



# An improved lower bound on the sensitivity complexity of graph properties

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## ABSTRACT

Turán (1984) [11] initiated the study of the sensitivity complexity of graph properties. He conjectured that for any non-trivial graph properties on  $n$  vertices, the sensitivity complexity is at least  $n - 1$ . He proved an  $\lfloor \frac{n}{4} \rfloor$  lower bound for sensitivity in his paper: Turán (1984) [11]. Wegener (1985) [12] proved this conjecture for all *monotone* graph properties. In this paper we improve Turán's lower bound to  $\frac{6}{17}n (\approx 0.35n)$ . We hope that this will shed some light on the proof of Turán's conjecture.

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## 1. Introduction

*Sensitivity complexity*  $s(f)$  was first introduced by Cook, Dwork and Reischuk [4,5] (under the name critical complexity) for studying the time complexity of CRAW-PRAMs. They showed that  $\log_b s(f)$  is a lower bound for the time needed by a PRAM to compute a function  $f$  (where  $b = (5 + \sqrt{21})/2 \approx 4.79$ ). Simon [10] has shown that the sensitivity complexity of a non-degenerate  $n$ -variable Boolean function is at least  $\Omega(\log n)$ . Turán [11] investigated the sensitivity complexity of *graph properties* (see the definition in Section 2). He proved that for any non-trivial *graph properties* on  $n$  vertices, the sensitivity is at least  $\lfloor \frac{n}{4} \rfloor$  (the number of variables of graph properties is  $\binom{n}{2}$ ). In [11], Turán also gave an example (the “contained an isolated vertex” property) which has sensitivity complexity  $n - 1$ . He further conjectured that  $n - 1$  might be the right lower bound. Wegener [12] proved this conjecture for all *monotone* graph properties. In this paper we improve Turán's lower bound for general graph properties. Here is the main theorem of our paper.

**Theorem 1.** For any non-trivial graph property  $f$  on  $n$  vertices,  $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ .

Wegener's proof relied heavily on the fact that the property is monotone. Our proof strategy is roughly like this: we show that for any two graphs  $G$  and  $H$ , there always exists a sequence of graphs  $G_0, G_1, \dots, G_t$ , where  $G_0 = G, G_t = H$ , such that for any  $0 \leq i \leq t - 1$ ,  $G_{i+1}$  is a graph obtained by adding or deleting one edge from graph  $G_i$ ; more importantly, there are at least  $\alpha n$  *isomorphism* ways of adding or deleting this edge. Therefore, if there exists some  $i$  with  $f(G_{i+1}) \neq f(G_i)$ , then  $s(f) \geq \alpha n$ . So if  $s(f) < \alpha n$ , then for any two graphs  $G$  and  $H$ ,  $f(G) = f(H)$ , which contradicts the non-trivial condition of  $f$ . We can show that  $\alpha$  is at least  $\frac{6}{17}$  in this paper.

### Related work:

Sensitivity complexity is closely related to *decision tree* complexity and other complexity measures of Boolean functions. Here we only list some results related to the sensitivity complexity. For more results we refer readers to the excellent survey [1] by Buhrman and de Wolf.

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Nisan [8] generalized the concept of sensitivity complexity to *block sensitivity* complexity and demonstrated that the time complexity of CREW-PRAM is actually equal to (up to a constant factor) the logarithm of the block sensitivity. He also showed that block sensitivity, *certificate complexity*, and decision tree complexity are polynomially related. Nisan and Szegedy [9] further showed that the *degree complexity* is also polynomially related to the block sensitivity. But very little is known about sensitivity complexity except the basic fact that it is a lower bound of block sensitivity. It is conjectured that the sensitivity complexity is also polynomially related to all four of the complexity measures mentioned above. Gotsman and Linial [6] have shown that the sensitivity versus degree problem is equivalent to an induced subgraphs problem on the Boolean hypercube studied by Fan Chung et al. [3]. The best known upper bound on the block sensitivity in terms of the sensitivity complexity is still exponential (by Kenyon and Kutin [7]). In his paper [11], Turán also conjectured that for a general class of functions, the *weakly symmetric* functions, the sensitivity complexity has a similar lower bound. Chakraborty [2] disproved this conjecture by giving a cyclically invariant function with sensitivity  $O(N^{1/3})$  ( $N$  is the number of variables). It is also open whether  $\Omega(N^{1/3})$  is a lower bound for the sensitivity complexity of all weakly symmetric functions, or even all cyclically invariant functions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we introduce the definitions and some notation, in Section 3 we prove two structural lemmas which will be used in the proof of the main theorem, and then we prove our main result in Section 4.

## 2. Preliminaries

Let  $f : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  be a Boolean function. For an input  $x \in \{0, 1\}^n$ ,  $x^i$  denotes the input obtained by flipping the  $i$ th bit of  $x$ .

**Definition 2.** The *sensitivity* complexity of  $f$  on input  $x$  is defined as  $s(f, x) = |\{i : f(x) \neq f(x^i)\}|$ . The *sensitivity* of the function  $f$  is defined as  $s(f) = \max_x s(f, x)$ .

**Definition 3.** A Boolean function  $f$  is *symmetric* if for every input  $x = x_1 \dots x_n$  and every permutation  $\pi \in S_n$ ,  $f(x_1, \dots, x_n) = f(\pi(x_1), \dots, \pi(x_n))$ .

For a symmetric function, we have the following lower bound on the sensitivity complexity:

**Lemma 4 (Turán [11]).** For every non-trivial symmetric function  $f : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ ,  $s(f) > \frac{n}{2}$ .

A generalization of the symmetric function is the *weakly symmetric function*.

**Definition 5.** A Boolean function  $f$  is called *weakly symmetric* (or *transitive-invariant*) if there exists a transitive group<sup>1</sup>  $\Gamma \leq S_n$  such that for all  $\sigma \in \Gamma$  and every input  $x = x_1 \dots x_n$ ,

$$f(x_1, \dots, x_n) = f(\sigma(x_1), \dots, \sigma(x_n)).$$

In this paper, we are interested in a special class of weakly symmetric functions: *graph properties* – Boolean functions which are independent of the labeling of the vertices of a graph. For example, being Hamiltonian, being connectivity, being triangle-free etc are graph properties. Here is the formal definition.

**Definition 6.** A Boolean function  $f : \{0, 1\}^{\binom{[n]}{2}} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  is called a *graph property* if for every input  $x = (x_{(1,2)}, \dots, x_{(n-1,n)})$  and every permutation  $\pi \in S_n$ ,

$$f(x_{(1,2)}, \dots, x_{(n-1,n)}) = f(x_{(\pi(1),\pi(2))}, \dots, x_{(\pi(n-1),\pi(n))}).$$

For graph  $G = (V, E)$ , we use  $I(G)$  to represent the set of isolated vertices in  $G$ . Let  $V_d(G) = \{v \in V(G) \mid \deg(v) = d\}$  and  $V_{\geq d}(G) = \{v \in V(G) \mid \deg(v) \geq d\}$ . We also use the notation  $I, V_d, V_{\geq d}$  if the graph  $G$  referred to is clear from the context.

## 3. Two structural lemmas

We need the following two lemmas for proving the main theorem.

**Lemma 7.** Given graph property  $f$  and graph  $G$ , if  $V_1(G) \neq \emptyset$ , then either  $s(f) \geq |I(G)| + 1$  or, for any vertex  $v \in V_1(G)$  and  $w$  adjacent to  $v$ ,  $f(G) = f(G - (v, w))$ .

**Proof.** Consider graph  $G' = G - (w, v)$  and suppose  $I(G) = \{u_1, \dots, u_{|I|}\}$ ; we have

$$G' + (w, u_i) \cong G' + (w, v), \quad i = 1, \dots, |I|,$$

and hence  $f(G' + (w, u_i)) = f(G' + (w, v))$ . So if  $f(G') \neq f(G' + (w, v))$ , then  $f(G') \neq f(G' + (w, u_i))$  ( $i = 1, \dots, |I|$ ). Therefore,  $s(f, G') \geq |I(G)| + 1$ . Otherwise,  $f(G') = f(G' + (w, v))$ , i.e.  $f(G - (w, v)) = f(G)$ .  $\square$

<sup>1</sup> A group  $\Gamma \leq S_n$  is *transitive* if for every  $i < j$ , there exists  $\sigma \in \Gamma$  such that  $\sigma(i) = j$ .

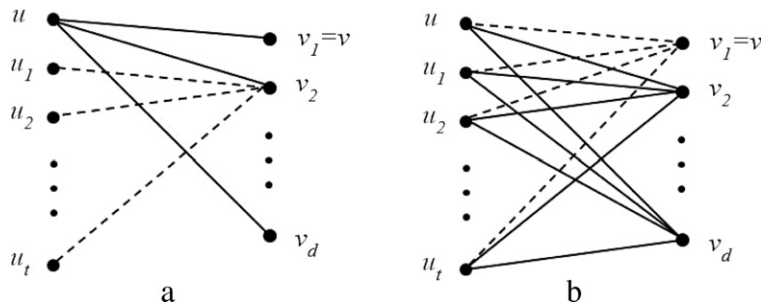


Fig. 1. (a) Function  $g_2(x_1, \dots, x_t)$ . (b) Function  $h(x_0, x_1, \dots, x_t)$ .

The following lemma was used implicitly in Turan’s proof [11].

**Lemma 8.** Given graph property  $f$  and graph  $G$ , if  $E(G) \neq \emptyset$ , then either  $s(f) \geq |I(G)|/2$  or, for all  $e \in E(G)$ ,  $f(G) = f(G - e)$ .

**Proof.** Suppose  $s(f) < |I(G)|/2$ ; we will deduce that for all  $e \in E(G)$ ,  $f(G) = f(G - e)$ .

Pick any edge  $(u, v)$  from  $E(G)$ . Suppose that in graph  $G$ ,  $\deg(u) = d$  and vertex  $u$  is adjacent to vertices  $\{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_d\}$ , where  $v_1 = v$ . Suppose  $I(G) = \{u_1, \dots, u_t\}$ , where  $t = |I(G)|$ .

Consider the  $t$ -variable Boolean function  $g_2 : \{0, 1\}^t \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ ,

$$g_2(x_1, \dots, x_t) = f(G + x_1(v_2, u_1) + x_2(v_2, u_2) + \dots + x_t(v_2, u_t)),$$

i.e. we add edge  $(v_2, u_i)$  to graph  $G$  iff  $x_i = 1$  ( $i = 1, \dots, t$ ); see Fig. 1(a). Since  $u_1, \dots, u_t$  are isolated vertices in  $G$ , it is easy to see that  $g_2$  is a symmetric function. By Lemma 4, either  $s(g_2) > t/2$  or  $g_2$  is a constant function. But  $g_2$  is a restriction of function  $f$ , so  $s(g_2) \leq s(f)$ , and thus  $s(g_2) < |I(G)|/2 = t/2$ ; therefore,  $g_2$  is a constant on every input. In particular,  $g_2(1, \dots, 1) = g_2(0, \dots, 0)$ , i.e.  $f(G + \sum_{i=1}^t (v_2, u_i)) = f(G)$ . Define  $G_2 = G + \sum_{i=1}^t (v_2, u_i)$ . Consider another Boolean function  $g_3 : \{0, 1\}^t \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ ,

$$g_3(x_1, \dots, x_t) = f(G_2 + x_1(v_3, u_1) + x_2(v_3, u_2) + \dots + x_t(v_3, u_t)).$$

Similarly,  $g_3$  is a symmetric function, so from Lemma 4  $s(g_3) > t/2$  or  $g_3$  is a constant function. But  $s(g_3) \leq s(f) < t/2$ , so  $g_3$  is constant, and  $f(G_2) = f(G_3)$ , where  $G_3 = G_2 + \sum_{i=1}^t (v_3, u_i)$ . Continuing this procedure, we can show that

$$f(G) = f(G_2) = \dots = f(G_d),$$

where  $G_i = G_{i-1} + \sum_{j=1}^t (v_i, u_j)$  ( $i = 3, \dots, d$ ).

Now let us consider the graph  $H = G_d - (u, v_1)$ . Define the  $(t + 1)$ -variable function  $h : \{0, 1\}^{t+1} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ ,

$$h(x_0, x_1, \dots, x_t) = f(H + x_0(v_1, u) + x_1(v_1, u_1) + \dots + x_t(v_1, u_t)).$$

See Fig. 1(b). Again  $h$  is a symmetric function; using Lemma 4,  $s(h) > (t + 1)/2$  or  $h$  is a constant function. Since  $s(h) \leq s(f) < t/2$ ,  $h$  is a constant. In particular,  $h(0, 0, \dots, 0) = h(1, 0, \dots, 0)$ , i.e.  $f(H) = f(H + (v_1, u)) = f(G_d)$ .

Next we will delete all the edges between  $\{u_1, \dots, u_t\}$  and  $\{v_2, \dots, v_d\}$  from  $H$  by reversing the adding edge procedure of  $G \rightarrow G_2 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow G_d$ . More precisely, define  $H_1 = H$ ; for  $i = 2, \dots, d$ , define

$$H_i = H_{i-1} - (v_i, u_1) - (v_i, u_2) - \dots - (v_i, u_t),$$

and

$$h_i(y_1, \dots, y_t) = f(H_i + y_1(v_i, u_1) + y_2(v_i, u_2) + \dots + y_t(v_i, u_t)).$$

By Lemma 4 and the fact  $s(f) < t/2$  we can show that all the functions  $h_2, \dots, h_d$  are constant, which implies  $f(H) = f(H_2) = \dots = f(H_d)$ . But if we compare graph  $G$  and graph  $H_d$ , it is easy to see that  $H_d = G - (u, v_1)$ . Therefore,  $f(G) = f(H_d) = f(G - (u, v))$ .  $\square$

#### 4. Proof of the main theorem

Without loss of generality we assume that for the empty graph  $\bar{K}_n, f(\bar{K}_n) = 0$ . Since  $f$  is a non-trivial property, there must exist a graph  $G$  such that  $f(G) = 1$ . Let us consider graphs in  $f^{-1}(1) = \{G | f(G) = 1\}$  with the minimum number of edges. Define  $m = \min\{|E(G)| : f(G) = 1\}$ .

We claim that if  $m \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ , then  $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ . Let  $G$  be a graph in  $f^{-1}(1)$  and  $|E(G)| = m \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ . Since  $G$  has the minimum number of edges, deleting any edges from  $G$  will change the value of  $f(G)$ , i.e.  $\forall e \in E(G), f(G - e) = 0$ . Therefore,  $s(f, G) \geq |E(G)| = m \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ . Thus  $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ .

In the following we assume  $m < \frac{6}{17}n$ . Again let  $G$  be a graph in  $f^{-1}(1)$  with  $|E(G)| = m$ . Let us consider the isolated vertices set  $I$ ; as

$$\sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < 2 \times \frac{6}{17}n = \frac{12}{17}n,$$

we have

$$|I| = n - |V_{\geq 1}| \geq n - \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 1}} \deg(v) = n - \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) \geq \frac{5}{17}n.$$

According to whether or not there exists a degree-1 vertex, we separate the proof into two parts:

**Case 1:**  $V_1 \neq \emptyset$ , i.e. there exists  $v \in V(G)$  with  $\deg(v) = 1$ . We further consider two subcases here:

(a) There exist  $v_1$  and  $v_2 \in V_1$  such that  $(v_1, v_2) \in E(G)$ .

Let  $G' = G - (v_1, v_2)$ . Since  $G$  has the minimum number of edges,  $f(G') = 0$ . Suppose  $I(G) = \{u_1, \dots, u_{|I|}\}$ ; since in graph  $G$ ,  $\deg(v_1) = \deg(v_2) = 1$ , then for any  $1 \leq i_1 < i_2 \leq |I|$ ,

$$G' + (u_{i_1}, u_{i_2}) \cong G' + (v_1, v_2) = G.$$

Thus

$$f(G' + (u_{i_1}, u_{i_2})) = f(G) = 1.$$

Similarly, we have

$$f(G' + (u_i, v_1)) = f(G' + (u_i, v_2)) = f(G) = 1, \quad (\text{for all } 1 \leq i \leq |I|)$$

but  $f(G') = 0$ ; therefore,

$$s(f, G') \geq \binom{|I| + 2}{2} \geq \binom{\lceil \frac{5}{17}n \rceil + 2}{2} \geq \frac{6}{17}n.$$

(b) Consider any vertices  $v_1$  and  $v_2 \in V_1$  with  $(v_1, v_2) \notin E(G)$ . We will show that  $|I(G)| \geq \frac{8}{17}n$  in this case.

$$\sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < 2 \times \frac{6}{17}n = \frac{12}{17}n,$$

i.e.,

$$\sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v) < \frac{12}{17}n. \tag{1}$$

Since no two vertices in  $V_1$  are adjacent, i.e., all the vertices in  $V_1$  are adjacent to vertices in  $V_{\geq 2}$ , we hence have

$$\sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) \leq \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v). \tag{2}$$

Combining Eqs. (1) and (2), we have  $\sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) < \frac{6}{17}n$ , i.e.  $|V_1| < \frac{6}{17}n$ .

If  $|V_{\geq 2}| \leq \frac{3}{17}n$ , then  $|I| = n - |V_1| - |V_{\geq 2}| > n - \frac{6}{17}n - \frac{3}{17}n = \frac{8}{17}n$ . Otherwise suppose that  $|V_{\geq 2}| > \frac{3}{17}n$ ; from Eq. (1),

$$|V_1| + 2|V_{\geq 2}| \leq \sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v) < \frac{12}{17}n.$$

Hence  $|V_1| + |V_{\geq 2}| < \frac{12}{17}n - |V_{\geq 2}| < \frac{9}{17}n$ . Therefore,  $|I| = n - |V_1| - |V_{\geq 2}| > n - \frac{9}{17}n = \frac{8}{17}n$ .

Since  $V_1 \neq \emptyset$ , by Lemma 7 either  $s(f) \geq |I(G)| + 1 > \frac{8}{17}n$  or there exists an edge  $e \in G$  with  $f(G - e) = f(G)$ . But we know that  $G$  has the minimum number of edges, so  $f(G - e) \neq f(G)$ ; thus  $s(f) \geq \frac{8}{17}n$ . This finishes the proof of **Case 1**.

**Case 2:**  $V_1 = \emptyset$ , i.e.  $\forall v \in V - I, \deg(v) \geq 2$ . In this case,

$$|I| = n - |V_{\geq 1}| = n - |V_{\geq 2}| \geq n - \frac{1}{2} \sum_v \deg(v) = n - m \geq \frac{11}{17}n.$$

(a) There exist  $v$  and  $w \in V_2$  such that  $(v, w) \in E(G)$ .

Since  $\deg(v) = \deg(w) = 2$ , suppose that besides vertex  $w$ , vertex  $v$  is also adjacent to vertex  $x$ ; similarly suppose that vertex  $w$  is also adjacent to vertex  $y$  ( $x$  and  $y$  could be the same vertex). Pick  $2r$  different isolated vertices  $\{v_1, \dots, v_r\}$  and

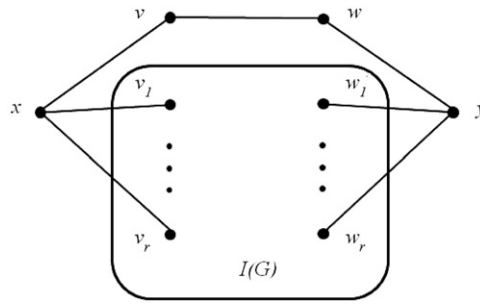


Fig. 2. Graph  $G_{2r}$  and  $H = G_{2r} - (v, w)$ .

$\{w_1, \dots, w_r\}$  from  $I(G)$ , where  $r = \lfloor \sqrt{\frac{6}{17}n} \rfloor$  ( $\frac{11}{17}n \geq 2 \lfloor \sqrt{\frac{6}{17}n} \rfloor$  for  $n \geq 4$ ). Define  $G_0 = G, G_i = G_{i-1} + (x, v_i)$  for  $i = 1, \dots, r$ , and  $G_i = G_{i-1} + (y, w_{i-r})$  for  $i = r + 1, \dots, 2r$ . If for some  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, 2r\}, f(G_i) \neq f(G_{i-1})$ , then by Lemma 7,

$$s(f) \geq |I(G_i)| + 1 = I(G) - i + 1 \geq \frac{11}{17}n - 2\sqrt{\frac{6}{17}n} + 1 \geq \frac{6}{17}n \quad (\text{for } n \geq 9).$$

So let us assume that  $f(G) = f(G_1) = \dots = f(G_{2r})$ .

Now consider the graph  $H = G_{2r} - (v, w)$  (see Fig. 2). In graph  $H, \deg(v) = \deg(v_1) = \dots = \deg(v_r) = 1$  and they are both adjacent to  $x$ ; similarly  $\deg(w) = \deg(w_1) = \dots = \deg(w_r) = 1$  and they are both adjacent to  $y$ . Thus

$$H + (v, w) \cong H + (v_i, w) \cong H + (v, w_j) \cong H + (v_i, w_j) \quad (\forall i, j = 1, \dots, r).$$

Therefore, if  $f(H) \neq f(H + (v, w))$  (i.e.  $f(G_{2r})$ ), then

$$s(f, H) \geq (r + 1)^2 = \left( \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{6}{17}n} \right\rfloor + 1 \right)^2 \geq \frac{6}{17}n.$$

So we can assume that  $f(H) = f(G_{2r})$ , which implies  $f(H) = f(G)$ . Now we define another sequence of graphs  $H_0 = H, H_i = H_{i-1} - (y, w_i)$  for  $i = 1, \dots, r$ , and  $H_i = H_{i-1} - (x, v_{i-r})$  for  $i = r + 1, \dots, 2r$ . By an argument similar to the previous one for  $G_0, \dots, G_{2r}$ , we can show that either  $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n$  or  $f(H) = \dots = f(H_{2r})$ . So we have  $f(G) = f(H) = f(H_{2r})$ . But if we compare graphs  $G$  and  $H_{2r}$ , we can see that  $H_{2r} = G - (v, w)$ , which contradicts the minimality of  $G$ .

(b)  $\forall v_1, v_2 \in V_2, (v_1, v_2) \notin E(G)$ . We claim that in this case  $|I| \geq \frac{12}{17}n$ .

$$2|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v) = \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < \frac{12}{17}n. \tag{3}$$

Since no two vertices in  $V_2$  are adjacent, all the vertices in  $V_2$  are adjacent to vertices in  $V_{\geq 3}$  ( $V_1 = \emptyset$ ); hence

$$\sum_{v \in V_2} \deg(v) = 2|V_2| \leq \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v). \tag{4}$$

From Eq. (4) + 5 × (3), we have

$$12|V_2| + 5 \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v) + \frac{60}{17}n,$$

i.e.  $3|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \frac{15}{17}n$ , which implies

$$3|V_2| + 3|V_3| \leq 3|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \frac{15}{17}n.$$

So  $|V_2| + |V_3| \leq \frac{5}{17}n$ ; therefore,  $|I| = n - |V_2| - |V_3| \geq \frac{12}{17}n$ .

By Lemma 8, either  $s(f) \geq |I(G)|/2 \geq \frac{6}{17}n$  or for all  $e \in G, f(G - e) = f(G)$ . But we know that  $G$  has the minimum number of edges, so  $f(G - e) \neq f(G)$ ; thus  $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n$ . This ends the whole proof.  $\square$

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