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More about subcolorings *

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Abstract

A subcoloring is a vertex coloring of a graph in which every color class induces a disjoint union of cliques. We derive a number of results on the combinatorics, the algorithmics, and the complexity of subcolorings.

On the negative side, we prove that 2-subcoloring is NP-hard for comparability graphs, and that 3-subcoloring is NP-hard for AT-free graphs and for complements of planar graphs. On the positive side, we derive polynomial time algorithms for 2-subcoloring of complements of planar graphs, and for r-subcoloring of interval and of permutation graphs. Moreover, we prove asymptotically best possible upper bounds on the subchromatic number of interval graphs, chordal graphs, and permutation graphs in terms of the number of vertices.

Keywords: graph coloring; subcoloring; special graph classes; polynomial time algorithm; computational complexity.

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1 Introduction

We denote by $G = (V, E)$ a finite undirected and simple graph. The *complement* $\overline{G}$ of $G = (V, E)$ is the graph on V with edge set $\overline{E}$ such that $\{u, v\} \in \overline{E}$ if and only if $\{u, v\} \notin E$. For a set of graphs $\mathcal{G}$, we denote by $\overline{\mathcal{G}}$ the set of complements of graphs from $\mathcal{G}$; hence $G \in \mathcal{G}$ if and only if $\overline{G} \in \overline{\mathcal{G}}$. Let $G = (V_G, E_G)$ and $H = (V_H, E_H)$ be graphs with $V_G \cap V_H = \emptyset$. The *disjoint union* $G \dot{\cup} H$ is the graph with vertex set $V_G \cup V_H$ and edge set $E_G \cup E_H$. The *join* $G \vee H$ of G and H is the graph with vertex set $V_G \cup V_H$ and edge set $E_G \cup E_H \cup \{\{u, v\} \colon u \in V_G, v \in V_H\}$). Finally, $G \ltimes H$ denotes the graph that results by adding a new vertex v to the disjoint union of G and H, and by joining v to all the vertices in G and H.

For every non-empty $W \subseteq V$, the subgraph of $G = (V, E)$ induced by W is denoted by $G[W]$. A *clique* C of a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a non-empty subset of V such that all the vertices of C are pairwise adjacent, i.e., $G[C]$ is a complete graph. The maximum size of a clique in G is denoted by $\omega(G)$. A subset of vertices $I \subseteq V$ is *independent* if no two of its elements are adjacent. An *r-coloring* of the vertices of a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a partition $V_1, V_2, \ldots, V_r$ of V; the r sets V_j are called the *color classes* of the r-coloring. An r-coloring is *proper* if every color class is an independent set. The *chromatic number* $\chi(G)$ is the minimum value r for which a proper r-coloring exists.

Evidently, an r-coloring is proper if and only if for every color class V_j the induced subgraph $G[V_j]$ is the union of complete graphs of cardinality one. This awkward reformulation leads to several interesting generalizations of the classical chromatic number.

- An r-coloring $V_1, V_2, \ldots, V_r$ is an *r-subcoloring*, if for every color class the induced subgraph $G[V_i]$ is the disjoint union of complete graphs (there is no restriction on the sizes of these complete graphs).
- An r-coloring is a *cocoloring*, if for every color class the induced subgraph $G[V_i]$ either is a clique or an independent set.
- Let F be some fixed graph. An r-coloring is an *F-free coloring*, if for every color class the induced subgraph $G[V_i]$ does not contain F as an induced subgraph.

The *subchromatic number* $\chi_{sub}(G)$, the *cochromatic number* $\chi_{co}(G)$, and the *F-free chromatic number* $\chi(F, G)$ of a graph G, is the smallest number r for which G has an r-subcoloring, an r-cocoloring, and an F-free r-coloring, respectively. Note that a coloring is a subcoloring if and only if it is a P_3-free coloring (where P_k denotes the path on k vertices).

In this paper, we study the algorithmic and combinatorial behavior of the subchromatic number on various classes of specially structured graphs.

1.1 Known results

Finding proper colorings for various classes of perfect graphs is a long studied and well understood problem. We refer to the book [9] of Golumbic for a classical source on algorithmic aspects of perfect graphs. By a celebrated result of Grötschel, Lovász & Schrijver [10], the chromatic number of a perfect graph can be computed in polynomial time. Simple and fast algorithms are known for different subclasses of perfect graphs like chordal graphs, comparability graphs, permutation graphs etc. However, even small steps away from proper coloring towards

more general concepts like subcoloring and cocoloring increase the computational complexity of coloring enormously.

For instance, the cochromatic number is NP-hard to compute even for permutation graphs (Wagner [14]). Gimbel, Kratsch & Stewart [7] proved the NP-hardness of computing the cochromatic number for circle graphs and line graphs of comparability graphs, and they derived a polynomial time algorithm for chordal graphs. Achlioptas [1] proved that for any graph F with at least three vertices and for any fixed integer $r \geq 2$, the problem of deciding whether a given input graph has an F-free r-coloring is NP-hard. By putting $F = P_3$, we get that r-subcoloring is NP-hard for any fixed integer $r \geq 2$. Fiala, Jansen, Le & Seidel [6] strengthened this hardness result to input graphs that are triangle-free, planar, and have maximum vertex degree four. On the positive side, [6] gave polynomial time algorithms for the subcoloring problem on cographs and on graphs of bounded treewidth.

The literature also contains a number of results on P_4-free colorings: Gimbel & Nešetřil [8] showed that P_4-free r-coloring in $r = 2$ or $r = 3$ colors is NP-hard even for planar input graphs. Since P_4 is isomorphic to its complement $\overline{P}_4$, we conclude that P_4-free coloring in 2 or 3 colors is NP-hard for complements of planar graphs. Hoàng & Le [11] proved that P_4-free 2-coloring is NP-hard for comparability and cocomparability graphs.

Now let us list a number of useful combinatorial results from the literature on subcolorings and cocolorings.

Proposition 1.1. *For any graph G, $\chi_{sub}(G) \leq \chi_{co}(G) \leq \min\{\chi(G), \chi(\overline{G})\}$.*

Proposition 1.2. *(Mynhardt & Broere [13])*
Let $K_{m,m,\ldots,m}$ be the complete m-partite graph containing m classes of m vertices. Then $\chi_{sub}(K_{m,m,\ldots,m}) = \chi_{co}(K_{m,m,\ldots,m}) = \chi(K_{m,m,\ldots,m}) = m$.

Proposition 1.3. *(Albertson, Jamison, Hedetniemi & Locke [2])*
Let G and H be graphs with $\chi_{sub}(G) \geq k$ and $\chi_{sub}(H) \geq k$. Then $\chi_{sub}(G \bowtie H) \geq k + 1$.

1.2 Our results

We study combinatorial, algorithmic and complexity aspects of the subcoloring problems. In particular, we derive the following results.

- For general n-vertex graphs the subchromatic number may be $\Theta(n/\log n)$; for perfect graphs, permutation graphs, and cographs, it may be $\Theta(\sqrt{n})$; for chordal graphs and interval graphs, it may be $\Theta(\log n)$. All these bounds are best possible up to constant factors. These results are proved in Section 2.

- For complements of planar graphs 2-subcoloring is polynomially solvable (Section 4) whereas 3-subcoloring is NP-hard (Section 3).

- For AT-free graphs, r-subcoloring is NP-hard for any fixed $r \geq 3$ (Section 3). For comparability graphs, r-subcoloring is NP-hard for any fixed $r \geq 2$ (Section 5.1).

- For interval graphs and for permutation graphs (Section 5.2) r-subcoloring is polynomially solvable for any fixed $r \geq 2$.

Figure 1 summarizes some of our results and illustrates the relations between some of the graph classes studied in this paper.

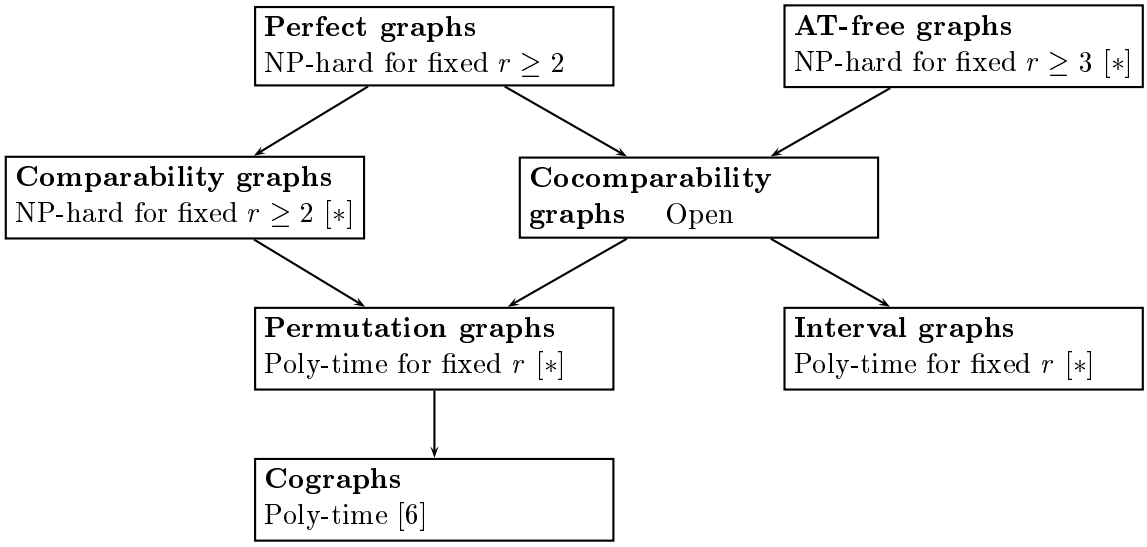

Figure 1: Summary of some of our results on r-subcoloring for special graph classes, and the containment relations between these classes. [$*$] denotes a contribution of this paper.

2 Upper and lower bound results

In this section we derive several bounds on the subchromatic number of graphs in terms of their number of vertices. We first state two useful results from the literature.

Proposition 2.1. *(Albertson, Jamison, Hedetniemi & Locke [2])*
For any graph G on n vertices, $\chi_{sub}(G) \leq 2n/(\log_2 n - 2) + O(n/(\log_2 n)^2)$.

Proposition 2.2. *(Erdős, Gimbel & Kratsch [5])*
For any perfect *graph G on n vertices, $\chi_{co}(G) \leq \lfloor \sqrt{2n + 1/4} - 1/2 \rfloor$.*

As our first result, we observe that up to constant factors the upper bound stated in Proposition 2.1 is best possible.

Lemma 2.3. *For every n, there exists a graph G on n vertices with $\chi_{sub}(G) \geq n/(2\log_2 n + 1)$.*

Proof. We slightly modify the famous argument of Erdős [4]. Consider the random graph on n vertices that contains every edge independently with probability 1/2.

A subset X of $k = 2\log_2 n + 1$ vertices is called *good*, if it induces a disjoint union of cliques, and thus constitutes a feasible color class for a subcoloring. It can be shown that the probability that some fixed set X is good is at most $k!/2^{\binom{k}{2}}$, and that the expected total number of good subsets of cardinality k is at most $\binom{n}{k} \cdot k!/2^{\binom{k}{2}} < 1$. Hence, there exists a graph G in the probability space that does not contain any good subset. In any subcoloring of G all color classes contain fewer than k vertices, and thus $\chi_{sub}(G) > n/k$. □

For perfect graphs, the subchromatic number is much smaller than $n/\log n$: Propositions 2.2 and 1.1 yield that for every perfect graph G on n vertices, $\chi_{sub}(G) \leq \chi_{co}(G) = O(\sqrt{n})$. Moreover, the complete bipartite graph $K_{m,m,\ldots,m}$ in Proposition 1.2 has $n = m^2$ vertices and satisfies

$\chi_{sub}(K_{m,m,\ldots,m}) = m = \sqrt{n}$. Since $K_{m,m,\ldots,m}$ is a perfect graph (in fact, it is even a cograph and a permutation graph), we get that up to constant factors the bound $\sqrt{n}$ in Proposition 2.2 gives the best possible bound for the subchromatic number of perfect graphs.

In the rest of this section, we will discuss interval graphs. We will show that for interval graphs the subchromatic number is bounded by $O(\log n)$.

Lemma 2.4. *For every interval graph G on n vertices, $\chi_{sub}(G) \leq \lfloor \log_2(n+1) \rfloor$. This bound is best possible.*

Proof. For the upper bound we use induction on n. The statement is clearly true for $n = 1$. Consider an interval representation of an interval graph G on n vertices; without loss of generality we assume that the left endpoints of the intervals are the integers $1, 2, \ldots, n$. If n is odd, we take an arbitrary maximal clique C that contains the interval with left endpoint $(n+1)/2$. Then every component of $G - C$ contains at most $(n-1)/2$ vertices. We color C by one color, and we use $\lfloor \log_2((n+1)/2) \rfloor$ additional colors to color all these components inductively. If n is even, a similar analysis goes through.

For showing that the bound $\lfloor \log_2(n+1) \rfloor$ is best possible, we consider the following graphs G_i: For $k = 1$, the graph G_1 consists of one vertex. For $k > 1$, we set $G_k = G_{k-1} \bowtie G_{k-1}$ where the new vertex is called v. Note that G_k has $2^k - 1$ vertices, and that by Proposition 1.3 $\chi_{sub}(G_k) = k$. Moreover, G_k is an interval graph; its interval representation can be obtained by putting two disjoint interval representations of G_{k-1} next to each other, and by adding one long interval that corresponds to the vertex v. □

We mention without proof that a similar inductive argument yields $\chi_{sub}(G) = O(\log n)$ for any *chordal* graph G.

3 Negative results: AT-free graphs

In this section we derive a generic NP-hardness result. As corollaries to this result, we derive the NP-hardness of 3-subcoloring for graphs with independence number two (and hence for AT-free graphs). For an integer $p \geq 1$ and a graph G, we denote by pG the disjoint union of p copies of G. We start with an auxiliary lemma.

Lemma 3.1. *For any graph G and for any integer $p \geq \chi(G)$, the chromatic number $\chi(G)$ of G coincides with the subchromatic number $\chi_{sub}(\overline{pG})$ of the graph $\overline{pG}$.*

Proof. It is trivial to see $\chi_{sub}(\overline{pG}) \leq \chi(G)$: Any independent set I in the graph G translates into a clique with $p|I|$ vertices in the graph $\overline{pG}$. Hence, any color class in a proper coloring of G corresponds to a feasible color class in a subcoloring of $\overline{pG}$.

On the other hand, we claim $\chi(G) \leq \chi_{sub}(\overline{pG})$. This statement is trivial if $\chi(G) = 1$, and from now on we assume that G contains at least one edge. Let $G_1, G_2, \ldots, G_p$ denote the p disjoint copies of G in the graph pG. Consider any coloring of pG in $k < \chi(G)$ colors. Then every subgraph G_i contains a monochromatic edge. Since $k < p$, there are two subgraphs G_i and G_j with $i \neq j$ that both contain a monochromatic edge of the same color. In $\overline{pG}$, the endpoints of these two monochromatic edges induce a monochromatic C_4, and thus $\overline{pG}$ contains a monochromatic P_3. □

Theorem 3.2. *Let $\mathcal{G}$ be a graph class that is closed under taking disjoint unions (that is, $G, H \in \mathcal{G}$ implies $G \dot{\cup} H \in \mathcal{G}$). Let r be an integer.*

If the proper r-coloring problem is NP-hard for graphs from $\mathcal{G}$, then the r-subcoloring problem is NP-hard for graphs from $\overline{\mathcal{G}}$.

Corollary 3.3. *The 3-subcoloring problem is NP-hard even when restricted to*

(a) graphs with independence number at most two,

(b) AT-free graphs,

(c) complements of planar graphs.

Corollary 3.4. *For any $\varepsilon > 0$, the subchromatic number of n-vertex graphs cannot be approximated within a factor of $n^{1/2-\varepsilon}$, unless* NP $\subseteq$ ZPP.

4 Positive results: Complements of planar graphs

Gimbel & Nešetřil [8] showed that deciding P_4-free 2-colorability of a planar graph is NP-hard. Since the complement of P_4 is again P_4, this implies that P_4-free 2-subcolorability is NP-hard for complements of planar graphs, too. Fiala, Jansen, Le & Seidel [6] showed that deciding 2-subcolorability of a planar graph is NP-hard. Surprisingly, we will show in this section that 2-subcolorability is polynomially solvable for complements of planar graphs. This will follow as a corollary from the main theorem of this section.

Theorem 4.1. *Let $\ell \geq 2$, and let $\mathcal{G}$ be a class of graphs that do not contain $K_{\ell,\ell}$ as an (induced or non-induced) subgraph. Then 2-subcolorability of a graph $G = (V, E)$ in $\overline{\mathcal{G}}$ can be decided in polynomial time $O(|V|^{3\ell})$.*

Before giving the proof of Theorem 4.1, we state two auxiliary lemmas.

Lemma 4.2. *Let H_i $(1 \leq i \leq m)$ be graphs with $|H_i| \leq \ell - 1$ such that the join $G = H_1 \vee H_2 \vee \cdots \vee H_m$ does not contain $K_{\ell,\ell}$ as an (induced or non-induced) subgraph. Then $|H_1| + |H_2| + \cdots + |H_m| \leq 3\ell - 3$.*

Proof. Suppose otherwise, and consider a counterexample with $|H_1|+|H_2|+\cdots+|H_m| \geq 3\ell-2$. Let k be the smallest index for which $q := |H_1| + |H_2| + \cdots + |H_k| \geq \ell$. Since $|H_k| \leq \ell - 1$ and since $|H_1| + |H_2| + \cdots + |H_{k-1}| \leq \ell - 1$ by the definition of k, we conclude that $q \leq 2\ell - 2$. Therefore $p := |H_{k+1}| + \cdots + |H_m| \geq \ell$ holds. But then the $q \geq \ell$ vertices in $H_1, \ldots, H_k$ on one side and the $p \geq \ell$ vertices in $H_{k+1}, \ldots, H_m$ on the other side span a $K_{\ell,\ell}$, the desired contradiction. □

Lemma 4.3. *Let G be a graph that does not contain $K_{\ell,\ell}$ as an (induced or non-induced) subgraph. Then for every $\overline{P_3}$-free coloring of G, each color class C is of one of the following two types:*

(A) the join $Q \vee I$ of a graph Q with at most $\ell - 1$ vertices and an independent set I;

(B) a graph R with at most $3\ell - 3$ vertices.

Proof. We use the fact that every $\overline{P_3}$-free graph is also P_4-free, and hence a cograph. We consider the cograph $G[C]$ induced by the color class C.

If $G[C]$ is not connected, then every connected component of this $\overline{P_3}$-free graph must consist of a single vertex. Hence, we are in case (A) with $Q = \emptyset$. In the remaining cases, $G[C]$ is a connected cograph and hence can be presented as the join $H_1 \vee H_2$ of two cographs H_1 and H_2 with $|H_1| \leq |H_2|$. Clearly, $|H_1| \leq \ell - 1$ since $G[C]$ does not contain $K_{\ell,\ell}$. If H_2 is not connected, then its vertex set induces an independent set. If H_2 is connected, then it again can be written as the join of two cographs. By repeating this procedure over and over again, we eventually find that $G[C]$ can be written as the join $H_1 \vee H_2 \vee \cdots \vee H_m$, where the graphs $H_1, \ldots, H_{m-1}$ all have at most $\ell - 1$ vertices, and where H_m is either a graph with at most $\ell - 1$ vertices or an independent set.

If $|H_m| \leq \ell - 1$, then we get from Lemma 4.2 that $|C| \leq 3\ell - 3$, and we are in case (B). If $|H_m| \geq \ell$, then H_m is an independent set. Moreover, $|H_1| + |H_2| + \cdots + |H_{m-1}| \leq \ell - 1$, since $G[C]$ does not contain $K_{\ell,\ell}$ as a subgraph. Hence, we are in case (A) with $I = H_m$ and $Q = H_1 \vee H_2 \vee \cdots \vee H_{m-1}$. □

Proof of Theorem 4.1. For the ease of exposition, we will deal with $\overline{P_3}$-free colorings of graphs from the class $\mathcal{G}$, instead of P_3-free colorings of graphs from the class $\overline{\mathcal{G}}$. Clearly, these two problems are equivalent. Now let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph from $\mathcal{G}$.

According to Lemma 4.3, in any $\overline{P_3}$-free 2-coloring of G both color classes must be of type (A) or (B). This yields the three possible cases (AA), (AB), and (BB). The two cases (AB) and (BB) involve a color class of type (B). They can be solved simultaneously by enumerating all $O(|V|^{3\ell-3})$ candidate sets for R. In any feasible solution, the graphs $G[R]$ and $G[V - R]$ both are $\overline{P_3}$-free, and this can be checked in $O(|V|^3)$ time.

We are left with the case (AA) where both color classes are of type (A). In this case we are looking for a partition of the vertex set V into four sets Q_1, Q_2, I_1, I_2 such that for $i = 1, 2$

- $0 \leq |Q_i| \leq \ell - 1$ holds,
- $G[Q_i]$ is a $\overline{P_3}$-free graph,
- $G[I_i]$ is an independent set,
- $G[Q_i] \vee G[I_i]$ is a subgraph of G.

Note that if $G[Q_i]$ is a $\overline{P_3}$-free graph and if $G[I_i]$ is an independent set, then also $G[Q_i] \vee G[I_i]$ is a $\overline{P_3}$-free graph.

We enumerate all $O(|V|^{2\ell-2})$ possible pairs of candidate sets for Q_1 and Q_2. For each such pair, we check whether $G[Q_1]$ and $G[Q_2]$ are $\overline{P_3}$-free. If they are not, then we move on to the next pair. If they are, then we try to split the remaining vertices in $Z := V - Q_1 - Q_2$ into the independent sets I_1 and I_2. A vertex $z \in Z$ is called *good for* I_i if it is adjacent to all vertices in Q_i. In any feasible solution, I_i only contains vertices that are good for it.

If there is a vertex $z \in Z$ that is neither good for I_1 nor for I_2, then we stop and move on to the next pair. Whenever a vertex $z \in Z$ is good for I_i and not good for the other independent set I_{1-i}, then we precolor z with color i. Then we check whether this precoloring can be extended to a proper 2-coloring of $G[Z]$; this can be done by standard methods in $O(|V| + |E|)$ time. If the precoloring can not be extended, then we move on to the next pair. If it can be extended,

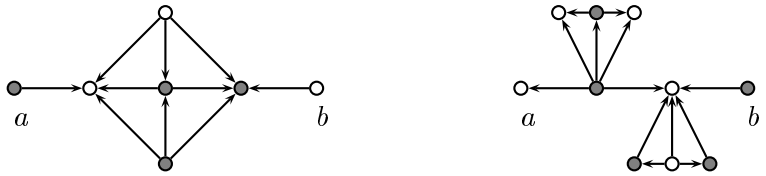

Figure 2: The gadget graphs *Source-Source* and *Source-Sink*.

then the two proper color classes I_1 and I_2 together with Q_1 and Q_2 constitute a solution to the $\overline{P_3}$-free coloring problem on G. □

Since planar graphs do not contain $K_{3,3}$ as a subgraph, we have the following corollary to Theorem 4.1. Corollaries 3.3.(c) and 4.4 together provide a complete classification of the complexity of subcolorings of complements of planar graphs.

Corollary 4.4. *The 2-subcoloring problem on complements of planar graphs is polynomially solvable.*

5 Perfect graphs

In this section, we discuss three classes of perfect graphs. In Section 5.1 we prove NP-hardness of r-subcolorability for every fixed $r \geq 2$ on comparability graphs. In Section 5.2, we give polynomial time dynamic programming algorithms for r-subcolorability for every fixed $r \geq 2$, on interval graphs and on permutation graphs.

5.1 Comparability graphs

In this section we prove the NP-hardness of r-subcolorings on comparability graphs for every fixed $r \geq 2$. Our NP-hardness reduction is based on the two graphs *Source-Source* (depicted to the left) and *Source-Sink* (depicted to the right) in Figure 2. Both graphs have two contact vertices a and b.

Lemma 5.1. *(a) The graphs* Source-Source *and* Source-Sink *are comparability graphs.*

(b) The graphs Source-Source *and* Source-Sink *possess a 2-subcoloring, in which no contact point receives the same color as its neighbor.*

(c) In every 2-subcoloring of Source-Source *and* Source-Sink*, the contact vertices a and b must receive different colors.*

Proof. Proof of (a). The orientations depicted in Figure 2 are transitive. Proof of (b). The 2-colorings depicted in Figure 2 are subcolorings. Proof of (c). By checking all possible cases. □

Statements (b) and (c) in Lemma 5.1 are extremely useful for our NP-hardness proofs: Consider a graph G, and let x, y be a pair of vertices in G. Let the graph G^+ result from G by adding an independent copy of a *Source-Source* or a *Source-Sink* gadget to G, and by identifying vertex x with contact point a, and vertex y with contact point b. Then the graph

G^+ has a 2-subcoloring, if and only if G has a 2-subcoloring in which x and y receive different colors.

Theorem 5.2. *The 2-subcoloring problem is NP-hard for comparability graphs.*

Proof. The proof is by a reduction from the NP-complete SET SPLITTING problem [12]: Given a finite set S and a collection C of triples over S, decide whether there is a partition of S into two subsets S_1 and S_2 such that every triple in C has a non-empty intersection with S_1 and with S_2.

Now let $C = \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_m\}$ be a collection of triples over a finite set $S = \{s_1, s_2, \ldots, s_n\}$. We construct the following graph G_C from C: For every $s_j \in S$, there is a corresponding vertex $x_j \in X$. For every triple $c_i = (s_i^1, s_i^2, s_i^3) \in C$, there are three corresponding vertices y_i^1, y_i^2, y_i^3 that form a P_3; there is an edge between y_i^1 and y_i^2, and there is an edge between y_i^2 and y_i^3. Vertex y_i^2 is called the *middle vertex* of this path, and vertices y_i^1 and y_i^3 are called the *end vertices*. Moreover, we introduce the following copies of the *Source-Source* and *Source-Sink* gadgets:

- For every occurrence of s_j in the *first* or *third* position of some triple $c_i = (s_i^1, s_i^2, s_i^3)$, the graph G_C contains a copy of the *Source-Source* gadget; the contact points are identified with vertex x_j, and with vertex y_i^1 (first position) or y_i^3 (third position), respectively.
- For every occurrence of s_j in the *second* position of some triple $c_i = (s_i^1, s_i^2, s_i^3)$, the graph G_C contains a copy of the *Source-Sink* gadget; the contact point b is identified with vertex x_j, and the contact point a is identified with vertex y_i^2.

This completes the definition of the graph G_C. We argue that G_C is a comparability graph by considering the following orientation: All *Source-Sink* and *Source-Source* gadgets are oriented as shown in Figure 2. The edges of the paths y_i^1, y_i^2, y_i^3 are directed towards the middle vertices y_i^2. In the resulting orientation, all vertices $x_j \in X$ and all end vertices of paths are sources, and all middle vertices of paths are sinks. Hence, arcs incident to these vertices can not violate transitivity, and the remaining arcs are within the gadgets.

We claim that G_C has a 2-subcoloring if and only if the corresponding instance of SET SPLITTING has answer YES.

Assume that G_C has a 2-subcoloring. We construct the following set splitting: If x_j is colored 1, then $s_j \in S_1$. If x_j is colored 2, then $s_j \in S_2$. Consider a triple $c_i = (s_i^1, s_i^2, s_i^3)$ in C. If it is contained in S_1 or S_2, then the three vertices that correspond to s_i^1, s_i^2, s_i^3 must all have the same color, and the three vertices y_i^1, y_i^2, y_i^3 on the P_3 corresponding to C_i must all have the opposite color. But then this P_3 would be monochromatic, and the coloring would not be a subcoloring.

Next assume that C possesses a set splitting of S into S_1 and S_2. We construct the following coloring: If $s_j \in S_1$, then we color vertex x_j by 1. If $s_j \in S_2$, then we color vertex x_j by 2. Then we extend this coloring to the *Source-Sink* and *Source-Source* gadgets according to Figure 2. It is easily checked that the resulting coloring is a 2-subcoloring of G_C. This completes the proof of the theorem. □

The NP-hardness result on 2-subcoloring for comparability graphs can easily be generalized to r-subcolorings with $r \geq 3$.

Theorem 5.3. *For any $r \geq 2$, the r-subcoloring problem on comparability graphs is NP-hard.*

Proof. We proceed by induction on r. The starting case $r = 2$ has been settled in Theorem 5.2. So assume that we have proved the statement up to r, and that we want to prove it for $r + 1$. This will be done as follows: Let G_r be a comparability graph G_r. Let $K = K_{r+1,\ldots,r+1}$ be the complete $(r + 1)$-partite graph containing $r + 1$ classes of $r + 1$ vertices. Recall that by Proposition 1.2, $\chi_{sub}(K) = r + 1$. We put $G_{r+1} = G_r \bowtie K$ where the new vertex is called v. Observe that G_{r+1} is a comparability graph: G_r and K are comparability graphs; we take their transitive orientations, and we orient all edges that are incident with the new vertex v away from v.

It can be shown that G_r is r-subcolorable if and only if G_{r+1} is $(r + 1)$-subcolorable. The details are omitted in this extended abstract. □

5.2 Interval and permutation graphs

In this section we design for every fixed $r \geq 2$ a polynomial time algorithm for the r-subcoloring problem on interval graphs. Let $G = (V, E)$ be an interval graph with $|V| = n$. Without loss of generality we may assume that the left endpoints of the intervals $I_1, \ldots, I_n$ that represent G are the integers $1, 2, \ldots, n$. For $k = 1, \ldots, n$ we denote by G_k the subgraph that is induced by the first k intervals $I_1, \ldots, I_k$. For a clique Cl in G, we denote by $\text{inter}(Cl) \neq \emptyset$ the intersection of all intervals in Cl and by $\text{union}(Cl)$ the union of all these intervals. Note that $\text{inter}(Cl)$ and $\text{union}(Cl)$ are also intervals.

Consider an arbitrary color class C in an arbitrary r-subcoloring of G_k. This color class C is the union of a number q of disjoint cliques $Cl_1, \ldots, Cl_q$; without loss of generality we assume that $\text{union}(Cl_i)$ always lies completely to the left of $\text{union}(Cl_{i+1})$. Now assume that we would like to extend the subcoloring to the graph G_{k+1} by adding interval I_{k+1} (with left endpoint $k + 1$) to color class C. There are only two possibilities for doing this:

(a) If the point $k + 1$ lies to the right of $\text{union}(Cl_q)$, then interval I_{k+1} may start a new clique in C.

(b) If the point $k + 1$ lies within $\text{inter}(Cl_q)$, then interval I_{k+1} may be added to the rightmost clique Cl_q in C.

Note furthermore that the *left* endpoints of $\text{inter}(Cl_q)$ and $\text{union}(Cl_q)$ do not exceed k. Hence, for deciding whether case (a) or case (b) holds, we only need to know the *right* endpoints of $\text{inter}(Cl_q)$ and $\text{union}(Cl_q)$. These observations suggest the following dynamic programming formulation.

Every state is specified by a $(2r + 1)$-tuple $[k; i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_r; u_1, \ldots, u_r]$. Here $1 \leq k \leq n$, and the variables $i_1, \ldots, i_r$ and $u_1, \ldots, u_r$ either specify right endpoints of some of the intervals $I_1, \ldots, I_k$, or they take the dummy value '$*$'. Hence, altogether there are $O(n^{2r+1})$ states. For every state, we compute a Boolean value $B[k; i_1, \ldots, i_r; u_1, \ldots, u_r]$. This Boolean value is TRUE, if and only if there exists a subcoloring of G_k with color classes $C_1, \ldots, C_r$ with the following properties for $j = 1, \ldots, r$: If C_j is empty, then $i_j = u_j = *$. And if C_j is non-empty, then i_j is the right endpoint of $\text{inter}(Cl)$ and u_j is the right endpoint of $\text{union}(Cl)$ of the rightmost clique Cl in color class C_j.

The values $B[k; i_1, \ldots, i_r; u_1, \ldots, u_r]$ are computed first for level $k = 1$, then for level $k = 2$, and so on up to level $k = n$. Since in any subcoloring for G_k the interval I_{k+1} can be added in at most two possible ways (a) and (b) to at most r color classes, every TRUE value at level k generates at most $2r$ TRUE values at level $k + 1$. The graph G is r-subcolorable, if and only if there exists a TRUE value at level n. Summarizing, we get the following theorem.

Theorem 5.4. *For any fixed r, the r-subcoloring problem for an interval graph with n vertices can be solved in $O(r \cdot n^{2r+1})$ time.*

For every fixed $r \geq 2$, there exists a polynomial $O(r \cdot n^{2r+1})$ time algorithm for the r-subcoloring problem on n-vertex permutation graphs. We use a dynamic programming approach that is quite similar to the above algorithm for interval graphs. For details, see the full version of this paper.

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