A PRECISE THRESHOLD FOR QUASI-RAMSEY NUMBERS*

ROSS J. KANG†, JÁNOS PACH‡, VIRESH PATEL§, AND GUUS REGTS¶

Abstract. We consider the variation of Ramsey numbers introduced by Erdős and Pach [J. Graph Theory, 7 (1983), pp. 137–147], where instead of seeking complete or independent sets we only seek a $t$-homogeneous set, a vertex subset that induces a subgraph of minimum degree at least $t$ or the complement of such a graph. For any $\nu > 0$ and positive integer $k$, we show that any graph $G$ or its complement contains as an induced subgraph some graph $H$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices with minimum degree at least $\frac{1}{2}(\ell - 1) + \nu$ provided that $G$ has at least $k\Omega(\nu^2)$ vertices. We also show this to be the best possible in a sense. This may be viewed as correction to a result claimed in [P. Erdős and J. Pach, J. Graph Theory, 7 (1983), pp. 137–147]. For the above result, we permit $H$ to have order at least $k$. In the harder problem, where we insist that $H$ have exactly $k$ vertices, we do not obtain sharp results, although we show a way to translate results of one form of the problem to the other.

Key words. Ramsey theory, quasi-Ramsey numbers, graph discrepancy, probabilistic method

AMS subject classifications. Primary, 05C55; Secondary, 05D10, 05D40

DOI. 10.1137/14097313X

1. Introduction. Recall that the (diagonal, two-color) Ramsey number is defined to be the smallest integer $R(k)$ for which any graph on $R(k)$ vertices is guaranteed to contain a homogeneous set of order $k$—that is, a set of $k$ vertices corresponding to either a complete or independent subgraph. The development of asymptotic bounds for these numbers is an important and challenging area of mathematics with a history of more than eighty years. Since the work of Erdős and Szekeres [8] and Erdős [5], there has been no progress in improving bounds on the first-order term of $\ln R(k)$, so even seemingly small improvements in asymptotic bounds on $R(k)$ are of major importance [3].

We consider a degree-based generalization of $R(k)$ where, rather than seeking a clique or coclique of order at least $k$, we seek instead an induced subgraph of order at least $k$ with high minimum degree (clique-like graphs) or low maximum degree (coclique-like graphs). We call this the variable quasi-Ramsey problem. By gradually relaxing the degree requirement, we get a spectrum of Ramsey-type problems where we see a sharp change at a certain point. Erdős and Pach [6] introduced such problems and obtained some interesting results, as summarized below.

---

*Received by the editors June 16, 2014; accepted for publication (in revised form) July 14, 2015; published electronically September 10, 2015.


†IMAPP, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen 6500 GL, The Netherlands (ross.kang@gmail.com). This author was supported by a NWO Veni grant. This work was begun while this author was at Durham University, supported by EPSRC grant EP/G066604/1.

‡EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland, and Rényi Institute, Budapest, Hungary (pach@cims.nyu.edu). This author’s research was supported by Hungarian Science Foundation EuroGIGA grant OTKA NN 102029 and by Swiss National Science Foundation grants 200020-144531 and 200021-137574.

§University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (V.S.Patel@uva.nl). The third author was supported by the Queen Mary—Warwick Strategic Alliance. This work was begun while this author was at Durham University, supported by EPSRC grant EP/F064551/1.

¶University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (guusregts@gmail.com). The fourth author’s research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement 339109.
1.1. The variable quasi-Ramsey problem. For a graph $G = (V, E)$, we write $\overline{G}$ for the complement of $G$. As a starting point, Erdős and Pach observed the following.

**Proposition 1.1** (see [6]).

(i) For $0 \leq \alpha < \frac{1}{2}$, there exists a constant $C(\alpha)$ such that, for each $k \in \mathbb{N}$ and any graph $G$ with at least $C(\alpha)k$ vertices, $G$ or $\overline{G}$ has an induced subgraph $H$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices with minimum degree at least $\frac{1}{2}\ell$.

(ii) For $\frac{1}{2} < \alpha \leq 1$, there exists a constant $C(\alpha) > 1$ such that, for each $k \in \mathbb{N}$, there is a graph $G$ with at least $C(\alpha)^k$ vertices satisfying the following. If $H$ is any induced subgraph of $G$ or $\overline{G}$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices, then $H$ has minimum degree less than $\alpha\ell$.

Investigating the abrupt change at $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$, Erdős and Pach [6] proved the following much stronger result, using graph discrepancy to prove part (i) and a weighted random graph construction to prove part (ii).

**Theorem 1.2** (see [6]).

(i) There exists a constant $C > 0$ such that, for each $k \in \mathbb{N}, k > 1$, and any graph $G$ with at least $Ck\ln k$ vertices, $G$ or $\overline{G}$ has an induced subgraph $H$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices with minimum degree at least $\frac{1}{2}\ell$.

(ii) For any $\rho \geq 0$, there is a constant $C_\rho > 0$ such that, for large enough $k$, there is a graph $G$ with at least $C_\rho k\ln k / \ln \ln k$ vertices satisfying the following. If $H$ is any induced graph of $G$ or $\overline{G}$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices, then $H$ has minimum degree less than $\frac{1}{2}\ell - \rho$.

Our first goal is to further investigate the abrupt change described above. We obtain sharp results by the application of a short discrepancy argument and the analysis of a probabilistic construction similar to Proposition 1.1(ii).

**Theorem 1.3.**

(i) Let $\nu \geq 0$ and $c > 4/3$ be fixed. For large enough $k$ and any graph $G$ with at least $k^{\frac{c}{10}\nu^2 + 4/3}$ vertices, $G$ or $\overline{G}$ has an induced subgraph $H$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices with minimum degree at least $\frac{1}{2}(\ell - 1) + \nu\sqrt{(\ell - 1) \ln \ell}$.

(ii) There is a constant $C > 0$ such that, if $\nu(\cdot)$ is a nondecreasing nonnegative function, then for large enough $k$ there is a graph $G$ with at least $Ck^{\nu(k)^2 + 1}$ vertices such that the following holds. If $H$ is an induced subgraph of $G$ or $\overline{G}$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices, then $H$ has minimum degree less than $\frac{1}{2}(\ell - 1) + \nu(\ell)\sqrt{(\ell - 1) \ln \ell}$.

Theorem 1.3 exhibits a threshold phenomenon which we elucidate in section 1.3, where we also make comparisons to Proposition 1.1 and Theorem 1.2. Erdős and Pach claimed that their argument for Theorem 1.2(i) could be extended to prove the statement of Theorem 1.3(i) with the term $k^{\frac{c}{10}\nu^2 + 4/3}$ replaced by $Ck\ln k$ and $\frac{1}{2}(\ell - 1) + \nu(\ell)\sqrt{(\ell - 1) \ln \ell}$ replaced by $\frac{1}{2}\ell + \nu(\ell)(\ell - 1)^{3/2}$. Their claimed result contradicts Theorem 1.3(ii) for $\nu(\ell) = \nu \ln \ell$.

Slightly before the abrupt change occurs, we have found that the construction for Theorem 1.2(ii) remains valid, and this yields the following. This improvement is mainly technical in nature, but we have included it for completeness.

**Theorem 1.4.** For any $\nu > 0$, there exists $C_\nu > 0$ such that, for large enough $k$, there is a graph $G$ with at least $C_\nu k\ln k / \ln \ln k$ vertices satisfying the following. If $H$ is any induced subgraph of $G$ or $\overline{G}$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices, then $H$ has minimum degree less than $\left(\frac{1}{2} - \nu(\ell)\right)(\ell - 1)$.

1.2. The fixed quasi-Ramsey problem. So far, we have discussed the variable quasi-Ramsey problem, where we seek to guarantee the existence of a clique-like or
coclique-like induced subgraph of order at least \( k \). It is also natural to ask for such an induced subgraph of order exactly \( k \), and we call this the \textit{fixed quasi-Ramsey} problem.

In section 4, we provide a probabilistic thinning lemma (Lemma 4.1) that allows us to translate results about the variable problem into results about the fixed problem. The lemma roughly says that, in any graph of large minimum degree, we can find an induced subgraph of any order that (approximately) preserves the minimum degree condition in an appropriate way. We can use this thinning lemma to establish bounds similar to Proposition 1.1(i). We can also use it, together with Theorem 1.2(i), to prove the following result.

\textbf{Theorem 1.5.} There exists a constant \( C > 0 \) such that, for large enough \( k \) and any graph \( G \) with at least \( Ck \ln k \) vertices, \( G \) or \( \overline{G} \) has an induced subgraph \( H \) on exactly \( k \) vertices with minimum degree at least \( \frac{1}{2}(k-1) - 2\sqrt{(k-1)\ln k} \).

The bound \( Ck \ln k \) in Theorem 1.5 is tight up to a \( \ln \ln k \) factor by Theorem 1.4. A similar but different result was proved with a graph discrepancy argument.

\textbf{Theorem 1.6 (see [6]).} There exists a constant \( C > 1 \) such that for every \( k, \nu \in \mathbb{N} \) and any graph \( G \) with at least \( C^{\nu}k^{2} \) vertices, \( G \) or \( \overline{G} \) has an induced subgraph \( H \) on exactly \( k \) vertices with minimum degree at least \( \frac{1}{2}k + \nu \).

1.3. Thresholds and bound comparisons. We introduce some terminology and notation to facilitate easy comparison of the above results and to describe a threshold phenomenon. A \( t \)-homogeneous set is a vertex subset of a graph that induces either a graph of minimum degree at least \( t \) or the complement of such a graph. Let \( f : \mathbb{Z}^{+} \to \mathbb{N} \) be a nondecreasing nonnegative integer function satisfying \( f(\ell) < \ell \) for all \( \ell \). For any positive integer \( k \), the \textit{variable quasi-Ramsey number} \( R_f(k) \) is defined to be the smallest integer such that any graph of order \( R_f(k) \) contains an \( f(\ell) \)-homogeneous set of order \( \ell \) for some \( \ell \geq k \). For integers \( t \) and \( k \) with \( 0 \leq t < k \), the \textit{fixed quasi-Ramsey number} \( R^*_t(k) \) is defined to be the smallest integer such that any graph of order \( R^*_t(k) \) contains a \( t \)-homogeneous set of order \( k \). We refer to both \( R_f(k) \) and \( R^*_t(k) \) as \textit{quasi-Ramsey numbers}.

Versions of these parameters were introduced in [6]. Note that Proposition 1.1 shows that, for any fixed \( \varepsilon > 0 \), as \( f \) changes from a function satisfying \( f(\ell) \leq \left( \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon \right)\ell \) for all \( \ell \) to a function satisfying \( f(\ell) \geq \left( \frac{1}{2} + \varepsilon \right)\ell \) for all \( \ell \), \( R_f(k) \) changes from polynomial (indeed, linear) to superpolynomial (indeed, exponential) growth in \( k \). Theorem 1.2(i) narrows this gap by showing that we can replace \( \left( \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon \right)\ell \) above with \( \frac{1}{2}\ell \) to achieve polynomial growth in \( k \). Theorem 1.3 shows that as \( f \) changes from a function satisfying \( f(\ell) \leq \frac{1}{2}\ell + o(\sqrt{\ell \ln \ell}) \) for all \( \ell \) to a function satisfying \( f(\ell) \geq \frac{1}{2}\ell + \omega(\sqrt{\ell \ln \ell}) \) for all \( \ell \), \( R_f(k) \) changes from polynomial to superpolynomial growth in \( k \).

The fixed quasi-Ramsey numbers are less well understood. Theorem 1.5 shows that \( R^*_t(k) = O(k \ln k) \) for \( t \leq \frac{1}{2}k - \omega(\sqrt{k \ln k}) \), while Theorem 1.6 shows that \( R^*_t(k) = O(k^2) \) for \( t = \frac{1}{2}k + O(1) \). Since \( R^*_t(k) \geq R_f(k) \), Theorem 1.3(ii) implies that \( R^*_t(k) \) is superpolynomial in \( k \) if \( t \geq \frac{1}{2}k + \omega(\sqrt{k \ln k}) \).

1.4. Further related work. We mention work on the fixed quasi-Ramsey problem by Chappell and Gimbel [2]. Using an Erdős–Szekeres-type recursion, they proved for \( t \geq 1 \) that

\[ R^*_t(k) \leq (k - t - 1) \binom{2(t-1)}{t-1} + \binom{2t}{t} \leq (k - t - 3)4^{t-1}. \]

They gave an exact formula for \( R^*_t(k) \) when \( t \) is small: if \( 1 \leq t \leq \frac{1}{2}(k + 2) \), then \( R^*_t(k) = k + 2t - 2 \). They also showed that the lower bound of \( k + 2t - 2 \) holds for all
then any graph $G$ and $Pach$ for their proof of Theorem 1.2(i).

use a result of Erdős and Spencer [7, Chap. 7], which is the same result used by Erdős (between $G$ and $Q$ is a coclique of order $2(t - 1)$, $R$ is a coclique of order $k - 2t + 1$, all possible edges between $P$ and $R$ are present, all possible edges between $Q$ and $R$ are absent, and the bipartite subgraph induced by the edges between $P$ and $Q$ is $(t - 1)$-regular. (Note that the subgraph on $R$ could instead be chosen arbitrarily.)

t $\leq \frac{1}{2}(k + 1)$; a construction certifying this is depicted in Figure 1.

Notation. Chappell and Gimbel chose the complementary interpretation for $R^*_t(k)$—so the sets of order $k$ have maximum degree bounded by $t$—and referred to the parameters as defective Ramsey numbers. Our $R^*_t(k)$ is essentially the same as what is $R^*_{t,k}(k)$ in the notation of Erdős and Pach, while our $R_f$ slightly refines their $R_c$, allowing for more precise statements.

Structure of the paper. We prove Theorem 1.3(i) in section 2. We prove Theorem 1.3(ii) and discuss related results in section 3. We state and prove the thinning approach and discuss its applications, such as Theorem 1.5, in section 4. In section 5, we prove Theorem 1.4. We give some concluding remarks and prompt some questions for further investigation in section 6.

2. An upper bound using discrepancy. We use a result on graph discrepancy to prove Theorem 1.3(i). Given a graph $G = (V, E)$, the discrepancy of a set $X \subseteq V$ is defined as

$$D(X) := e(X) - \frac{1}{2}\left(\left|\frac{X}{2}\right|\right),$$

where $e(X)$ denotes the number of edges in the subgraph $G[X]$ induced by $X$. We use a result of Erdős and Spencer [7, Chap. 7], which is the same result used by Erdős and Pach for their proof of Theorem 1.2(i).

Lemma 2.1 (Theorem 7.1 of [7]). Provided $n$ is large enough, if $t \in \{1, \ldots, n\}$, then any graph $G = (V, E)$ of order $n$ satisfies

$$\max_{S \subseteq V, |S| \leq t} |D(S)| \geq \frac{q^{3/2}}{10^3} \sqrt{\ln(5n/t)}.$$

Proof of Theorem 1.3(i). Fix $\nu \geq 0$ and let $G = (V, E)$ be any graph on at least $N = k^{c - 10^6 \nu^2 + 4/3}$ vertices. For the theorem, it suffices to prove that $G$ or $\overline{G}$ has an induced subgraph $H$ on $\ell \geq k$ vertices with minimum degree at least $\frac{1}{2}(\ell - 1) + \nu(\ell - 1)\ln \ell$. For any $X \subseteq V$, we define the following skew form of discrepancy:

$$D_{\nu}(X) := |D(X)| - \nu \sqrt{|X|^3 \ln |X|}.$$

Let $X \subseteq V$ be a set attaining maximum skew discrepancy. By symmetry, we may assume that $D(X) > 0$. Then, for any $x \in X$, we have

$$\deg_{G[X]}(x) \geq \frac{1}{2}(|X| - 1) + \nu \sqrt{|X| \ln |X|}.$$
To see (2.1), suppose that \( x \in X \) has strictly smaller degree than claimed and set \( X' := X \setminus \{x\} \). Then

\[
D_\nu(X') \geq e(X') - \frac{1}{2}\binom{|X| - 1}{2} - \nu \sqrt{(|X| - 1)^3 \ln(|X| - 1)}
\]

\[
> e(X) - \frac{1}{2}\binom{|X|}{2} - \nu \sqrt{|X| \ln |X|} - \nu \sqrt{(|X| - 1)^3 \ln(|X| - 1)}.
\]

Note that \( \sqrt{|X|^3 \ln |X|} > \sqrt{|X| \ln |X|} + \sqrt{(|X| - 1)^3 \ln(|X| - 1)} \), which by the above implies \( D_\nu(X') > D_\nu(X) \), contradicting the maximality of \( D_\nu(X) \).

If \( k \) is large enough, then by Lemma 2.1 there exists a set of at most \( k^{4/3} \) vertices with discrepancy at least \( \nu k^2 \sqrt{\ln k} \). Recall that \( c > 4/3 \). So, in evaluating the skew discrepancy of this set, the ordinary discrepancy term will dominate the “skew term,” which is equal to \( -\nu k^2 \sqrt{4/3 \ln k} \). We may thus assume that \( D_\nu(X) \geq k^2 \) if \( k \) is large enough, but now note that this implies that \( |X| \geq k \), as required.

This argument is considerably shorter than Erdős and Pach’s proof of Theorem 1.2(i). We can instead follow their approach more closely, albeit with the choice of skew discrepancy defined in the proof of Theorem 1.3(i) rather than a “more skewed” choice suggested in [6, eq. (1)]. After appropriate adjustments, we then obtain an improvement upon Theorem 1.3(i), whereby \( k^{10^{3\nu^2/4}+4/3} \) with \( c > 4/3 \) is replaced by \( 200(k \ln k)^{10^{3\nu^2/4}+1} \) with \( c > 1 \). Note that with \( \nu = 0 \), this results in a bound akin to Theorem 1.2(i). For clarity of exposition, we elected for the shorter argument here, and it nevertheless yields the threshold phenomenon we desire.

3. Random graph lower bounds. Next, we give probabilistic lower bounds for the quasi-Ramsey numbers. We elaborate on an observation by Erdős and Pach. We apply upper bounds on the order of largest \( t \)-homogeneous sets in random graphs to extend the classic lower bounds on \( R(k) \) [5, 12]. We rely on analysis from [10], which among other things thoroughly describes the expected behavior of \( t \)-dependent sets—i.e., vertex subsets that induce subgraphs of maximum degree at most \( t \)—in the random graph \( G_{n,1/2} \) with vertex set \( [n] = \{1, \ldots, n\} \) and edge probability \( 1/2 \). We need a result best stated with large deviations notation. For more on large deviations, consult [4]. Let

\[
\Lambda^*(x) = \begin{cases} 
  x \ln(2x) + (1 - x) \ln(2(1 - x)) & \text{for } x \in [0, 1], \\
  \infty & \text{otherwise}
\end{cases}
\]

(where \( \Lambda^*(0) = \Lambda^*(1) = \ln 2 \)). This is the Fenchel–Legendre transform of the logarithmic moment generating function associated with the Bernoulli distribution with probability \( 1/2 \) (cf. Exercise 2.2.23(b) of [4]). Some easy calculus checks that \( \Lambda^*(x) \) has a global minimum of 0 at \( x = 1/2 \) and is strictly decreasing on \([0, 1/2)\) and strictly increasing on \((1/2, 1]\). The following is a bound on the probability that a given subset of order \( k \) in \( G_{n,1/2} \) is \( t \)-dependent. This bound is known to be tight for the ranges of \( t \) and \( k \) for which we apply it.

**Lemma 3.1** (Lemma 2.2(i) of [10]). Given \( \bar{t}, k \) with \( \bar{t} \leq \frac{k}{2}(k - 1) \),

\[
\mathbb{P}(\Delta(G_{k,1/2}) \leq \bar{t}) \leq \exp \left( -\frac{k}{2} \Lambda^* \left( \frac{\bar{t}}{k - 1} \right) \right).
\]
Consider the random graph \( A \). Let \( \delta \) be the minimum degree of the graph. Since \( \delta > 0 \), there exists a graph \( A \) of \( n \) vertices for which each induced subgraph of order \( \ell \geq k \), and a choice of \( \ell \) large enough, there exists a graph on \( n \) vertices for which each induced subgraph of order \( \ell \geq k \) and its complement have minimum degree less than \( f(\ell) \). Since we proved that this statement holds for any \( \delta > 0 \), the result follows.

As we see now, Theorem 1.3(ii) follows the same argument.

**Proof of Theorem 1.3(ii).** Into the proof of Proposition 3.2, we substitute

\[
\varepsilon = \varepsilon(\ell) = \nu(\ell) \sqrt{\frac{\ln \ell}{\ell - 1}}.
\]

By the Taylor expansion of \( \Lambda^* \) (for \( 0 \leq \varepsilon \leq 1/2 \)), we have that

\[
\Lambda^* \left( \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon \right) = \left( \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon \right) \ln(1 - 2\varepsilon) + \left( \frac{1}{2} + \varepsilon \right) \ln(1 + 2\varepsilon)
\]

\[
= \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} \frac{(2\varepsilon)^{2j}}{2j(2j - 1)} \geq 2\varepsilon^2.
\]

Note that \( \Lambda^* \left( \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon \right) \geq 2\varepsilon^2 \) in fact holds for all \( \varepsilon \geq 0 \). Now, for any \( \delta > 0 \), let

\[
n = \left\lfloor \frac{1}{1 + \delta} \frac{k^{e(\varepsilon)^2 + 1}}{e} \right\rfloor,
\]
where $k$ is some large enough integer. Again consider the random graph $G \sim G_{n,1/2}$. Let $f(\ell) = \left(\frac{1}{2} + \varepsilon(\ell)\right)(\ell - 1)$ and $A_S$ be as in Proposition 3.2. As we did before, but also using the Taylor expansion above, we obtain that the probability that $A_S$ holds for some set $S \subseteq [n]$ of $\ell \geq k$ vertices is at most

$$
\sum_{S \subseteq [n], |S| \geq k} \mathbb{P}(A_S) \leq 2\sum_{\ell = k}^n \frac{en}{\ell} \cdot \exp\left(-\left(\ell - 1\right)\varepsilon^2\right) = 2\sum_{\ell = k}^n \left(\frac{en}{\ell^{\nu(\ell)/2+1}}\right) \leq 2\sum_{\ell = k}^n (1 + \delta)^{-\ell} < 1,
$$

by the choice of $n$, $\ell \geq k$, $\nu(\ell) \geq \nu(k)$, and $k$ large enough. Thus, for $k$ large enough, there is a graph on $n$ vertices where each induced subgraph of order $\ell \geq k$ and its complement have minimum degree less than $f(\ell)$. This holds for any $\delta > 0$, so the result follows.

For the fixed quasi-Ramsey numbers $R_i^f(k)$, we can get a constant factor improvement upon the bound implied by Proposition 3.2 by additionally using the Lovász local lemma as Spencer [12] did for $R(k)$. In particular, for $t = t(k) \geq (\frac{1}{2} + \varepsilon)(k - 1)$, the factor is $\exp\left(\Lambda^* \left(\frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon\right)\right)$. This is standard, and the calculations are similar to those used above, so we omit the proof.

**Proposition 3.3.** For $\varepsilon \geq 0$, let $t = t(k) \geq (\frac{1}{2} + \varepsilon)(k - 1)$. Then, as $k \to \infty$,

$$
R_i^f(k) \geq (1 + o(1)) \frac{k}{e} \exp\left(\frac{k + 1}{2} \Lambda^* \left(\frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon\right)\right).
$$

**4. A thinning argument for upper bounds.** We start this section by explicitly stating our thinning approach.

**Lemma 4.1.** For any $0 < c < 1$ and $\varepsilon > 0$, let $k$ be such that

$$
\exp\left(\frac{1}{2} \varepsilon^2 (k - 1)\right) > k.
$$

If $H$ is a graph of order $\ell \geq k$ such that $\delta(H) \geq c\ell$, then there exists $S \subseteq V(H)$ of order $k$ such that $\delta(H[S]) \geq (c - \varepsilon)(k - 1)$.

For Lemma 4.1, we require a Chernoff-type bound for the hypergeometric distribution. Given positive integers $N, b, a$ with $a, b \leq N$, choose $S \subseteq [N]$ with $|S| = b$ uniformly at random (u.a.r.). The random variable given by $X = |S \cap [a]|$ is a hypergeometric random variable with parameters $N, b, a$.

**Lemma 4.2** (Theorem 2.10 and (2.6) of [9]). If $X$ is a hypergeometric random variable with parameters $N, b, a$, and $d \geq 0$, then

$$
\mathbb{P}\left(X \leq \frac{ab}{N} - d\right) \leq \exp\left(-\frac{d^2N}{2ab}\right).
$$

**Proof of Lemma 4.1.** Assume that $c, \varepsilon, k,$ and $H$ are as in the statement of the lemma. Given a vertex $v \in V(H)$ and a subset $T \subseteq V(H) \setminus \{v\}$ of order $k - 1$, we call $(v, T)$ a pair. We say that a pair $(v, T)$ is good if $\deg_T(v) \geq (c - \varepsilon)(k - 1)$; otherwise, it is bad. Given a subset $U \subseteq V(H)$ of order $k$, we say it is good if $(w, U \setminus \{w\})$ is good for all $w \in U$; otherwise, it is bad.

Note that if we can find a good $U$ in $H$, then we are done. Also observe that if $U$ is bad for all $U \subseteq V(H)$ of order $k$, then there must be at least $\binom{k}{2}$ distinct bad
pairs. However, there are \( \ell\left(\frac{k-1}{2}\right) \) pairs in total. So there exists a good \( U \) provided that, when choosing a pair \((v,T)\) u.a.r.,

\[
\mathbb{P}(v,T \text{ is bad}) < \left(\frac{\ell}{k}\right) \left/ \ell\left(\frac{k-1}{2}\right) \right. = \frac{1}{k}.
\]

We pick \((v,T)\) u.a.r. by choosing \( v \) u.a.r. before choosing \( T \) u.a.r. Note that, given \( v \) and a uniform choice of subset \( T \subseteq V(H) \setminus \{v\} \) of order \( k-1 \), the random variable \( \deg_T(v) \) has a hypergeometric distribution with parameters \( \ell, k-1, \deg(v) \). Since \( c\ell \leq \deg(v) \leq \ell \), we have by Lemma 4.2 that

\[
\mathbb{P}(v,T \text{ is bad}) = \mathbb{P}(\deg_T(v) < (c-\varepsilon)(k-1)) \\
\leq \mathbb{P}\left(\deg(v)(k-1) - \varepsilon(k-1)\right) \\
\leq \exp\left(-\varepsilon^2(k-1)/2\deg(v)\right) \leq \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2}\varepsilon^2(k-1)\right).
\]

By (4.1), the last quantity is less than \( 1/k \), so it follows that

\[
\mathbb{P}(v,T \text{ is bad}) = \frac{1}{\ell} \sum_v \mathbb{P}(v,T \text{ is bad} \mid v) < \frac{1}{k},
\]

as desired.

Our first application of the thinning lemma is the following upper bound for \( R_t^*(k) \). This complements the bounds of Chappell and Gimbel mentioned in the introduction. Since it is not close to the lower bound, we did not attempt to optimize it, though it can easily be improved to roughly \( (\varepsilon^{-1/2}/2)^2 \cdot k \).

**Theorem 4.3.** Let \( \varepsilon > 0 \). If \( \ell = t(k) \leq (\frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon)(k-1) \), then

\[
R_t^*(k) \leq \varepsilon^{-1/2}\sqrt{1+\varepsilon} \cdot (k + o(k)).
\]

**Proof.** Choose \( k \) large enough so that it satisfies (4.1) with \( \varepsilon \) halved, and let \( G \) be a graph of order \( n \geq \varepsilon^{-1/2}\sqrt{1+\varepsilon}k \) for some small fixed \( \gamma > 0 \). By considering \( G \) or its complement, we may assume without loss of generality that \(|E(G)| \geq \frac{1}{2}(n)\).

We require the following explicit form of Theorem 1.1(i). This is essentially given as Exercise 12.8 in [1], so we omit the proof. (The idea is to repeatedly remove any vertex of too small degree.)

**Lemma 4.4.** Let \( 0 \leq \alpha < 1/2 \) and suppose that

\[
n \geq \frac{\sqrt{1-\alpha}}{(\frac{1}{2} - \alpha)^{1/2}} \cdot k \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{k(1-\alpha)\left(\frac{1}{2}-\alpha\right)^{1/2}}\right)^{1/2}
\]

(for \( k \) chosen large enough). If \( G \) is a graph with \(|V(G)| = n \) and \(|E(G)| \geq \frac{1}{2}(n)\), then it has a subgraph \( H \) of order at least \( k \) such that \( \delta(H) \geq \alpha|V(H)| \).

For large enough \( k \), our choice of \( n \) satisfies the hypothesis of the lemma with \( \alpha = \frac{1}{2}(1-\varepsilon) \). So we are guaranteed a subgraph \( H \) with \(|V(H)| \geq k \) and \( \delta(H) \geq \frac{1}{2}(1-\varepsilon)|V(H)| \). By Lemma 4.1 with \( c = \frac{1}{2}(1-\varepsilon) \) and \( \varepsilon \) halved, there exists \( S \subseteq V(H) \subseteq V(G) \) of order \( k \) with \( \delta(G[S]) \geq (\frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon)(k-1) \).

We also apply our thinning lemma to prove Theorem 1.5.

**Proof of Theorem 1.5.** Let \( G \) be a graph of order \( Ck\ln k \), where \( C \) is the same constant as in Theorem 1.2(i). Then \( G \) or \( \overline{G} \) contains a subgraph \( H \) of order \( \ell \), where
for convenience write $\hat{\epsilon} = \epsilon - 10^{-4}$. Let $k$ be some sufficiently large integer. Let $g(\cdot)$ be the function defined by

$$g(x) = \left\lfloor \frac{\nu' \ln x}{8 \ln \ln x} \right\rfloor$$

and write $z = g(k)$. Construct a graph $G = (V, E)$ randomly as follows. The vertex set is defined $V = V_1 \cup \cdots \cup V_z$ for disjoint sets $V_1, \ldots, V_z$ with

$$|V_1| = \cdots = |V_z| = \left\lfloor \left(1 - \frac{1}{2z}\right) k \right\rfloor.$$ 

Note that $|V| < k \ln k$ and

$$|V| \geq z(k-1) \geq \frac{\frac{7}{10} + \frac{1}{k} \ln k}{\ln \ln k}.$$ 

Thus, we can safely choose $C_\nu = \nu/20$ for the statement of the theorem. The random edge set $E$ of $G$ is determined according to a skewed distribution. Given vertices $v_i \in V_i$ and $v_j \in V_j$, the probability of their being joined by an edge is defined by

$$\mathbb{P}(v_i v_j \in E) = p_{ij} = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2} - (2z)^{-4(i+j)-1} & \text{if } i \neq j; \\
\frac{1}{2} + (2z)^{-8i} & \text{if } i = j. \end{cases}$$

The remainder of the proof is devoted to proving that $G$ has the properties we desire with positive probability. Let $X$ be an arbitrary subset of $\lceil k \rceil$ vertices and for convenience write $\ell_i = |X \cap V_i|$ for every $i \in \{1, \ldots, z\}$. We will show that $X$ is $t$-homogeneous with very small probability, where $t = \frac{1}{2} - \hat{\epsilon}(\ell - 1)$ for some $\hat{\epsilon} = \hat{\epsilon}(\ell) > 0$ to be specified later.

First, we concentrate on the minimum degree of the graph $G[X]$ induced by $X$. To this end, let $j'$ be the largest integer that satisfies $\ell_{j'} \geq \ell/(4z^2)$, so that $\ell_i < \ell/(4z^2)$ for all $i > j'$. By this choice of $j'$, note that

$$\sum_{i < j'} \ell_i \geq \ell - |V_{j'}| - \frac{z \ell}{4z^2} \geq \ell - \left(1 - \frac{1}{2z}\right) k - \frac{\ell}{4z}$$

$$= \left(1 - \frac{1}{4z}\right) (\ell - k) + \frac{k}{4z} \geq \frac{\ell}{4z}$$

which proves the theorem. □
for large enough $k$. We consider the minimum degree only among vertices in $X \cap V_j$. Let $v \in X \cap V_j$. Since the degree of $v$ in $G[X]$ is the sum $\sum_i e(v, X \cap V_i)$ (where $e(v, S)$ denotes the number of edges between $v$ and $S$), its expectation satisfies

$$
E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)) = (\ell_j - 1)p_j + \sum_{i \neq j} \ell_i p_j.
$$

Combining these observations, it follows, for any $v \in X \cap V_j$,

$$
E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)) = (\ell_j - 1) \left( \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{(2z)\bar{z}} \right) + \sum_{i \neq j} \ell_i \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{(2z)^{4(\ell_j + \bar{z})+1}} \right)
$$

$$
\leq \frac{1}{2} (\ell - 1) + \frac{\ell_j - 1}{(2z)\bar{z}} - \sum_{i \neq j} \ell_i \frac{(2z)^{4(\ell_j + \bar{z})+1}}{2(2z)\bar{z}^2} \leq \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{(2z)^{8\bar{z}}} \right) (\ell - 1)
$$

for large enough $k$. We also easily have that $E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)) \geq \frac{1}{3}(\ell - 1)$. Since $\deg_{G[X]}(v)$ is a sum of independent Bernoulli random variables, it follows by Hoeffding’s inequality (cf. [9, eq. (2.14)]) that, for any $\varepsilon > 0$, provided $k$ is large enough,

$$
P(\deg_{G[X]}(v) > (1 + \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)))
$$

$$
< \exp(-\frac{1}{8} \varepsilon^2 E(\deg_{G[X]}(v))) \leq \exp(-\frac{1}{8} \varepsilon^2 (\ell - 1)).
$$

(5.1)

Although this bound is already quite small, for our purposes we require an even stronger bound on $P(\delta(G[X]) > (1 + \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)))$. For this, we restrict our attention further by bounding the minimum degree among vertices of some arbitrary subset $Y \subseteq X \cap V_j$ of order $\frac{1}{2} \varepsilon \ell_j$. Now if $v \in Y$ has degree in $G[X]$ greater than $(1 + \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v))$, then the number of neighbors of $v$ outside $Y$ must be greater than $(1 + \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v))$. Note that the random variables that count the number of neighbors of $v$ in $G[X]$ outside $Y$ for all $v \in Y$ are mutually independent. Also, since $Y$ is small, the following analogue of (5.1) holds for each $v \in Y$, as long as $k$ is large enough:

$$
P(e(v, X \setminus Y) > (1 + \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v))) < \exp(-\frac{1}{8} \varepsilon^2 (\ell - 1)).
$$

Combining these observations, it follows, for any $\varepsilon > 0$, that if $k$ is sufficiently large, then

$$
P(\delta(G[X]) > (1 + \varepsilon) \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{(2z)^{8\bar{z}}} \right) (\ell - 1))
$$

$$
\leq P(\delta(G[X]) > (1 + \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)))
$$

$$
\leq P(\forall v \in Y : \deg_{G[X]}(v) > (1 + \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)))
$$

$$
\leq \prod_{v \in Y} P(e(v, X \setminus Y) > (1 + \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon) E(\deg_{G[X]}(v)))
$$

$$
\leq \exp(-\frac{1}{12} \varepsilon^2 (\ell - 1) \ell_j) \leq \exp(-\frac{\varepsilon^2 (\ell - 1) \ell_j}{288z^2}).
$$

(5.2)

Copyright © by SIAM. Unauthorized reproduction of this article is prohibited.
Next, we concentrate on the minimum degree of the complement of \( G[X] \). To this end, let \( j^* \in \{1, \ldots, z\} \) be such that \( \ell_{j^*}(2z)^{-4j^*} \) is maximized. By an averaging argument, this choice of \( j^* \) implies
\[
\frac{\ell_{j^*}}{(2z)^{4j^*}} \geq \frac{\ell}{z(2z)^4} \geq \frac{\ell - 1}{z(2z)^4}.
\]
We shall consider the maximum degree only among vertices in \( X \cap V_{j^*} \). Let \( v \in X \cap V_{j^*} \). Then we have that the expected degree of \( v \) in \( G[X] \) satisfies for all large enough \( k \) that
\[
\mathbb{E}(\deg_{G[X]}(v)) = (\ell_{j^*} - 1) p_{j^*} + \sum_{i \neq j^*} \ell_i p_{i,j^*}
\]
\[
= (\ell_{j^*} - 1) \left( \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{(2z)^{8j^*}} \right) + \sum_{i \neq j^*} \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{(2z)^{4(i+j^*)+1}} \right)
\]
\[
\geq \frac{1}{2} (\ell - 1) + \ell_{j^*} - \frac{1}{(2z)^{8j^*}} - \ell_{j^*} (z - 1) (2z)^{8j^*+1} \geq \frac{1}{2} (\ell - 1) + \frac{\ell_{j^*}}{2(2z)^{8j^*}}
\]
\[
\geq \left( \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{(2z)^{8j^*+1}} \right) (\ell - 1).
\]
We also easily see that \( \mathbb{E}(\deg_{G[X]}(v)) \leq \frac{3}{4}(\ell - 1) \). By similar arguments as above, but for the complement \( \overline{G} \) of \( G \), we obtain, for any \( \varepsilon > 0 \), that if \( k \) is large enough, then
\[
P(\delta(\overline{G}[X]) > (1 + \varepsilon) \left( \frac{1}{2} - (2z)^{-8z-1} \right) (\ell - 1)) \leq \exp \left( -\frac{e^3(\ell - 1)\ell}{72z(2z)^{4z}} \right).
\]
To tie everything together, we apply (5.2) and (5.3) with a common choice of \( \varepsilon \). In particular, let \( \hat{\varepsilon}(\cdot) \) be the function defined by
\[
\hat{\varepsilon}(x) = (2g(x))^{-8g(x)^{-2}}
\]
and let \( \varepsilon = \hat{\varepsilon}(k \ln k) \). Note that since \( k \leq \ell \leq |V| < k \ln k \), we have that \( \varepsilon < \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell) \leq \hat{\varepsilon}(k) \). By our definition of \( g(\cdot) \), we obtain that as \( k \to \infty \), both
\[
\hat{\varepsilon}(k) \sim k^{-((1+o(1)))^{\nu'}} and \varepsilon \sim k^{-((1+o(1)))^{\nu'}}
\]
so that \( \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell) > \ell^{-\nu'} \) for large enough \( k \), by the choice of \( \nu' \). Also, for large \( k \),
\[
(1 + \varepsilon) \left( \frac{1}{2} - (2z)^{-8z} \right) \leq (1 + \varepsilon) \left( \frac{1}{2} - (2z)^{-8z-1} \right)
\]
\[
\leq \frac{1}{2} - \hat{\varepsilon}(k) \leq \frac{1}{2} - \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell) \leq \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon.
\]
Then, by (5.2) and (5.3), the probability that the set \( X \) is \( ((\frac{1}{2} - \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell))(\ell - 1)) \)-homogeneous is, for all \( k \) sufficiently large, at most
\[
2 \exp \left( -\frac{e^3(\ell - 1)\ell}{288z(2z)^{4z}} \right) \leq 2 \exp \left( -\frac{\ell(\ell - 1)}{144(2g(k \ln k))^{28g(k \ln k)^{1/7}}} \right)
\]
\[
= 2 \exp \left( -\frac{k^{-2-(1+o(1))^{\nu'}}}{72z(2z)^{4z}} \right) < 2 \exp \left( -k^{-2-(1+o(1))^{\nu'}} \right).
\]
The above estimate holds for any \( X \) with \( \ell \geq k \) vertices. Thus, the probability that \( G \) has a \( ((\frac{1}{2} - \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell))(\ell - 1)) \)-homogeneous set with \( \ell \geq k \) vertices is less than
\[
2^z k \cdot 2 \exp \left( -k^{-2-(1+o(1))^{\nu'}} \right),
\]
which is less than 1 for \( k \) large enough, since \( z = k^{o(1)} \) and \( \nu' < \frac{2}{7} \). For large enough \( k \), we have \( \hat{\varepsilon}(\ell) > \ell^{-\nu'} \), and so we conclude that there is a graph of order at least \( C_\nu k \ln k / \ln \ln k \) in which no vertex subset of order \( \ell \geq k \) is \( ((\frac{1}{2} - \ell^{-\nu'}))(\ell - 1)) \)-homogeneous, as required. \( \square \)
6. Concluding remarks and open problems. Theorem 1.3 demonstrates that the threshold between polynomial and superpolynomial growth of the variable quasi-Ramsey numbers \( R_f(k) \) occurs for \( f(\ell) = \frac{1}{2} \ell + \Theta(\sqrt{\ell \ln \ell}) \). Erdős and Pach did not notice this phenomenon and indeed presumed a different outcome. It is rare to see sharp asymptotic results in this area of mathematics, so this reaffirms the intimate connection between graph discrepancy and the probabilistic method.

We may also ask for finer detail on the abrupt change in the variable quasi-Ramsey problem for minimum density around \( \frac{1}{2} \).

1. For \( \varepsilon > 0 \), what precisely is the least choice of \( f(\ell) \) for which \( R_f(k) = \Omega(k(\ln k)^{1+\varepsilon}) \)? We only know it satisfies \( \frac{1}{2} \ell \leq f(\ell) \leq \frac{1}{2} \ell + o(\sqrt{\ell \ln \ell}) \).

2. Does a form of Theorem 1.3(i) hold for \( \nu = \nu(\ell) \rightarrow \infty \) as \( \ell \rightarrow \infty \)?

Our understanding of fixed quasi-Ramsey numbers \( R^*_f(k) \) is less clear, even if thinning has brought us to a slightly better viewpoint. We believe that it would be difficult to determine the second-order term in the polynomial-to-superpolynomial threshold for \( R^*_f(k) \). The threshold might be at \( t = \frac{1}{2}k + \Theta(\sqrt{k \ln k}) \), this being the boundary case for superpolynomial behavior in Proposition 3.2 or 3.3. We cannot rule out that the threshold is close to \( t = \frac{1}{2}k + \Theta(\ln k) \), this being the boundary case for polynomial behavior in Theorem 1.6. It is unlikely that one can use the thinning method to obtain sharp bounds for the fixed quasi-Ramsey number \( R^*_f(k) \) for \( t \geq \frac{1}{2}(k - 1) \). It seems that for this, one would need bounds on the variable quasi-Ramsey numbers that contradict Theorem 1.3(ii).

We concentrated on the case of minimum density around \( \frac{1}{2} \), but it would also be interesting to better understand the parameters further away from the threshold. Intuitively, tightening the existing bounds in the exponential regime could be as difficult as the analogous problem for \( R(k) \), but in the linear regime there is room for improvement, especially near the threshold.

Let us examine the bounds for \( R^*_f(k) \). Fix \( \alpha \in [0, 1] \) and suppose that \( t = t(k) \) satisfies \( t \sim \alpha(k - 1) \) as \( k \rightarrow \infty \). If \( \alpha > \frac{1}{2} \), then Proposition 3.2 or 3.3 and the Erdős–Szekeres-type bound of Chappell and Gimbel together give

\[
\frac{1}{2} \Lambda^*(1 - \alpha) + o(1) \leq \frac{1}{k} \ln R^*_f(k) \leq 2\alpha \ln 2 + o(1).
\]

Recall that \( \Lambda^*(1 - \alpha) \downarrow 0 \) as \( \alpha \downarrow \frac{1}{2} \) and \( \Lambda^*(0) = \ln 2 \). It is curious that these bounds do not imply that \( \frac{1}{2} \ln R^*_f(k) \) is strictly smaller than \( \frac{1}{k} \ln R(k) \) for any \( \alpha > \frac{1}{2} \), but there might be a way to prove such a statement without improving the exponential bounds directly. If \( \frac{1}{2} \leq \alpha < \frac{1}{2} \), then the lower bound certified in Figure 1 and Theorem 4.3 (plugging in \( \varepsilon = 1/2 - \alpha \)) together give

\[
2\alpha + 1 + o(1) \leq \frac{1}{k} R^*_f(k) \leq \sqrt{\left(\frac{1}{2} - \alpha\right)^{-1}} + 1 + o(1).
\]

The thinning upper bound can be improved slightly, but close to \( \alpha = \frac{1}{2} \) a new idea may be needed for upper and lower bounds that agree up to a constant multiple, independent of \( \frac{1}{2} - \alpha \). For \( \alpha < \frac{1}{2} \), there is the exact formula of Chappell and Gimbel.

To conclude, we reiterate a problem left open by Erdős and Pach, which asks about arguably the most interesting case for \( R^*_f(k) \), the symmetric choice \( t = \frac{1}{2}(k - 1) \), rounded up or down. They showed that

\[
R^*_f\left(\frac{1}{2}(k - 1)\right) = \Omega\left(\frac{k \ln k}{\ln \ln k}\right) \quad \text{and} \quad R^*_f\left(\frac{1}{2}(k - 1)\right) = O(k^2),
\]
but what is the correct behavior of $R^*_k((k-1)k)$? Note added: subsequent to the present work, three of the authors have improved the upper bound to $O(k \ln^2 k)$ [11].

Acknowledgment. We thank John Gimbel for stimulating discussions as well as for sending us the manuscript [2].

REFERENCES