Rethinking the Expressive Power of GNNs via Graph Biconnectivity (ICLR 2023 Outstanding Paper)

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June 7, 2023

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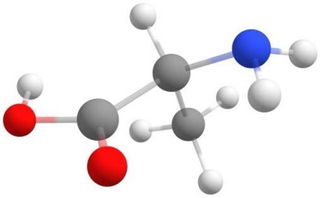
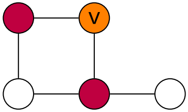
Introduction

- Graph neural networks (GNNs) have become the dominant approach for learning graph-structured data.



Introduction

- Message-passing neural networks (MPNNs) [Gilmer et al., 2017, Kipf and Welling, 2017, Hamilton et al., 2017, Veličković et al., 2018]:
  - Maintain a node feature $h(v)$ for each node v;
  - Update:
    $h^{(l)}(v) = \mathsf{UPDATE}^{(l)}\left(h^{(l-1)}(v), \mathsf{AGGR}^{(l)}\left(\{\!\!\{h^{(l-1)}(u) : u \in \mathcal{N}_G(v)\}\!\!\}\right)\right)$
  - Graph representation is obtained by pooling all node representations.



MPNN Update

Introduction

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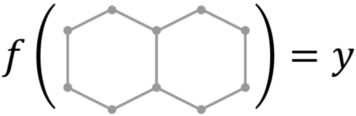
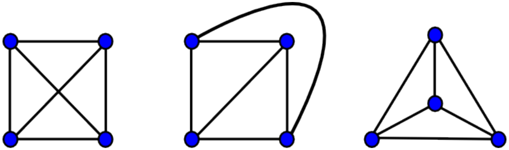
  - Graph representation is obtained by pooling all node representations.
- Examples:
  - GCN [Kipf and Welling, 2017]:
    $$\boldsymbol{h}_v^{(l)} = \mathrm{ReLU}\left(\boldsymbol{W}\left(\frac{1}{\mathcal{N}_G(v)+1}\sum_{u\in\mathcal{N}_G(v)\cup v}\boldsymbol{h}_u^{(l-1)}\right)+\boldsymbol{b}\right)$$
  - GIN [Xu et al., 2019]:
    $$\boldsymbol{h}_v^{(l)} = \mathrm{MLP}\left((1+\epsilon)\boldsymbol{h}_v^{(l-1)} + \sum_{u\in\mathcal{N}_G(v)}\boldsymbol{h}_u^{(l-1)}\right)$$

The Expressive Power of GNNs

- Are GNNs able to learn a general function on graphs?

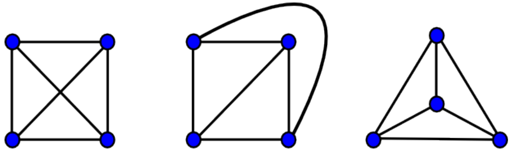


- A highly related condition: GNN should be able to distinguish topologically different graphs.



Graph isomorphism

- Graph isomorphism problem: Given two graphs $G = (\mathcal{V}_G, \mathcal{E}_G)$ and $H = (\mathcal{V}_H, \mathcal{E}_H)$, determine if there is a bijective mapping $f : \mathcal{V}_G \to \mathcal{V}_H$, such that $\{u, v\} \in \mathcal{E}_G$ iff $\{f(u), f(v)\} \in \mathcal{E}_H$.
- Hardness: no polynomial algorithm has been found.
- Therefore, to study the expressive power of GNNs, it is important to characterize what graphs GNNs cannot distinguish.
- Seminal work: Morris et al. [2019], Xu et al. [2019] first linked GNN expressivity to an important algorithm called Weisfeiler-Lehman test [Weisfeiler and Leman, 1968].



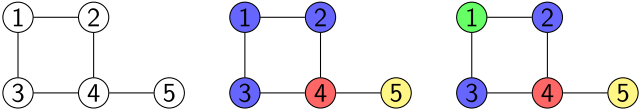
The Classic Weisfeiler-Lehman Test

- Given a graph $G = (\mathcal{V}, \mathcal{E})$, 1-WL computes a color mapping $\chi_G : \mathcal{V}_G \to \mathcal{C}$ by iteratively refining each node color using its neighboring node colors.

Algorithm 1: The 1-dimensional Weisfeiler-Lehman Algorithm

Initialize: $\chi_G^0(v) := c$ for all $v \in \mathcal{V}$ ($c \in \mathcal{C}$ is a fixed color)
for $t \leftarrow 1$ **to** T **do**
    for each $v \in \mathcal{V}$ **do**
        $\chi_G^t(v) := \mathrm{hash}\left(\chi_G^{t-1}(v), \{\!\{\chi_G^{t-1}(u) : u \in \mathcal{N}_G(v)\}\!\}\right)$
Return: χ_G^T

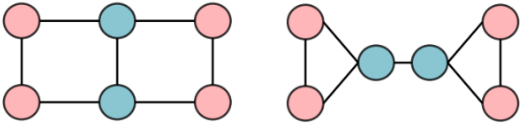
- If $\{\!\{\chi_G(v) : v \in \mathcal{V}_G\}\!\} \neq \{\!\{\chi_H(v) : v \in \mathcal{V}_H\}\!\}$, then G is not isomorphic to H!



Example of 1-WL (Color refinement) iterations.

MPNNs are at Most as Expressive as 1-WL

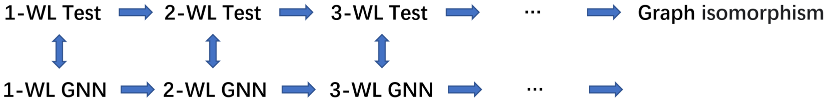
- Whenever 1-WL fails to distinguish two non-isomorphic graphs, MPNNs also fail.
- Failure cases:



- It is a central problem to study how to design more expressive GNNs beyond the 1-WL test.

Higher-order GNNs

- Leveraging *higher-order* WL variants to design provably more powerful GNNs [Morris et al., 2019, 2020, Maron et al., 2019, Geerts and Reutter, 2022].



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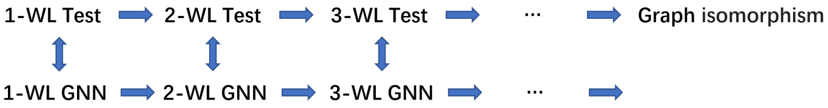

  - Severe computation/memory costs
  - Coarse bound between 1-WL and 3-WL [Morris et al., 2022]
  - Unclear about *necessity* for real-world tasks

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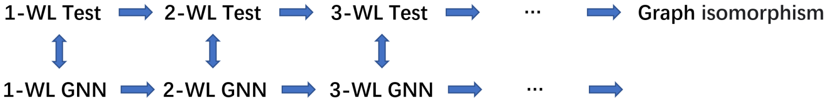

  - Severe computation/memory costs
  - Coarse bound between 1-WL and 3-WL [Morris et al., 2022]
  - Unclear about *necessity* for real-world tasks

- Overall, the WL hierarchy is too abstract to guide designing practical GNNs!

Other Related Works on Expressive GNNs

- Other works still keeps the message-passing framework for efficiency.

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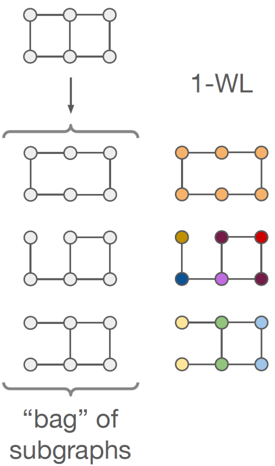
- Substructure-based GNNs [Bouritsas et al., 2022, Barceló et al., 2021, Bodnar et al., 2021b,a]:
  - Based on heuristics and requiring specific domain knowledge.

Other Related Works on Expressive GNNs

- Other works still keeps the message-passing framework for efficiency.
- Substructure-based GNNs [Bouritsas et al., 2022, Barceló et al., 2021, Bodnar et al., 2021b,a]:
  - Based on heuristics and requiring specific domain knowledge.
- Subgraph GNNs [Cotta et al., 2021, Zhang and Li, 2021, You et al., 2021, Bevilacqua et al., 2022, Zhao et al., 2022, Qian et al., 2022, Frasca et al., 2022, Huang et al., 2023]:
  - Unclear what power they can *systematically and provably gain*.
  - Expressiveness justified by toy examples
  - Unclear of the expressivity relation of different design paradigms



Topics Involved in This Talk

- Can we develop a class of principled and convincing metrics beyond the WL hierarchy that can
  - formally measure the expressive power of different GNN families
  - guide the design of provably better GNN architectures

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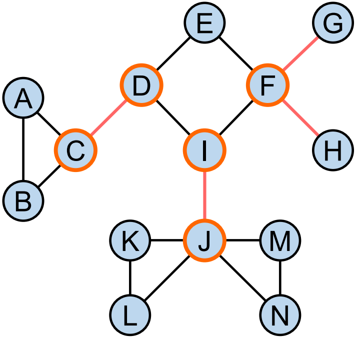
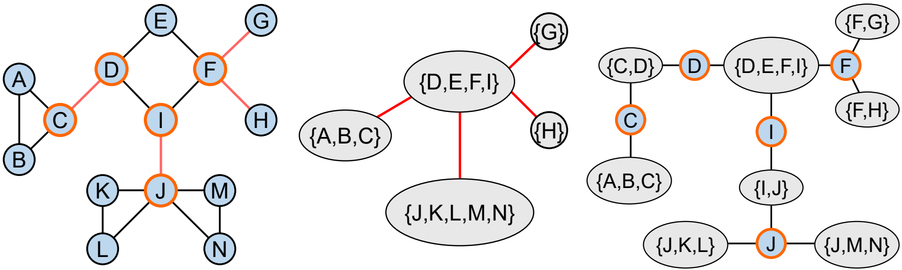
Graph Biconnectivity

- A central property in graph theory
- Key concepts:
  - cut vertex
  - cut edge
  - biconnected components
  - block cut tree



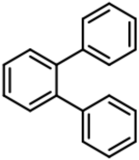
Concepts related to Biconnectivity



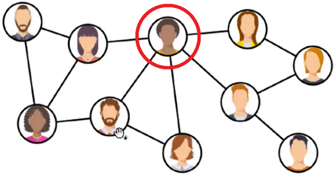
- Cut vertices/edges can be regarded as "hubs" in a graph that link different subgraphs into a whole.
- The link between cut vertices/edges and biconnected components forms exactly a *tree* structure, called the Block Cut-vertex Tree and Block Cut-edge Tree, respectively.

Biconnectivity is Important for Both Theory and Practice

- From a practical perspective:
  - Chemical reactions are highly related to edge-biconnectivity of molecule graphs.
  - Social networks are related to vertex-biconnectivity.

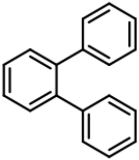


1,2-diphenylbenzene



Biconnectivity is Important for Both Theory and Practice

- From a practical perspective:
  - Chemical reactions are highly related to edge-biconnectivity of molecule graphs.
  - Social networks are related to vertex-biconnectivity.
- From a theoretical perspective:
  - Network flow and spanning tree.
  - Planar graph isomorphism [Hopcroft and Tarjan, 1972].



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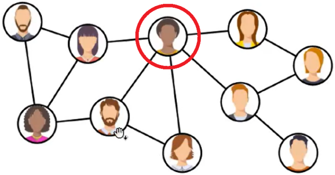

Biconnectivity Can be Efficiently Computed!

- Linear-time algorithm exists for all biconnectivity problems by using Depth-first Search [Tarjan, 1972].
  - Identifying all cut vertices/edges;
  - Finding all biconnected components;
  - Building block cut trees.
- Remark: the complexity is the same as an MPNN!

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Problem Formulation

- Most common GNN architectures can be cast into corresponding color refinement (CR) algorithms.
- A CR algorithm takes a graph G as input and outputs a *color mapping* $\chi_G : \mathcal{V}_G \to \mathcal{C}$ where $\mathcal{C}$ is called the *color set*.
- Several concepts in a CR algorithm:
  - Node feature: $\chi_G(u)$ for $u \in \mathcal{V}$
  - Edge feature: $\{\{\chi_G(u), \chi_G(v)\}\}$ for $\{u, v\} \in \mathcal{E}$
  - Graph representation: $\{\{\chi_G(u) : u \in \mathcal{V}_G\}\}$

Problem Formulation

- Three types of biconnectivity problems (with increasing difficulties):

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  - **Distinguish whether a graph is vertex/edge-biconnected**:
    for any graphs G, H where G is vertex/edge-biconnected but H is not, their graph representations are different.

Problem Formulation

- Three types of biconnectivity problems (with increasing difficulties):
  - **Distinguish whether a graph is vertex/edge-biconnected**:
    for any graphs G, H where G is vertex/edge-biconnected but H is not, their graph representations are different.
  - **Identify cut vertices**:
    for any graphs G, H and nodes $u \in \mathcal{V}_G, v \in \mathcal{V}_H$ where u is a cut vertex but v is not, their node features are different.
    Identify cut edges:
    for any $\{u, v\} \in \mathcal{E}_G$ and $\{w, x\} \in \mathcal{E}_H$ where $\{u, v\}$ is a cut edge but $\{w, x\}$ is not, their edge features are different.

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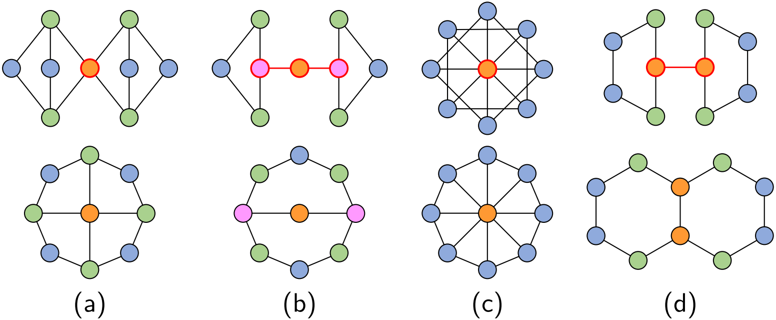
    Identify cut edges:
    for any $\{u, v\} \in \mathcal{E}_G$ and $\{w, x\} \in \mathcal{E}_H$ where $\{u, v\}$ is a cut edge but $\{w, x\}$ is not, their edge features are different.
  - **Distinguish block cut-vertex/edge trees**:
    for any graphs G, H satisfying $\mathrm{BCVTree}(G) \not\simeq \mathrm{BCVTree}(H)$ (or $\mathrm{BCETree}(G) \not\simeq \mathrm{BCETree}(H)$), their graph representations are different.

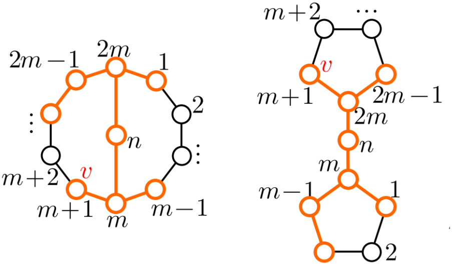
Can 1-WL Solve Biconnectivity Problems?



- The answer is no. They cannot even solve the easiest problem: to distinguish whether a graph is vertex/edge-biconnected!

How about Advanced GNN Architectures?

- We investigate three types of popular GNNs in prior works:
  - Substructure-based GNNs [Bouritsas et al., 2022];
  - Simplicial/Cullular GNNs [Bodnar et al., 2021b,a];
  - Overlap Subgraph GNN [Wijesinghe and Wang, 2022];
- Unfortunately, still, none of these GNNs can solve even the easiest biconnectivity task.



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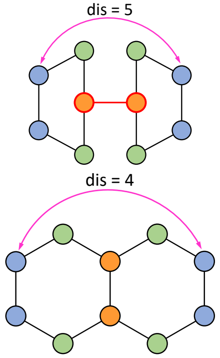
Our Motivation

- Problem: **Can we design a principled and efficient GNN framework with provable expressiveness for biconnectivity?**

- Let us restart from the classic 1-WL. Why cannot it encode biconnectivity?



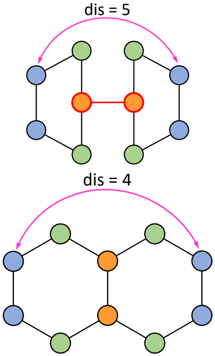
Our Motivation

- Problem: **Can we design a principled and efficient GNN framework with provable expressiveness for biconnectivity?**

- Let us restart from the classic 1-WL. Why cannot it encode biconnectivity?

- We argue that a major weakness is that it is agnostic to *distance information* between nodes, since each node can only "see" its *neighbors* in aggregation.

- Idea: incorporating distance into the aggregation procedure!



Our Approach: GD-WL

Algorithm 2: The Genealized Distance Weisfeiler-Lehman Algorithm

Input : Graph $G = (\mathcal{V}, \mathcal{E})$, distance metric $d_G : \mathcal{V} \times \mathcal{V} \to \mathbb{R}_+$
Output: Color mapping $\chi_G : \mathcal{V} \to \mathcal{C}$

Initialize: $\chi_G^0(v) := c_0$ for all $v \in \mathcal{V}$ where $c_0 \in \mathcal{C}$ is a fixed color
for $t \leftarrow 1$ **to** T **do**
  for each $v \in \mathcal{V}$ **do**
    $\chi_G^t(v) := \operatorname{hash}\left(\{\!\{(d_G(v,u), \chi_G^{t-1}(u)) : u \in \mathcal{V}\}\!\}\right)$
Return: χ_G^T

Special Case: SPD-WL

- When choosing the *shortest path distance* $d_G = \mathrm{dis}_G$, we obtain SPD-WL.
- It can be equivalently written as

$$\chi_G^{t+1}(v) = \mathrm{hash}\left(\chi_G^t(v), \{\!\{\chi_G^t(u) : u \in \mathcal{N}_G(v)\}\!\}, \{\!\{\chi_G^t(u) : \mathrm{dis}_G(v,u) = 2\}\!\}, \cdots, \{\!\{\chi_G^t(u) : \mathrm{dis}_G(v,u) = n-1\}\!\}, \{\!\{\chi_G^t(u) : \mathrm{dis}_G(v,u) = \infty\}\!\}\right).$$

- It is strictly more powerful than 1-WL since it additionally aggregates the k-hop neighbors for all $k > 1$.

Special Case: SPD-WL

- SPD-WL is fully expressive for edge-biconnectivity.

Theorem

Let $G = (\mathcal{V}_G, \mathcal{E}_G)$ and $H = (\mathcal{V}_H, \mathcal{E}_H)$ be two graphs, and let χ_G and χ_H be the corresponding SPD-WL color mapping. Then the following holds:

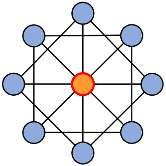
- For any two edges $\{w_1, w_2\} \in \mathcal{E}_G$ and $\{x_1, x_2\} \in \mathcal{E}_H$, if $\{\!\{\chi_G(w_1), \chi_G(w_2)\}\!\} = \{\!\{\chi_H(x_1), \chi_H(x_2)\}\!\}$, then $\{w_1, w_2\}$ is a cut edge if and only if $\{x_1, x_2\}$ is a cut edge.
- If $\{\!\{\chi_G(w) : w \in \mathcal{V}_G\}\!\} = \{\!\{\chi_H(w) : w \in \mathcal{V}_H\}\!\}$, then $\mathrm{BCETree}(G) \simeq \mathrm{BCETree}(H)$.

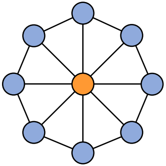
Discussions

- The result is highly non-trivial. It combines three seemingly unrelated concepts (i.e., SPD, biconnectivity, and the WL test) into a unified conclusion.
- Distinguishing non-isomorphic graphs with different block cut-edge trees can be much easily solved than the general case [Cai et al., 1992, Babai, 2016].

Discussions

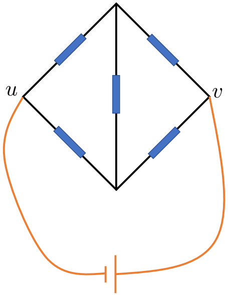
- The result is highly non-trivial. It combines three seemingly unrelated concepts (i.e., SPD, biconnectivity, and the WL test) into a unified conclusion.
- Distinguishing non-isomorphic graphs with different block cut-edge trees can be much easily solved than the general case [Cai et al., 1992, Babai, 2016].
- However, SPD-WL cannot distinguish vertex-biconnectivity (see the right figure).





Another Special Case: RD-WL

- Due to the generality of GD-WL, we can use arbitrary distance metrics.
- Another basic metric in graph theory is the *Resistance Distance* (RD).
  - $\mathrm{dis}_G^{\mathsf{R}}(u, v)$: the effective resistance between u and v when treating G as an electrical network where each edge corresponds to a resistance of one ohm.
- Properties of RD:
  - Valid *metric*: non-negative, semidefinite, symmetric, and satisfies the triangular inequality.
  - Similar to SPD, $0 \le \mathrm{dis}_G^{\mathsf{R}}(u, v) \le n - 1$, and $\mathrm{dis}_G^{\mathsf{R}}(u, v) = \mathrm{dis}_G(u, v)$ if G is a tree.
  - RD is highly related to the graph Laplacian and can be efficiently calculated.



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Theorem

Let $G = (\mathcal{V}_G, \mathcal{E}_G)$ and $H = (\mathcal{V}_H, \mathcal{E}_H)$ be two graphs, and let χ_G and χ_H be the corresponding RD-WL color mapping. Then the following holds:

- For any two nodes $w \in \mathcal{V}_G$ and $x \in \mathcal{V}_H$, if $\chi_G(w) = \chi_H(x)$, then w is a cut vertex if and only if x is a cut vertex.
- If $\{\!\{\chi_G(w) : w \in \mathcal{V}_G\}\!\} = \{\!\{\chi_H(w) : w \in \mathcal{V}_H\}\!\}$, then $\mathrm{BCVTree}(G) \simeq \mathrm{BCVTree}(H)$.

- Therefore, RD-WL is fully expressive for vertex-biconnectivity.

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- Therefore, RD-WL is fully expressive for vertex-biconnectivity.

Corollary

When using both SPD and RD (i.e., by setting $d_G(u, v) := (\mathrm{dis}_G(u, v), \mathrm{dis}^{\mathsf{R}}_G(u, v))$), the corresponding GD-WL is fully expressive for both vertex-biconnectivity and edge-biconnectivity.

Practical Implementation

- GD-WL enjoys great simplicity and full parallelizability.
- **Graphormer-GD**: (A Transformer-like architecture)

$$\mathbf{Y}^h = \left[\phi_1^h(\mathbf{D}) \odot \mathrm{softmax}\left(\mathbf{X}\mathbf{W}_Q^h(\mathbf{X}\mathbf{W}_K^h)^\top + \phi_2^h(\mathbf{D})\right)\right]\mathbf{X}\mathbf{W}_V^h$$

- Conputational cost: $O(n^2)$.

Theorem

When choosing proper functions ϕ_1^h and ϕ_2^h and using a sufficiently large number of heads and layers, Graphormer-GD is as powerful as GD-WL.

Upper Bound of GD-WL

- The upper bound of the expressiveness of GD-WL is 2-FWL.

Theorem

The 2-FWL algorithm is more powerful than both SPD-WL and RD-WL.

Corollary

The 2-FWL is fully expressive for both vertex-biconnectivity and edge-biconnectivity.

Detecting Cut Vertices/Edges

Accuracy on cut vertex (articulation point) and cut edge (bridge) detection tasks.

Model	Cut Vertex Detection	Cut Edge Detection
GCN [Kipf and Welling, 2017]	51.5%±1.3%	62.4%±1.8%
GAT [Veličković et al., 2018]	52.0%±1.3%	62.8%±1.9%
GIN [Xu et al., 2019]	53.9%±1.7%	63.1%±2.2%
GSN [Bouritsas et al., 2022]	60.1%±1.9%	70.7%±2.1%
Graphormer [Ying et al., 2021]	76.4%±2.8%	84.5%±3.3%
Graphormer-GD (ours)	100%	100%
- w/o. Resistance Distance	83.3%±2.7%	100%

- GD-WL achieves 100% accuracy on both tasks, which is consistent to our theory. In contrast, prior GNNs fails on both tasks.

ZINC Dataset

Method	Model	Time (s)	Params	Test MAE ZINC-Subset	Test MAE ZINC-Full
MPNNs	GIN [Xu et al., 2019]	8.05	509,549	0.526±0.051	0.088±0.002
	GraphSAGE [Hamilton et al., 2017]	6.02	505,341	0.398±0.002	0.126±0.003
	GAT [Veličković et al., 2018]	8.28	531,345	0.384±0.007	0.111±0.002
	GCN [Kipf and Welling, 2017]	5.85	505,079	0.367±0.011	0.113±0.002
Higher-order GNNs	RingGNN [Chen et al., 2019]	178.03	527,283	0.353±0.019	-
	3WLGNN [Maron et al., 2019]	179.35	507,603	0.303±0.068	-
Substructure-based GNNs	GSN [Bouritsas et al., 2022]	-	∼500k	0.101±0.010	-
	CIN-Small [Bodnar et al., 2021a]	-	∼100k	0.094±0.004	0.044±0.003
Subgraph GNNs	NGNN [Zhang and Li, 2021]	-	∼500k	0.111±0.003	0.029±0.001
	DSS-GNN [Bevilacqua et al., 2022]	-	445,709	0.097±0.006	-
	GNN-AK [Zhao et al., 2022]	-	∼500k	0.105±0.010	-
	GNN-AK+ [Zhao et al., 2022]	-	∼500k	0.091±0.011	-
	SUN [Frasca et al., 2022]	15.04	526,489	0.083±0.003	-
Graph Transformers	GT [Dwivedi and Bresson, 2021]	-	588,929	0.226±0.014	-
	SAN [Kreuzer et al., 2021]	-	508,577	0.139±0.006	-
	Graphormer [Ying et al., 2021]	12.26	489,321	0.122±0.006	0.052±0.005
GD-WL	Graphormer-GD (ours)	12.52	502,793	**0.081±0.009**	**0.025±0.004**

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Take aways

- Graph biconnectivity is a central property.
- Most prior GNNs are not expressive for biconnectivity.
- There are deep relations between distance and biconnectivity.

Open Directions

- More efficient architectures?
- A deeper understanding of GD-WL (e.g., its spectral properties)
- Encoding other distance metrics?
- Beyond biconnectivity: higher-order connectivity metrics

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Thank You!