

Scale-free networks

Last updated: 2024/11/14, 21:12:13 EST

Principles of Complex Systems, Vols. 1, 2, & 3D
CSYS/MATH 6701, 6713, & a pretend number, 2024–2025

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Santa Fe Institute | University of Vermont



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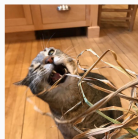
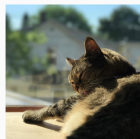
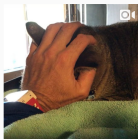
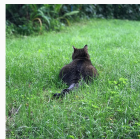
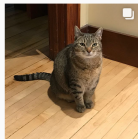
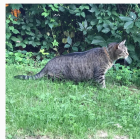
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Real networks with power-law degree distributions became known as **scale-free** networks.

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- Real networks with power-law degree distributions became known as **scale-free** networks.
- Scale-free refers specifically to the **degree distribution** having a **power-law decay** in its tail:

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$$P_k \sim k^{-\gamma} \text{ for 'large' } k$$




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- One of the seminal works in complex networks:



“Emergence of scaling in random networks” 
Barabási and Albert,
Science, **286**, 509–511, 1999. ^[2]

Times cited: **~ 43,853**  (as of May 19, 2023)

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- Somewhat misleading nomenclature ...



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Scale-free networks are **not fractal** in any sense.



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Usually talking about networks whose links are **abstract, relational, informational**, ...(non-physical)



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Primary example: hyperlink network of the Web



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- Scale-free networks are **not fractal** in any sense.
- Usually talking about networks whose links are **abstract, relational, informational**, ...(non-physical)
- Primary example: hyperlink network of the Web
- Much arguing about whether or networks are 'scale-free' or not...



Some real data (we are feeling brave):

From Barabási and Albert's original paper^[2]:

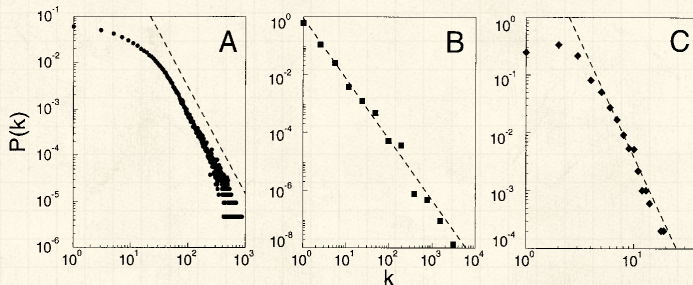


Fig. 1. The distribution function of connectivities for various large networks. (A) Actor collaboration graph with $N = 212,250$ vertices and average connectivity $\langle k \rangle = 28.78$. (B) WWW, $N = 325,729$, $\langle k \rangle = 5.46$ (6). (C) Power grid data, $N = 4941$, $\langle k \rangle = 2.67$. The dashed lines have slopes (A) $\gamma_{\text{actor}} = 2.3$, (B) $\gamma_{\text{www}} = 2.1$ and (C) $\gamma_{\text{power}} = 4$.

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Random networks: largest components

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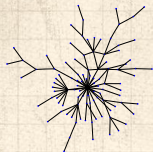
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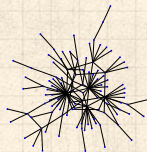
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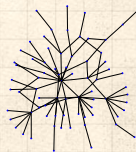
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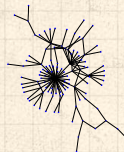
$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.8$$



$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 2.05333$$



$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.66667$$



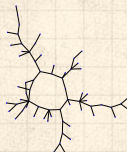
$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.92$$



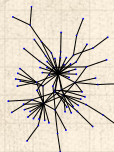
$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.6$$



$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.50667$$



$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.62667$$



$$\gamma = 2.5$$
$$\langle k \rangle = 1.8$$



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The big deal:



We move beyond describing networks to finding **mechanisms** for why certain networks are the way they are.

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The big deal:



We move beyond describing networks to finding mechanisms for why certain networks are the way they are.

A big deal for scale-free networks:



How does the exponent γ depend on the mechanism?



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The big deal:

 We move beyond describing networks to finding mechanisms for why certain networks are the way they are.

A big deal for scale-free networks:

 How does the exponent γ depend on the mechanism?

 Do the mechanism details matter?



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Barabási-Albert model = BA model.

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Barabási-Albert model = BA model.



Key ingredients:

Growth and **Preferential Attachment** (PA).

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 **Step 1:** start with m_0 disconnected nodes.

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In essence, we have a **rich-gets-richer** scheme.



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In essence, we have a **rich-gets-richer** scheme.



Yes, we've seen this all before in Simon's model.



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BA model



Definition: A_k is the attachment kernel for a node with degree k .

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Definition: A_k is the **attachment kernel** for a node with degree k .



For the original model:

$$A_k = k$$

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where $N(t) = m_0 + t$ is # nodes at time t

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where $N(t) = m_0 + t$ is # nodes at time t
and $N_k(t)$ is # degree k nodes at time t .



Approximate analysis



When $(N + 1)$ th node is added, the expected increase in the degree of node i is

$$E(k_{i,N+1} - k_{i,N}) \simeq m \frac{k_{i,N}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N(t)} k_j(t)}.$$

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Dispense with Expectation by assuming (hoping) that over longer time frames, degree growth will be smooth and stable.



Approximate analysis



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Approximate $k_{i,N+1} - k_{i,N}$ with $\frac{d}{dt} k_{i,t}$:



Approximate analysis



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Dispense with Expectation by assuming (hoping) that over longer time frames, degree growth will be smooth and stable.



Approximate $k_{i,N+1} - k_{i,N}$ with $\frac{d}{dt} k_{i,t}$:

$$\frac{d}{dt} k_{i,t} = m \frac{k_i(t)}{\sum_{j=1}^{N(t)} k_j(t)}$$

where $t = N(t) - m_0$.





Deal with denominator: each added node brings m new edges.

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$$\therefore \sum_{j=1}^{N(t)} k_j(t) = 2tm$$

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The node degree equation now simplifies:

$$\frac{d}{dt} k_{i,t} = m \frac{k_i(t)}{\sum_{j=1}^{N(t)} k_j(t)}$$





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The node degree equation now simplifies:

$$\frac{d}{dt} k_{i,t} = m \frac{k_i(t)}{\sum_{j=1}^{N(t)} k_j(t)} = m \frac{k_i(t)}{2mt} = \frac{1}{2t} k_i(t)$$





Deal with denominator: each added node brings m new edges.

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Next find c_i ...





Know i th node appears at time

$$t_{i,\text{start}} = \begin{cases} i - m_0 & \text{for } i > m_0 \\ 0 & \text{for } i \leq m_0 \end{cases}$$





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 First-mover advantage: Early nodes do **best**.





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Clearly, a Ponzi scheme



We are already at the Zipf distribution:



Degree of node i is the size of the i th ranked node:

$$k_i(t) = m \left(\frac{t}{t_{i,\text{start}}} \right)^{1/2} \text{ for } t \geq t_{i,\text{start}}.$$

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$$t_{i,\text{start}} = \begin{cases} i - m_0 & \text{for } i > m_0 \\ 0 & \text{for } i \leq m_0 \end{cases}$$

so $t_{i,\text{start}} \sim i$ which is the rank.

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We then have:

$$k_i \propto i^{-1/2} = i^{-\alpha}.$$

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Our connection $\alpha = 1/(\gamma - 1)$ or $\gamma = 1 + 1/\alpha$ then gives

$$\gamma = 1 + 1/(1/2) = 3.$$

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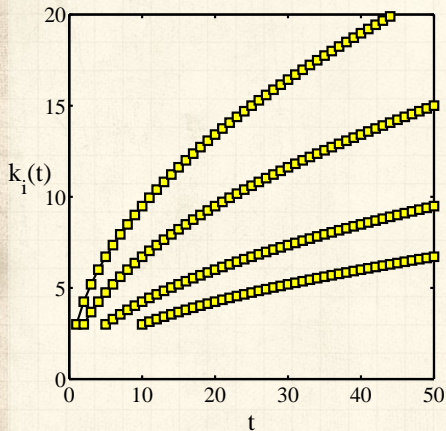
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$m = 3$



$t_{i,start} =$

1, 2, 5, and 10.



Degree distribution



So what's the degree distribution at time t ?

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Degree distribution



So what's the **degree distribution** at time t ?



Use fact that birth time for added nodes is distributed uniformly between time 0 and t :

$$\Pr(t_{i,\text{start}})dt_{i,\text{start}} \simeq \frac{dt_{i,\text{start}}}{t}$$

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Also use

$$k_i(t) = m \left(\frac{t}{t_{i,\text{start}}} \right)^{1/2} \Rightarrow t_{i,\text{start}} = \frac{m^2 t}{k_i(t)^2}.$$

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Transform variables—Jacobian:

$$\frac{dt_{i,\text{start}}}{dk_i} = -2 \frac{m^2 t}{k_i(t)^3}.$$

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Degree distribution



$$\mathbf{Pr}(k_i)dk_i = \mathbf{Pr}(t_{i,\text{start}})dt_{i,\text{start}}$$

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$$= 2 \frac{m^2}{k_i(t)^3} dk_i$$

$$\propto k_i^{-3} dk_i.$$

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We thus have a very specific prediction of $\Pr(k) \sim k^{-\gamma}$ with $\gamma = 3$.



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 Typical for real networks: $2 < \gamma < 3$.



Degree distribution

 We thus have a very specific prediction of $\Pr(k) \sim k^{-\gamma}$ with $\gamma = 3$.

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 Range true more generally for events with size distributions that have power-law tails.



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 $2 < \gamma < 3$: finite mean and 'infinite' variance





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 In practice, $\gamma < 3$ means variance is governed by upper cutoff.





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 Range true more generally for events with size distributions that have power-law tails.

 $2 < \gamma < 3$: finite mean and 'infinite' variance (wild)

 In practice, $\gamma < 3$ means variance is governed by upper cutoff.

 $\gamma > 3$: finite mean and variance (mild)



Back to that real data:

From Barabási and Albert's original paper [2]:

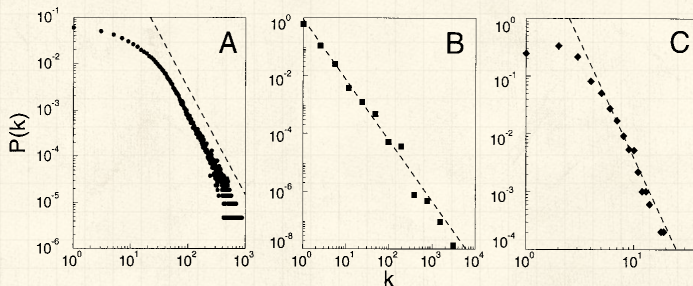


Fig. 1. The distribution function of connectivities for various large networks. **(A)** Actor collaboration graph with $N = 212,250$ vertices and average connectivity $\langle k \rangle = 28.78$. **(B)** WWW, $N = 325,729$, $\langle k \rangle = 5.46$ (6). **(C)** Power grid data, $N = 4941$, $\langle k \rangle = 2.67$. The dashed lines have slopes (A) $\gamma_{\text{actor}} = 2.3$, (B) $\gamma_{\text{www}} = 2.1$ and (C) $\gamma_{\text{power}} = 4$.



Examples

Web	$\gamma \simeq 2.1$ for in-degree
Web	$\gamma \simeq 2.45$ for out-degree
Movie actors	$\gamma \simeq 2.3$
Words (synonyms)	$\gamma \simeq 2.8$

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The Internet **s** is a different business...

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Things to do and questions



Vary attachment kernel.



Vary mechanisms:

1. Add edge deletion
2. Add node deletion
3. Add edge rewiring



Deal with directed versus undirected networks.

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Important Q.: Are there distinct universality classes for these networks?

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Q.: How does changing the model affect γ ?



Q.: Do we need preferential attachment and growth?



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Q.: Do model details matter?





Things to do and questions


 Vary attachment kernel.


 Vary mechanisms:


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2. Add node deletion
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 Deal with directed versus undirected networks.

 **Important Q.:** Are there distinct universality classes for these networks?

 Q.: How does changing the model affect γ ?

 Q.: Do we need preferential attachment and growth?

 Q.: Do model details matter? Maybe ...

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 Let's look at preferential attachment (PA) a little more closely.



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 PA implies arriving nodes have **complete knowledge** of the existing network's degree distribution.



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- Let's look at preferential attachment (PA) a little more closely.
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 We need to know what everyone's degree is...



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 PA is \therefore an **outrageous** assumption of node capability.



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 PA is \therefore an **outrageous** assumption of node capability.

 But a **very simple mechanism** saves the day...



Preferential attachment through randomness



Instead of attaching preferentially, allow new nodes to attach randomly.

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Now add an **extra step**: new nodes then connect to some of their friends' friends.

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Preferential attachment through randomness

-  Instead of attaching preferentially, allow new nodes to attach randomly.
-  Now add an **extra step**: new nodes then connect to some of their friends' friends.
-  Can also do this **at random**.

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Preferential attachment through randomness

 Instead of attaching preferentially, allow new nodes to attach randomly.

 Now add an **extra step**: new nodes then connect to some of their friends' friends.

 Can also do this **at random**.

 Assuming the existing network is random, we know probability of a **random friend** having degree k is

$$Q_k \propto kP_k$$

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 So **rich-gets-richer** scheme can now be seen to work in a natural way.

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Robustness

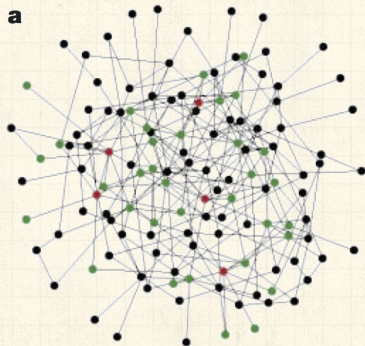


Albert et al., Nature, 2000:

“Error and attack tolerance of complex networks” [1]

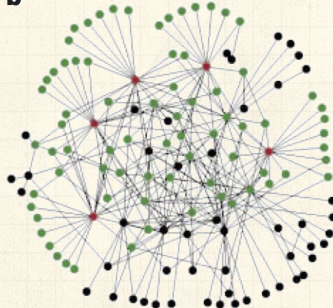


Standard random networks (Erdős-Rényi)
versus Scale-free networks:



Exponential

b



Scale-free

from Albert et al., 2000

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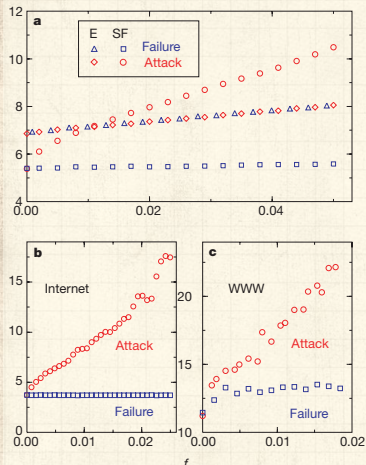
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Plots of network diameter as a function of fraction of nodes removed



Erdős-Rényi versus scale-free networks



blue symbols = random removal



red symbols = targeted removal (most connected first)

from Albert et al., 2000





Scale-free networks are thus **robust to random failures** yet
fragile to targeted ones.



Robustness



Scale-free networks are thus **robust to random failures** yet **fragile to targeted ones**.



All very reasonable: **Hubs** are a big deal.

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 Scale-free networks are thus **robust to random failures** yet **fragile to targeted ones**.

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 **But:** next issue is whether hubs are vulnerable or not.








-  Scale-free networks are thus **robust to random failures** yet **fragile to targeted ones**.
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 1. Physically larger nodes that may be harder to 'target'



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 1. Physically larger nodes that may be harder to 'target'
 2. or subnetworks of smaller, normal-sized nodes.




-  Scale-free networks are thus **robust to random failures** yet **fragile to targeted ones**.
-  All very reasonable: **Hubs** are a big deal.
-  **But:** next issue is whether hubs are vulnerable or not.
-  Representing all webpages as the same size node is obviously a stretch (e.g., google vs. a random person's webpage)
-  Most connected nodes are either:
 1. Physically larger nodes that may be harder to 'target'
 2. or subnetworks of smaller, normal-sized nodes.
-  Need to explore cost of various targeting schemes.



Not a robust paper:



“The “Robust yet Fragile” nature of the Internet” 

Doyle et al.,

Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci., **2005**, 14497–14502,
2005. ^[3]



HOT networks versus scale-free networks



Same degree distributions, different arrangements.



Doyle *et al.* take a look at the actual Internet.



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Fooling with the mechanism:



2001: Krapivsky & Redner (KR) ^[4] explored the **general attachment kernel**:



Fooling with the mechanism:


 2001: Krapivsky & Redner (KR) ^[4] explored the **general attachment kernel**:

$$\Pr(\text{attach to node } i) \propto A_k = k_i^\nu$$

where A_k is the attachment kernel and $\nu > 0$.




Fooling with the mechanism:

 2001: Krapivsky & Redner (KR) ^[4] explored the **general attachment kernel**:

$$\Pr(\text{attach to node } i) \propto A_k = k_i^\nu$$

where A_k is the attachment kernel and $\nu > 0$.

 KR also looked at changing the details of the attachment kernel.



Generalized model



We'll follow KR's approach using rate equations ↗.

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Generalized model



We'll follow KR's approach using rate equations .



Here's the set up:

$$\frac{dN_k}{dt} = \frac{1}{A} [A_{k-1}N_{k-1} - A_kN_k] + \delta_{k1}$$

where N_k is the number of nodes of degree k .

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1. One node with one link is added per unit time.

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2. The **first term** corresponds to degree $k - 1$ nodes becoming degree k nodes.

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Generalized model



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Generalized model



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(e.g., a connected pair)



Generalized model



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5. Seed with some initial network
(e.g., a connected pair)
6. Detail: $A_0 = 0$



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In general, probability of attaching to a **specific node** of degree k at time t is

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Generalized model



In general, probability of attaching to a **specific node** of degree k at time t is

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Generalized model



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Generalized model



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E.g., for BA model, $A_k = k$ and $A = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} k N_k(t)$.

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For $A_k = k$, we have

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Generalized model



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since one edge is being added per unit time.



Generalized model



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Detail: we are ignoring initial seed network's edges.

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So now

$$\frac{dN_k}{dt} = \frac{1}{A} [A_{k-1}N_{k-1} - A_k N_k] + \delta_{k1}$$

becomes

$$\frac{dN_k}{dt} = \frac{1}{2t} [(k-1)N_{k-1} - kN_k] + \delta_{k1}$$

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As for BA method, look for steady-state growing solution:

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As for BA method, look for steady-state growing solution:

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We replace dN_k/dt with $dn_k t/dt = n_k$.

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As for BA method, look for steady-state growing solution:

$$N_k = n_k t.$$



We replace dN_k/dt with $dn_k t/dt = n_k$.



We arrive at a difference equation:

$$n_k = \frac{1}{2t} [(k-1)n_{k-1} - kn_k] + \delta_{k1}$$



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Universality?



As expected, we have the same result as for the BA model:

$$N_k(t) = n_k(t)t \propto k^{-3}t \text{ for large } k.$$

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Now: what happens if we start playing around with the attachment kernel A_k ?



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 KR's natural modification: $A_k = k^\nu$ with $\nu \neq 1$.



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KR's natural modification: $A_k = k^\nu$ with $\nu \neq 1$.

But we'll first explore a more subtle modification of A_k made by Krapivsky/Redner ^[4]



Universality?

As expected, we have the same result as for the BA model:

$$N_k(t) = n_k(t)t \propto k^{-3}t \text{ for large } k.$$

Now: what happens if we start playing around with the attachment kernel A_k ?

Again, we're asking if the result $\gamma = 3$ universal?


KR's natural modification: $A_k = k^\nu$ with $\nu \neq 1$.

But we'll first explore a more subtle modification of A_k made by Krapivsky/Redner^[4]


Keep A_k linear in k but tweak details.






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 But we'll first explore a more subtle modification of A_k made by Krapivsky/Redner ^[4]

 Keep A_k **linear in k** but tweak details.

 **Idea:** Relax from $A_k = k$ to $A_k \sim k$ as $k \rightarrow \infty$.



Universality?



Recall we used the normalization:

$$A(t) = \sum_{k'=1}^{\infty} k' N_{k'}(t) \simeq 2t \text{ for large } t.$$

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 We'll find μ later and make sure that our assumption is consistent.



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where we only know the asymptotic behavior of A_k .

 We assume that $A = \mu t$

 We'll find μ later and make sure that our assumption is consistent.

 As before, also assume $N_k(t) = n_k t$.



Universality?



For $A_k = k$ we had

$$n_k = \frac{1}{2} [(k-1)n_{k-1} - kn_k] + \delta_{k1}$$

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Universality?



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This now becomes

$$n_k = \frac{1}{\mu} [A_{k-1}n_{k-1} - A_k n_k] + \delta_{k1}$$

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Again two cases:

$$k=1 : n_1 = \frac{\mu}{\mu + A_1};$$

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Again two cases:

$$k = 1 : n_1 = \frac{\mu}{\mu + A_1}; \quad k > 1 : n_k = n_{k-1} \frac{A_{k-1}}{\mu + A_k}.$$

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Universality?



Time for pure excitement: Find **asymptotic behavior** of n_k given $A_k \rightarrow k$ as $k \rightarrow \infty$.

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Time for pure excitement: Find **asymptotic behavior** of n_k given $A_k \rightarrow k$ as $k \rightarrow \infty$.



For large k , we find:

$$n_k = \frac{\mu}{A_k} \prod_{j=1}^k \frac{1}{1 + \frac{\mu}{A_j}} \propto k^{-\mu-1}$$



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 For large k , we find:

$$n_k = \frac{\mu}{A_k} \prod_{j=1}^k \frac{1}{1 + \frac{\mu}{A_j}} \propto k^{-\mu-1}$$

 Since μ depends on A_k , **details matter...**



Universality?



Now we need to find μ .

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Universality?



Now we need to find μ .



Our assumption again: $A = \mu t = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} N_k(t) A_k$

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Now we need to find μ .



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Since $N_k = n_k t$, we have the simplification $\mu = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} n_k A_k$

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Now substitute in our expression for n_k :

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Universality?



Now we need to find μ .



Our assumption again: $A = \mu t = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} N_k(t) A_k$



Since $N_k = n_k t$, we have the simplification $\mu = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} n_k A_k$



Now substitute in our expression for n_k :

$$1\cancel{\mu} = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} \frac{\cancel{\mu}}{\cancel{A_k}} \prod_{j=1}^k \frac{1}{1 + \frac{\mu}{A_j} \cancel{A_k}}$$



Universality?

- Now we need to find μ .
- Our assumption again: $A = \mu t = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} N_k(t) A_k$
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- Closed form expression for μ .

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Universality?

- Now we need to find μ .
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- Closed form expression for μ .
- We can solve for μ in some cases.



Universality?

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Closed form expression for μ .

We can solve for μ in some cases.

Our assumption that $A = \mu t$ looks to be not too horrible.



Universality?



Consider tunable $A_1 = \alpha$ and $A_k = k$ for $k \geq 2$.

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Universality?



Consider tunable $A_1 = \alpha$ and $A_k = k$ for $k \geq 2$.



Again, we can find $\gamma = \mu + 1$ by finding μ .

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 Closed form expression for μ :

$$\frac{\mu}{\alpha} = \sum_{k=2}^{\infty} \frac{\Gamma(k+1)\Gamma(2+\mu)}{\Gamma(k+\mu+1)}$$

#mathisfun

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$$\mu(\mu - 1) = 2\alpha \Rightarrow \mu = \frac{1 + \sqrt{1 + 8\alpha}}{2}.$$

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$$\mu(\mu-1) = 2\alpha \Rightarrow \mu = \frac{1 + \sqrt{1+8\alpha}}{2}.$$

 Since $\gamma = \mu + 1$, we have

$$0 \leq \alpha < \infty \Rightarrow 2 \leq \gamma < \infty$$

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 Crazyiness...

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Sublinear attachment kernels



Rich-get-somewhat-richer:

$$A_k \sim k^\nu \text{ with } 0 < \nu < 1.$$

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$$A_k \sim k^\nu \text{ with } 0 < \nu < 1.$$



General finding by Krapivsky and Redner: ^[4]

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-c_1 k^{1-\nu}} + \text{correction terms}.$$

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 Stretched exponentials (truncated power laws).



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 aka Weibull distributions.



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 **Universality:** now details of kernel **do not** matter.



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 General finding by Krapivsky and Redner: ^[4]

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-c_1 k^{1-\nu}} + \text{correction terms}.$$

 Stretched exponentials (truncated power laws).

 aka Weibull distributions.

 **Universality:** now details of kernel **do not** matter.

 Distribution of degree is universal providing $\nu < 1$.



Sublinear attachment kernels

Details:



For $1/2 < \nu < 1$:

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-\mu \left(\frac{k^{1-\nu} - 2^{1-\nu}}{1-\nu} \right)}$$

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Details:

 For $1/2 < \nu < 1$:

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-\mu \left(\frac{k^{1-\nu} - 2^{1-\nu}}{1-\nu} \right)}$$

 For $1/3 < \nu < 1/2$:

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-\mu \frac{k^{1-\nu}}{1-\nu} + \frac{\mu^2}{2} \frac{k^{1-2\nu}}{1-2\nu}}$$



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Details:

 For $1/2 < \nu < 1$:

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-\mu \left(\frac{k^{1-\nu} - 2^{1-\nu}}{1-\nu} \right)}$$

 For $1/3 < \nu < 1/2$:

$$n_k \sim k^{-\nu} e^{-\mu \frac{k^{1-\nu}}{1-\nu} + \frac{\mu^2}{2} \frac{k^{1-2\nu}}{1-2\nu}}$$

 And for $1/(r+1) < \nu < 1/r$, we have r pieces in exponential.



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Rich-get-much-richer:

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Rich-get-much-richer:

$$A_k \sim k^\nu \text{ with } \nu > 1.$$



Now a **winner-take-all** mechanism.



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Rich-get-much-richer:

$$A_k \sim k^\nu \text{ with } \nu > 1.$$



Now a **winner-take-all** mechanism.



One single node ends up being connected to almost all other nodes.



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References

 Rich-get-much-richer:

$$A_k \sim k^\nu \text{ with } \nu > 1.$$

 Now a **winner-take-all** mechanism.

 One single node ends up being connected to almost all other nodes.

 For $\nu > 2$, all but a finite # of nodes connect to one node.



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Turning the corner:

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References

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