k) with certain additional properties. The path in (ii) will be found applying Lemma 3.2 with the sets A_i being the vertex classes of a red complete $(k+1)$-partite subgraph of F^k. This red complete $(k+1)$-partite subgraph of F^k will be found using Theorem 2.3, applied to a suitable red/blue colored complete graph (we complete F^k with its auxiliary coloring χ' to a red/blue colored complete graph by considering nonedges of F^k red).

In case (i), where we find a blue P_n in F^k under the coloring χ', we shall be able to find a blue P_n^k in H_t^k. In case (ii), the properties of the path P_n found in F will ensure the existence of a red P_n^k in F^k. It will then be easy to find a red P_n^k in $F_t^k \subseteq H_t^k$. The idea of defining an auxiliary graph on monochromatic cliques as above was used in [1].

3 | PROOF OF THEOREM 1.2

Our first lemma guarantees the existence of bounded-degree graphs with the pseudorandomness property we require.

Lemma 3.1. *For every positive constants ε and a, there is a constant b such that, for any large enough n, there is a graph H with $v(H) = an$ such that*

(1) *For every pair of disjoint sets $S, T \subseteq V(H)$ with $|S|, |T| \geq \varepsilon n$, we have $|E_H(S,T)| > 0$.*
(2) $\Delta(H) \leq b$.

Proof. Fix positive constants ε and a. Let $c = 4a/\varepsilon^2$ and $b = 4ac$ and consider a sufficiently large n. Let $G = G(2an, p)$ be the binomial random graph with $p = c/n$. By Chernoff's inequality, with high probability we have $|E(G)| < (4a^2c)n$. Moreover, with high probability G satisfies (1) (with $H = G$) by the following reason: let X_G be the number of pairs of disjoint subsets of $V(G)$ of size εn with no edges between them. Then, from the choice of c and using Markov's inequality, we have

$$\mathbb{P}[X_G \geq 1] \leq \mathbb{E}[X_G] \leq \binom{2an}{\varepsilon n}^2 \left(1 - \frac{c}{n}\right)^{(\varepsilon n)^2} < 2^{4an} \cdot \mathrm{e}^{-c\varepsilon^2 n} = o(1).$$

Thus, there is a graph G with $|E(G)| < (4a^2c)n$ and $X_G = 0$.

Now let H be a subgraph of G obtained by iteratively removing a vertex of maximum degree until exactly an vertices remain. Then $\Delta(H) \leq b$, as otherwise, from the choice of b we would have deleted more than $b \cdot an > |E(G)|$ edges from G during the iteration, which contradicts property (1). Moreover, as H is an induced subgraph of G, (1) is maintained. This completes the proof of the lemma. □

We now show that any graph satisfying the hypothesis of Lemma 3.1 and property (1) also satisfies an additional property.

Algorithm 1.

```
Input  : a graph H with v(H) = an satisfying (1) and sets A_i ⊆ V(H) (1 ⩽ i ⩽ k + 1)
         with A_i ∩ A_j = ∅ for all i ≠ j and |A_i| ⩾ εan for all i.
Output : a path P_n = (x_1, ..., x_n) in H with x_i ∈ A_j for all i, where j ≡ i (mod k + 1).
foreach 1 ⩽ i ⩽ k + 1 do
    U_i ← A_i;   D_i ← ∅
while |D_i| ⩽ |A_i|/2 for all i do
    pick x_1 ∈ U_1 and let P = (x_1);   r ← 1;   U_1 ← U_1 ∖ {x_1}
    while 1 ⩽ |P| < n do
        // P = (x_1, ..., x_r) with r ⩾ 1
        if ∃u ∈ U_{r+1} with {x_r, u} ∈ E(H) then
            x_{r+1} ← u;   U_{r+1} ← U_{r+1} ∖ {u}
            P ← (x_1, ..., x_r, x_{r+1});   r ← r + 1
        else
            D_r ← D_r ∪ {x_r}
            P ← (x_1, ..., x_{r-1});   r ← r − 1
    if |P| = n then
        return P   // path has been found
STOP with failure   // this will not happen
```

Lemma 3.2. *For every integer $k \geq 1$ and every $\varepsilon > 0$, there exists $a_0 > 0$ such that the following holds for any $a \geq a_0$. Let H be a graph with an vertices such that for every pair of disjoint sets $S, T \subseteq V(H)$ with $|S|, |T| \geq \varepsilon n$ we have $|E_H(S, T)| > 0$. Then, for every family $A_1, \ldots, A_{k+1} \subseteq V(H)$ of pairwise disjoint sets each of size at least εan, there is a path $P_n = (x_1, \ldots, x_n)$ in H with $x_i \in A_j$ for all $1 \leq i \leq n$, where $j \equiv i \pmod{k+1}$.*

To prove Lemma 3.2, we analyze a depth-first search algorithm, adapting a proof idea in [5, Lemma 4.4]. More specifically, we run an algorithm (stated formally as Algorithm 1). Our algorithm receives as input a graph H with $v(H) = an$ satisfying property (1), and a family of pairwise disjoint sets $A_1, \ldots, A_{k+1} \subseteq V(H)$ with $|A_i| \geq \varepsilon an$ for all i. The output of $\mathcal{A}$ is a path $P_n = (x_1, \ldots, x_n)$ in H with $x_i \in A_j$ for all i, where $j \equiv i \pmod{k+1}$.

As it runs, the algorithm builds a path $P = (x_1, \ldots, x_r)$ with $x_i \in A_j$ for all i and j with $j \equiv i \pmod{k+1}$. Furthermore, it maintains sets U_j and $D_j \subseteq A_j$ for all j, with the property that U_j, D_j, and $V(P) \cap A_j$ form a partition of A_j for every j. The cardinality of the sets U_j decreases as the algorithm runs, while the D_j increases. As the algorithm runs, we have $r = |P| < n$ and it searches for an edge $\{x_r, u\} \in E(H)$ where u belongs to the set U_{r+1} of *unused* vertices in A_{r+1}. If such a vertex $u \in U_{r+1}$ is found, then P is made one vertex longer by adding u to it. If there is no such vertex u, then x_r is declared a *dead end* and it is put into D_r. Moreover, the path P is shortened by one vertex; it becomes $P = (x_1, \ldots, x_{r-1})$. Our algorithm iterates this procedure. If we find a path P with n vertices this way, then we are done.

We now analyze Algorithm 1.

Proof of Lemma 3.2. We will prove that Algorithm 1 returns a path P on line 13 as desired, instead of terminating with failure on line 14.

Fix an integer $k \geq 1$ and $\varepsilon > 0$. Let

$$a_0 = 2 + \frac{4}{\varepsilon(k+1)}, \tag{3.1}$$

fix $a \geq a_0$, and let n be sufficiently large. Let H be a graph with an vertices satisfying property (1), that is, for every pair of disjoint sets S, $T \subseteq V(H)$ with $|S|$, $|T| \geq \varepsilon n$ we have $|E_H(S, T)| > 0$. Let $A_1, \ldots, A_{k+1} \subseteq V(H)$ be a family of pairwise disjoint sets each of size at least εan.

First recall that U_i, D_i, and $V(P) \cap A_i$ form a partition of A_i for every i. Since the path P is always empty on line 4, at this point we have $|U_1| \geq |A_1| - |D_1| \geq |A_1|/2 > 0$. Then, line 4 is always executed successfully.

Suppose now that $\mathcal{A}$ stops with failure on line 14. Then, for some i, say $i = r$, the set $D_i = D_r$ became larger than $|A_r|/2 \geq \varepsilon an/2 \geq \varepsilon n$. Furthermore, we have $|P| < n$ and $|D_{r+1}| \leq |A_{r+1}|/2$ (indices modulo $k + 1$) and hence,

$$|U_{r+1}| \geq |A_{r+1}| - |D_{r+1}| - |V(P) \cap A_{r+1}| \geq \frac{1}{2}|A_{r+1}| - \left\lceil \frac{n}{k+1} \right\rceil \geq \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon an - \frac{2n}{k+1} > \varepsilon n.$$

Note that this is the only place where the exact value of a_0 is used. Applying property (1) to the pair (D_r, U_{r+1}), we see that there is an edge $\{x, u\} \in E(H)$ with $x \in D_r$ and $u \in U_{r+1}$. Consider the moment in which x was put into D_r. This happened on line 10, when P had x as its foremost vertex and $\mathcal{A}$ was trying to extend P further into U_{r+1}. At this point, because of the edge $\{x, u\} \in E(H)$, we must have had $u \notin U_{r+1}$ (see line 6). Since the set U_{r+1} decreases as $\mathcal{A}$ runs, this is a contradiction and hence $\mathcal{A}$ does not terminate on line 14.

Since $\sum_{1 \leq i \leq k+1} (|D_i| - |U_i|)$ increases as Algorithm 1 runs, we know the algorithm terminates. Therefore, we conclude that it returns a suitable path P as claimed. □

We are now ready to complete the proof of Theorem 1.2.

Proof of Theorem 1.2. Fix $k \geq 1$ and let $\varepsilon = 1/3(k + 1)$. Let a_0 be the constant given by an application of Lemma 3.2 with parameters k and ε. Set $a = \max\{6k, a_0\}$ and let b be given by Lemma 3.1 for this choice of a. Moreover, let H be a graph with $|V(H)| = an$ and $\Delta(H) \leq b$ be as in Lemma 3.1. Finally, put $t = (64k)^{2k}$ and $s = 2k$.

Let H_t^k be a complete-t-blow-up of H^k, as in Definition 2.1, and let χ: $E(H_t^k) \to \{\text{red, blue}\}$ be an edge-coloring of H_t^k. We shall show that H_t^k contains a monochromatic copy of P_n^k under χ. By the definition of H_t^k, any cluster $C(v)$ contains a monochromatic copy $B(v)$ of K_t. Without loss of generality, the set $W := \{v \in V(H)\colon B(v) \text{is blue}\}$ has cardinality at least $v(H)/2$. Let $F := H[W]$ be the subgraph of H induced by W, and let F' be the subgraph of $F_t^k \subseteq H_t^k$ induced by $\bigcup_{w \in W} V(B(w))$.

Given the above coloring χ, we define a coloring χ' of F^k as follows. An edge $\{u, v\} \in E(F^k)$ is colored *blue* if the bipartite subgraph $F'[V(B(u)), V(B(v))]$ of F' naturally induced by the sets $V(B(u))$ and $V(B(v))$ contains a blue $K_{s,s}$. Otherwise $\{u, v\}$ is colored *red*. □

Claim 3.4. Any 2-coloring of $E(F^k)$ has either a blue P_n or a red P_n^k.

Proof. We apply Theorem 2.3 to F^k, where if an edge is not present in F^k, then we consider it to be in the red color class. If F^k contains a blue copy of P_n, then we are done. Hence we may assume F^k contains a balanced, complete $(k+1)$-partite graph K with parts $A_1,\ldots,A_{k+1}$ on at least $v(F^k) - kn \geq an/2 - kn$ vertices, with no blue edges between any two parts. As $a \geq 6k$, each one of these parts has size at least

$$\frac{1}{k+1}\left(\frac{1}{2}a - k\right)n \geq \varepsilon an. \tag{3.2}$$

By Lemma 3.2 applied to the collection of sets of vertices $A_1,\ldots,A_{k+1}$ of $F \subseteq H$ (specifically F and not F^k), we see that $F[V(K)]$ contains a path with n vertices such that any consecutive $k+1$ vertices are in distinct parts of K. Therefore $F^k[V(K)]$ contains a copy of P_n^k in which every pair of adjacent vertices are in distinct parts of K. By the definition of K, such a copy is red. □

By Claim 3.4, F^k contains a blue copy of P_n or a red copy of P_n^k under the edge-coloring χ'. Thus, we can split our proof into these two cases.

Case 1. First suppose F^k contains a blue copy $(x_1,\ldots,x_n)$ of P_n. Then, for every $1 \leq i \leq n-1$, the bipartite graph $F'[V(B(x_i)), V(B(x_{i+1}))]$ contains a blue copy of $K_{s,s}$, with, say, vertex classes $X_i \subseteq V(B(x_i))$ and $Y_{i+1} \subseteq V(B(x_{i+1}))$. As $|X_i| = |Y_i| = s = 2k$ for all $2 \leq i \leq n-1$, we can find sets $X'_i \subseteq X_i$ and $Y'_i \subseteq Y_i$ such that $|X'_i| = |Y'_i| = k$ and $X'_i \cap Y'_i = \emptyset$ for all $2 \leq j \leq n-1$. Let $X'_1 = X_1$ and $Y'_n = Y_n$.
We now show that the set $U := \bigcup_{i=1}^{n-1} X'_i \cup \bigcup_{i=2}^{n} Y'_i$ provides us with a blue copy of P_{2kn}^k in $F' \subseteq H_t^k$. Note first that $|U| = 2k + 2k(n-2) + 2k = 2kn$. Let $u_1,\ldots,u_{2kn}$ be an ordering of U such that, for each i, every vertex in X'_i comes before any vertex in Y'_{i+1} and after every vertex in Y'_i. By the definition of the sets X'_i and Y'_i and the construction of $F' \subseteq F_t^k \subseteq H_t^k$, each vertex u_j is adjacent in blue to $\{u_{j'} \in U: 1 \leq |j - j'| \leq k\}$. Thus, U contains a blue copy of P_{2nk}^k, as claimed.

Case 2. Now suppose F^k contains a red copy P of P_n^k. That is, F^k contains a set of vertices $\{x_1,\ldots,x_n\}$ such that x_i is adjacent in red to all x_j with $1 \leq |j - i| \leq k$. We shall show that, for each $1 \leq i \leq n$, we can pick a vertex $y_i \in V(B(x_i))$ so that $y_1,\ldots,y_n$ define a red copy of P_n^k in $F' \subseteq F_t^k \subseteq H_t^k$. We do this by applying the local lemma [13] (a greedy strategy also works).

We have to show that it is possible to pick the y_i $(1 \leq i \leq n)$ in such a way that $\{y_i, y_j\}$ is a red edge in F' for every i and j with $1 \leq |i - j| \leq k$. Let us choose $y_i \in V(B(x_i))$ $(1 \leq i \leq n)$ uniformly and independently at random. Let $e = \{x_i, x_j\}$ be an edge in $P \subseteq F^k$. We know that e is red. Let A_e be the event that $\{y_i, y_j\}$ is a *blue* edge in F'. Since the edge e is red, we know that the bipartite graph $F'[V(B(x_i)), V(B(x_j))]$ contains no blue $K_{s,s}$. Theorem 2.4 then tells us that $\mathbb{P}[A_e] \leq 4t^{-1/s}$.

The events A_e are not independent, but we can define a dependency graph D for the collection of events A_e ($e \in E(P)$) by adding an edge between A_e and A_f if and only if $e \cap f \neq \emptyset$. Then $\Delta(D) \leq 4k$. Given that

$$4\Delta\mathbb{P}[A_e] \leq 64kt^{-1/s} = 1, \tag{3.3}$$

for all e, the local lemma tells us that $\mathbb{P}[\bigcap_{e \in E(P)} \bar{A}_e] > 0$, and hence a simultaneous choice of the y_i ($1 \leq i \leq n$) as required is possible. This completes the proof of Theorem 1.2.

Throughout our proof we have used probabilistic methods to show the existence of G. We now briefly discuss how our proof could be made constructive. For instance, it suffices to take for H a suitable (n, d, λ)-graph as in Alon and Chung [2], namely, it is enough to have $\lambda = O(\sqrt{d})$ and d large enough with respect to k and $1/\varepsilon$.

4 | OPEN QUESTIONS

We make no attempts to optimize the constant given by our argument, so the following question is of interest.

Question 4.1. For any integer $k \geq 2$, what is $\limsup_{n \to \infty} \hat{r}(P_n^k)/n$?

It is also interesting to consider what happens when more than two colors are at play. For $q \in \mathbb{N}$, let $\hat{r}_q(H)$ denote the *q-color size-Ramsey number* of H, that is, the smallest number of edges in a graph that is q-Ramsey for H.

Conjecture 4.2. For any $q, k \in \mathbb{N}$ we have $\hat{r}_q(P_n^k) = O(n)$.

It is conceivable that in hypergraphs the size-Ramsey number (defined analogously as for graphs) of tight paths may be linear. Let $H_n^{(k)}$ denote the tight path of uniformity k on n vertices; that is, $V(H_n^{(k)}) = [n]$ and $E(H_n^{(k)}) = \{\{1, \dots, k\}, \{2, \dots, k+1\}, \dots, \{n-k+1, \dots, n\}\}$. The following question appears as Question 2.9 in [9].

Question 4.3. For any $k \in \mathbb{N}$, do we have $\hat{r}(H_n^{(k)}) = O(n)$?

Finally, we note that for fixed k, our main result implies the linearity of the size-Ramsey number for the grid graphs $G_{k,n}$, the cartesian product of the paths P_k and P_n. Indeed our main result implies the linearity of the size-Ramsey number for any sequence of graphs with bounded bandwidth. For the d-dimensional grid graph G_n^d, obtained by taking the cartesian product of d copies of P_n, we raise the following question.

Question 4.4. For any integer $d \geq 2$, is $\hat{r}(G_n^d) = O(n^d)$?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was conducted while the authors were attending the ATI-HIMR Focused Research Workshop: *large-scale structures in random graphs* at the Alan Turing Institute. We thank the organizers of this workshop and the institute for their facilitation of a productive research environment and provision of a magical coffee machine. We are very grateful to David Conlon for suggesting the problem [6]. The third author was partially supported by FAPESP (Proc. 2013/03447-6) and by CNPq (Proc. 459335/2014-6, 310974/2013-5). The fifth author was supported by FAPESP (Proc. 2013/11431-2, 2013/03447-6, and 2018/04876-1) and partially by CNPq (Proc. 459335/2014-6, 304733/2017-2). This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, Brasil (CAPES), Finance Code 001. The collaboration of part of the authors was supported by a CAPES/DAAD PROBRAL grant (Proc. 430/15).

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How to cite this article: Clemens D, Jenssen M, Kohayakawa Y, et al. The size-Ramsey number of powers of paths. *J Graph Theory*. 2018;1–10. https://doi.org/10.1002/jgt.22432