

## Ozsváth–Szabó and Rasmussen invariants of cable knots

CORNELIA A VAN COTT

We study the behavior of the Ozsváth–Szabó and Rasmussen knot concordance invariants  $\tau$  and  $s$  on  $K_{m,n}$ , the  $(m, n)$ –cable of a knot  $K$  where  $m$  and  $n$  are relatively prime. We show that for every knot  $K$  and for any fixed positive integer  $m$ , both of the invariants evaluated on  $K_{m,n}$  differ from their value on the torus knot  $T_{m,n}$  by fixed constants for all but finitely many  $n > 0$ . Combining this result together with Hedden’s extensive work on the behavior of  $\tau$  on  $(m, mr + 1)$ –cables yields bounds on the value of  $\tau$  on any  $(m, n)$ –cable of  $K$ . In addition, several of Hedden’s obstructions for cables bounding complex curves are extended.

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### 1 Introduction

The  $(m, n)$ –cable of a knot  $K$ , denoted  $K_{m,n}$ , is the satellite knot with companion  $K$  and pattern  $T_{m,n}$ , the  $(m, n)$ –torus knot. The behavior of many classical concordance invariants has been shown to be rather predictable on cable knots. For example, it is a classical result (see Lickorish [6]) that the Alexander polynomial of a cable knot is

$$\Delta_{K_{m,n}}(t) = \Delta_K(t^m)\Delta_{T_{m,n}}(t).$$

Shinohara [17] found a formula for the signature of a cable knot, and Litherland [7] extended the result, finding the value of Tristram–Levine signatures on a cable knot:

$$\sigma_\omega(K_{m,n}) = \sigma_{\omega^m}(K) + \sigma_\omega(T_{m,n}).$$

Milnor signatures and Casson–Gordon invariants of cables (see Litherland [8] and Kearton [5], respectively, for details) also yield nice formulas.

The purpose of this note is to investigate two relatively new concordance invariants – the Ozsváth–Szabó invariant  $\tau$  and the Rasmussen invariant  $s$  – and their behavior on cable knots. The discussion here will use only the formal properties that the two invariants have in common.

Both  $\tau$  and  $s$  were introduced in connection with developments in the theory of knot homologies:  $\tau$  is defined in terms of knot Floer homology (see Ozsváth and Szabó [10] and Rasmussen [15]) and the Rasmussen invariant  $s$  is defined in terms of Khovanov homology (see Rasmussen [14]). These two invariants have enabled important progress

in the field of knot theory, providing new proofs for Milnor's conjecture [10; 14] and examples of Alexander polynomial one knots which are not smoothly slice (see Livingston [9]).

No work has been done to compute the Rasmussen invariant for cables, but the behavior of the Ozsváth–Szabó concordance invariant  $\tau$  under  $(m, mr + 1)$ -cabling has been investigated by Hedden [2; 3]. Through careful investigation of the relationship between the filtered chain homotopy types of  $\mathcal{F}(K_{m, mr+1}, i)$  and  $\mathcal{F}(K, i)$ , he obtained the following main result:

**Theorem 1** [3] *Let  $K \subset S^3$  be a nontrivial knot. Then the following inequality holds for all  $r$ :*

$$m\tau(K) + \frac{(mr)(m-1)}{2} \leq \tau(K_{m, mr+1}) \leq m\tau(K) + \frac{(mr)(m-1)}{2} + m - 1.$$

*In the special case when  $K$  satisfies  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ , we have the equality*

$$\tau(K_{m, mr+1}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(mr)(m-1)}{2},$$

*whereas when  $\tau(K) = -g(K)$ , we have*

$$\tau(K_{m, mr+1}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(mr)(m-1)}{2} + m - 1.$$

When appropriately normalized,  $\tau$  and  $s$  share several formal properties and agree on many families of knots, though in general they have been shown to be distinct invariants (see Hedden and Ording [4]). Stated in reference to  $\tau$ , the essential formal properties are as follows (see Ozsváth and Szabó [10]):

- (1)  $\tau$  is a homomorphism from the smooth knot concordance group  $\mathcal{C}$  to  $\mathbb{Z}$ .
- (2)  $|\tau(K)| \leq g_4(K)$ , where  $g_4(K)$  denotes the 4-genus of  $K$ .
- (3)  $\tau(T_{m,n}) = (m-1)(n-1)/2$ , where  $T_{m,n}$  denotes the  $(m, n)$ -torus knot with  $m, n \geq 1$ .

It can be shown that  $s/2$  also satisfies these three properties [14]. In addition, both  $\tau$  and  $s$  are insensitive to a change in orientation [11; 14]. Our main results will only depend on these formal properties, and hence apply to both invariants. To proceed concisely, let  $\nu$  denote any concordance invariant satisfying the above properties.

Fixing  $m > 0$ , we would like to study the value of  $\nu$  on  $K_{m,n}$  as a function of  $n$ , where  $n$  ranges over the integers relatively prime to  $m$ . (Notice that  $K_{m,n} = -K_{-m,-n}$ , and so the restriction  $m > 0$  does not limit our results.) From our observations about other concordance invariants, we expect that the behavior of  $\nu(K_{m,n})$  as a function of  $n$  is somehow related to the behavior of  $\nu(T_{m,n})$ . This, in fact, is true. As a function of  $n$ ,

$\nu(T_{m,n})$  is linear of slope  $(m - 1)/2$  for  $n > 0$ . We will see that the function  $\nu(K_{m,n})$  is close to being linear with the same slope. Specifically, we subtract from  $\nu$  a linear function to construct the following function:

$$h(n) = \nu(K_{m,n}) - \frac{(m - 1)}{2}n,$$

where  $n$  is an integer relatively prime to  $m$ . We have the following theorem:

**Theorem 2** *The function  $h(n)$  is a nonincreasing  $\frac{1}{2} \cdot \mathbb{Z}$ -valued function which is bounded below. In particular, we have*

$$-(m - 1) \leq h(n) - h(r) \leq 0$$

for all  $n > r$ , where both  $n$  and  $r$  are relatively prime to  $m$ .

From this result it follows that for all  $n$  large enough,  $h$  is constant. Hence for  $n$  large enough,  $\nu(K_{m,n})$  differs from  $\nu(T_{m,n})$  by a fixed constant. That is, for every knot  $K$  there exist integers  $N$  and  $c$  such that  $\nu(K_{m,n}) = \nu(T_{m,n}) + c$  for all  $n > N$ , where  $n$  is relatively prime to  $m$ . Additionally, a similar statement with corresponding constant  $c'$  holds for all  $n < N'$  for some  $N'$ .

Theorem 2 is sharp in the sense that there are knots  $K$  with associated functions  $h$  which achieve the bounds given in the theorem. For example, when  $K$  is slice,  $h(n) = (m - 1)/2$  for all  $n < 0$  and  $h(n) = -(m - 1)/2$  for all  $n > 0$ . Here the drop in functional value from  $n = -1$  to  $n = 1$  is maximal:  $h(1) - h(-1) = -(m - 1)$ . On the other hand, we will see that when  $\nu = \tau$  and  $\tau(K) = g_3(K)$ , the function  $h$  is constant.

Using Theorem 2, we can take several results which apply only to  $(m, mr + 1)$ -cables and extend their scope to include *all* cables. For example, the bounds on the value of  $\tau$  on  $(m, mr + 1)$ -cables described in Theorem 1 extend to all cables as follows.

**Corollary 3** *Let  $K \subset S^3$  be a nontrivial knot. Then the following inequality holds for all  $n$  relatively prime to  $m$ :*

$$m\tau(K) + \frac{(m - 1)(n - 1)}{2} \leq \tau(K_{m,n}) \leq m\tau(K) + \frac{(m - 1)(n + 1)}{2}.$$

When  $K$  satisfies  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ , we have

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(m - 1)(n - 1)}{2},$$

whereas when  $\tau(K) = -g(K)$ , we have

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(m - 1)(n + 1)}{2}.$$

Observe that the results in Corollary 3 could probably also have been obtained by using the definition of  $\tau$  and studying the filtered chain homotopy type of  $\mathcal{F}(K_{m,n})$  for  $n$  relatively prime to  $m$ . However, the proof here avoids this and uses only the analysis of  $\mathcal{F}(K_{m,mr+1})$  in [3] together with Theorem 2 to obtain the result for all cables.

The second half of Corollary 3 motivates studying knots  $K$  for which  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ . Hedden summarized many results about such knots and their  $(m, mr + 1)$ -cables in [3]. Now combining that discussion with Corollary 3 from above, we can extend several of his results to a more general setting. Let  $\mathcal{P}$  denote the class of all knots satisfying the equality  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ . An immediate consequence of Corollary 3 is the following.

**Corollary 4** *Let  $K$  be a nontrivial knot in  $S^3$ , and let  $n$  be relatively prime to  $m$ .*

- (1) *If  $K \in \mathcal{P}$ , then  $K_{m,n} \in \mathcal{P}$  if and only if  $n > 0$ .*
- (2) *If  $K \notin \mathcal{P}$ , then  $K_{m,n} \notin \mathcal{P}$ .*

As discussed in [3],  $\mathcal{P}$  contains several classes of knots. We mention two such classes here:

- Any knot  $K$  which bounds a properly embedded complex curve,  $V_f \subset B^4$ , with  $g(V_f) = g(K)$ . This set of knots includes, for example, positive knots (that is, knots which admit diagrams with only positive crossings). (See Hedden [1] and Livingston [9].)
- Any knot which admits a positive lens space (or L-space) surgery. (See Ozsváth and Szabó [12].)

From this, we have the following immediate applications extending the work of [3].

**Corollary 5** *If  $K_{m,n}$  bounds a properly embedded complex curve  $V_f \subset B^4$  satisfying  $g(V_f) = g(K_{m,n})$ , then  $n > 0$  and  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ .*

**Corollary 6** *Suppose that  $K_{m,n}$  admits a positive lens space (or L-space) surgery. Then  $n > 0$  and  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ .*

**Corollary 7** *Suppose  $K \notin \mathcal{P}$ . Then  $K_{m,n}$  is not a positive knot for any relatively prime pair of integers  $m, n$ .*

A final corollary concerns a more general class of knots – the class of  $\mathbb{C}$ -knots. A knot  $K$  is a  $\mathbb{C}$ -knot if  $K$  bounds a properly embedded complex curve  $V_f \subset B^4$ . From [1; 13; 16], we know that for such knots,  $\tau(K) = g_4(K) \geq 0$ . Coupling this result with Corollary 3, we have the following corollary.

**Corollary 8** *Suppose that  $K_{m,n}$  is a  $\mathbb{C}$ -knot. Then  $n \geq -2m\tau(K)/(m-1) - 1$ .*

The primary significance of each of these corollaries is that they can be used as obstructions to cables having the discussed properties. Moreover, it is interesting that  $\tau$  provides obstructions to such a wide array of geometric notions. For an excellent extended discussion of this, we refer the reader to [3].

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 contains the proof of Theorem 2. Section 3 contains the proof of Corollary 3. Finally, in Section 4 we observe that the strategy for the proof of Theorem 2 extends to a broader setting in which, instead of cabling, we consider a braiding construction.

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## 2 Proof of Theorem 2

Let  $r, n$  be integers relatively prime to  $m$  with  $n > r$ . The general strategy here is to first find a cobordism between  $K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r}$  and a torus knot.

We begin with the knot  $K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r}$ . Working through signs and orientations carefully, we find that

$$K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r} = K_{m,n} \# (-K)_{m,-r}.$$

We will now do a series of band moves to the knot  $K_{m,n} \# (-K)_{m,-r}$ . A band move on any knot  $K \subset S^3$  is accomplished as follows. Start with an embedding  $b: I \times I \rightarrow S^3$  such that  $b(I \times I) \cap K = b(I \times \{0, 1\})$  and such that  $b$  respects the orientation of  $K$ . Define  $K_b = K - b(I \times \{0, 1\}) \cup b(\{0, 1\} \times I)$ . The knot (or link)  $K_b$  is the result of doing a band move along  $b$ . Doing a band move to a knot simultaneously constructs a cobordism from the knot  $K$  to  $K_b$ . The genus of this cobordism can be computed explicitly. For example, in the special case that the result of performing a sequence of band moves is again a knot, one can show that the genus of the cobordism is half of the number of bands added.

Now there is a sequence of  $m-1$  band moves on  $K_{m,n} \# (-K)_{m,-r}$  which results in the knot (or link)  $(K \# -K)_{m,n-r}$ . See Figure 1 for an example. Since  $K \# -K$  is cobordant to the unknot,  $(K \# -K)_{m,n-r}$  is cobordant to the torus link  $T_{m,n-r}$ . Let  $k_+$  denote the smallest positive integer such that  $n-r+k_+$  is relatively prime to  $m$ . (If  $n-r$  is already relatively prime to  $m$ , then set  $k_+ = 0$ .) By doing  $k_+ \cdot (m-1)$  additional band moves to the torus link  $T_{m,n-r}$ , we obtain the torus knot  $T_{m,n-r+k_+}$ .

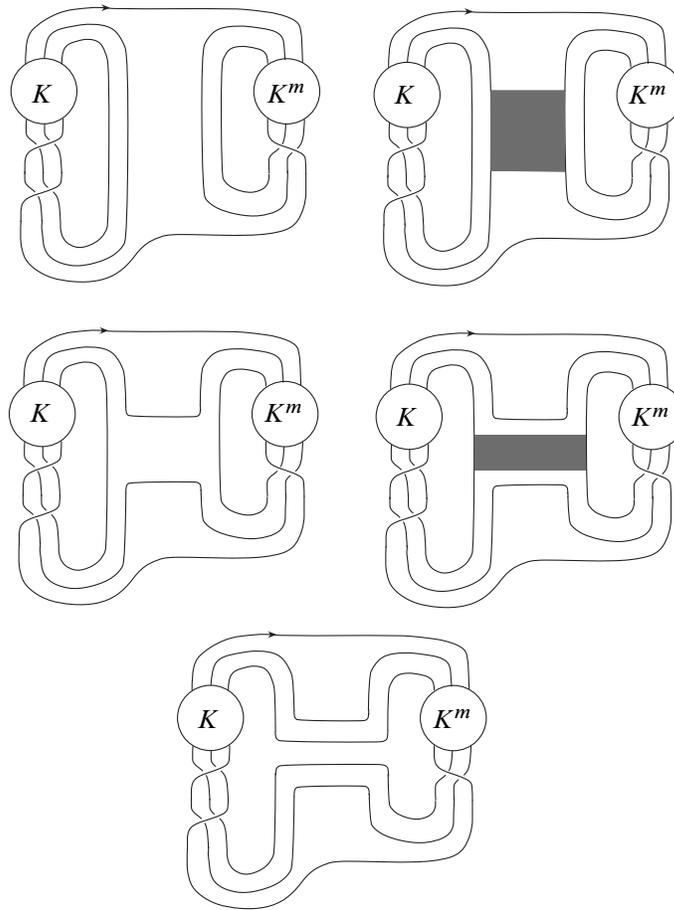


Figure 1: Beginning with the knot  $K_{3,2} \# (-K)_{3,-1}$ , we perform two band moves and obtain the knot  $(K \# -K)_{3,1}$ .  $K^m$  denotes the mirror image of  $K$ .

(Figure 2). Altogether, the total number of band moves performed was  $(k_+ + 1)(m - 1)$ . Therefore, the knot  $K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r}$  is genus  $(k_+ + 1)(m - 1)/2$  cobordant to the torus knot  $T_{m,n-r+k_+}$ . Hence we conclude that

$$g_4(K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r} \# -T_{m,n-r+k_+}) \leq \frac{(k_+ + 1)(m - 1)}{2}.$$

Now since  $|v(K)| \leq g_4(K)$ , it follows that

$$|v(K_{m,n} \# -K_{m,r} \# -T_{m,n-r+k_+})| \leq \frac{(k_+ + 1)(m - 1)}{2}.$$

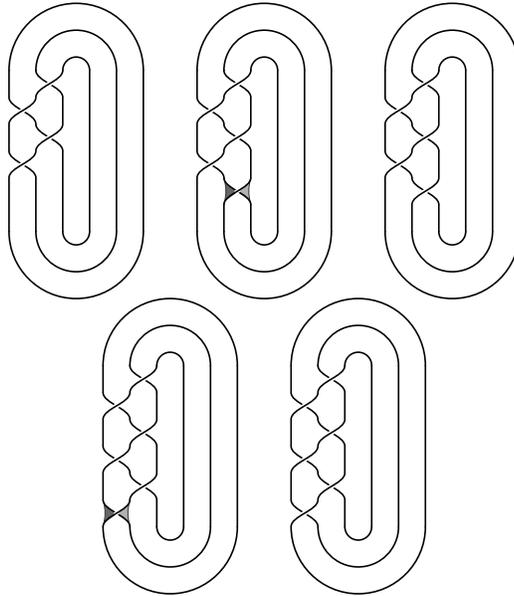


Figure 2: Beginning with the torus knot  $T_{3,2}$ , we perform two band moves and obtain  $T_{3,3}$ .

Simplifying the expression using the properties of  $\nu$ , we obtain

$$\left| \nu(K_{m,n}) - \nu(K_{m,r}) - \frac{(m-1)(n-r+k_+-1)}{2} \right| \leq \frac{(k_++1)(m-1)}{2}.$$

At this point, recall the function  $h(n)$  which we defined earlier. Using the definition of  $h$ , we can further simplify the inequality:

$$\left| h(n) - h(r) - \frac{(m-1)(k_+-1)}{2} \right| \leq \frac{(k_++1)(m-1)}{2}.$$

Hence,

$$(1) \quad -(m-1) \leq h(n) - h(r) \leq k_+(m-1).$$

Notice that if  $k_+ = 0$ , then we are done. If not, then we continue as follows.

Similar to before, let  $k_-$  denote the largest negative integer such that  $n-r+k_-$  is relatively prime to  $m$ . By doing  $|k_-| \cdot (m-1)$  band moves to  $T_{m,n-r}$ , we can obtain the torus knot  $T_{m,n-r+k_-}$ . Proceeding through the same steps as before, we obtain

$$(2) \quad (k_- - 1)(m-1) \leq h(n) - h(r) \leq 0.$$

Combining (1) and (2), we have

$$-(m-1) \leq h(n) - h(r) \leq 0$$

for all integers  $n > r$  where both  $n$  and  $r$  are relatively prime to  $m$ .

### 3 Proof of Corollary 3

Combining Theorem 1 and Theorem 2 together, we obtain an easy proof that the bounds on the value of  $\tau$  on  $(m, mr+1)$ -cables described in Theorem 1 extend to all cables. We now restate and prove Corollary 3.

**Corollary 3** *Let  $K \subset S^3$  be a nontrivial knot. Then the following inequality holds for all  $n$  relatively prime to  $m$ :*

$$m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n-1)}{2} \leq \tau(K_{m,n}) \leq m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n+1)}{2}.$$

When  $K$  satisfies  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ , we have

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n-1)}{2},$$

whereas when  $\tau(K) = -g(K)$ , we have

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) = m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n+1)}{2}.$$

**Proof** The proof of this corollary is obtained by carefully combining the equalities and inequalities found in Theorem 1 and Theorem 2. We will demonstrate a portion of the proof, leaving the rest to the reader.

Let  $m$  and  $n$  be two relatively prime integers with  $m > 0$ . Let  $r$  be an integer such that  $n > mr + 1$ . Then by Theorem 2,

$$h(n) - h(mr + 1) \leq 0.$$

Using the definition of  $h$  and letting  $v = \tau$ , we obtain

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) \leq \tau(K_{m,mr+1}) - \frac{m-1}{2}(mr - n + 1).$$

Using the upper bound on  $\tau(K_{m,mr+1})$  given by Theorem 1, we have

$$\tau(K_{m,n}) \leq m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n+1)}{2},$$

which is one side of the desired inequality.

To obtain the other side of the inequality, let  $r'$  be an integer such that  $mr' + 1 > n$ . Then by Theorem 2,

$$h(mr' + 1) - h(n) \leq 0.$$

We leave to the reader the task of reducing this inequality (using methods exactly similar to above) to obtain the desired second half of the inequality in the corollary.

Now let  $K$  be a knot such that  $\tau(K) = g(K)$ . Suppose for contradiction that  $\tau(K_{m,n}) \neq m\tau(K) + (m-1)(n-1)/2$ . By the inequality discussed above, this implies that  $\tau(K_{m,n}) > m\tau(K) + (m-1)(n-1)/2$ . Again, let  $r$  be an integer such that  $n > mr + 1$ . Then we have

$$\begin{aligned} h(n) - h(mr + 1) &= \tau(K_{m,n}) - \frac{(m-1)}{2}n - \tau(K_{m,mr+1}) + \frac{m-1}{2}(mr + 1) \\ &= \tau(K_{m,n}) - \frac{(m-1)}{2}n - m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)}{2} \\ &> m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)(n-1)}{2} - \frac{(m-1)}{2}n - m\tau(K) + \frac{(m-1)}{2} \\ &= 0. \end{aligned}$$

This contradicts Theorem 2. Therefore,  $\tau(K_{m,n}) = m\tau(K) + (m-1)(n-1)/2$  for all  $n$  relatively prime to  $m$ . A similar argument settles the case when  $K$  is a knot such that  $\tau(K) = -g(K)$ . □

## 4 Further analysis

The process of cabling a knot can be reinterpreted as a special case of the following more general procedure. Let  $\beta$  be an element of the braid group  $B_m$  such that the closure of the braid  $\hat{\beta}$  is a knot. There is a natural solid torus  $V$  which contains the closed braid  $\hat{\beta}$ . Remove a neighborhood of a knot  $K$  in  $S^3$  and glue in the solid torus  $V$  by a homeomorphism which maps longitude to longitude and meridian to meridian. We denote the resulting knot by  $K_\beta$ . Notice that if we take the braid  $\beta \in B_m$  to be  $(\sigma_{m-1}\sigma_{m-2}\cdots\sigma_1)^n$  (where  $\sigma_i$  denotes the  $i$ -th standard generator of the braid group), then the resulting knot  $K_\beta$  is the  $(m, n)$ -cable  $K_{m,n}$ .

For any braid  $\beta \in B_m$ , let  $\beta_r$  denote the braid consisting of  $\beta$  with  $r$  full twists adjoined to the end of the braid. Specifically,  $\beta_r = \beta(\sigma_{m-1}\sigma_{m-2}\cdots\sigma_1)^{mr}$ . The value of  $\nu$  on  $K_{\beta_r}$  as a function of  $r$  turns out to have controlled behavior similar to that of cabling. Define the function

$$g(r) = \nu(K_{\beta_r}) - \frac{(m-1)}{2}mr,$$

where  $\beta \in B_m$  is a braid whose closure is a knot and  $r$  is an integer. Then we have the following theorem about the behavior of the function  $g$ .

**Theorem 9** *The function  $g(r)$  is a nonincreasing integer valued function which is bounded below. In particular,*

$$-(m-1) \leq g(r) - g(s) \leq 0$$

for all  $r > s$ .

From this theorem, it follows that the function  $g$  is eventually constant. This allows us to describe quite clearly a relationship among the values of  $\tau$  (and  $s$ ) on an entirely new set of knots. Fixing a knot  $K$  and a braid  $\beta \in B_m$  such that  $\hat{\beta}$  is a knot, Theorem 9 implies that for all large  $r$ ,

$$v(K_{\beta_{r+1}}) = v(K_{\beta_r}) + \frac{m(m-1)}{2}.$$

where  $v$  can be taken to be either  $\tau$  or  $s$ . Note that if we take  $K$  in the above construction to be the unknot, then the theorem relates the values of  $v$  on knots with braid representatives which differ by full twists.

We turn now to the proof of Theorem 9.

**Proof** As with the proof of Theorem 2, the first goal here is to find a cobordism between  $K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s}$  and a torus knot. Notice that  $-K_{\beta_s} = (-K)_{(\beta^{-1})_{-s}}$ . Therefore,

$$K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s} = K_{\beta_r} \# (-K)_{(\beta^{-1})_{-s}}.$$

By doing  $m-1$  band moves to the latter knot, we obtain the knot  $(K \# -K)_{(\beta\beta^{-1})_{r-s}}$ . Since  $K \# -K$  is cobordant to the unknot and  $\beta\beta^{-1}$  is the trivial  $m$ -strand braid, this new knot is cobordant to the torus link  $T_{m,m(r-s)}$ . Again, by doing  $(m-1)$  band moves to the torus link  $T_{m,m(r-s)}$ , we obtain the torus knot  $T_{m,m(r-s)+1}$ . A total of  $2(m-1)$  band moves have been performed. Therefore, the knot  $K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s}$  is genus  $(m-1)$  cobordant to the torus knot  $T_{m,m(r-s)+1}$ . Hence

$$g_4(K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s} \# -T_{m,m(r-s)+1}) \leq m-1.$$

Now since  $|v(K)| \leq g_4(K)$ , it follows that

$$|v(K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s} \# -T_{m,m(r-s)+1})| \leq m-1,$$

which simplifies to

$$\left| v(K_{\beta_r}) - v(K_{\beta_s}) - \frac{(m-1)m(r-s)}{2} \right| \leq m-1.$$

We now recall the function  $g(r)$  which we defined earlier. Using the definition of  $g$ , we can further simplify the inequality and obtain

$$(3) \quad -(m-1) \leq g(r) - g(s) \leq m-1.$$

This gives us only half of the desired inequality. To obtain the remaining half, go back to the torus link  $T_{m,m(r-s)}$  which we obtained from  $K_{\beta_r} \# -K_{\beta_s}$  by a cobordism which added  $m-1$  bands. Instead of adding  $m-1$  additional bands to obtain the torus knot  $T_{m,m(r-s)+1}$ , add  $m-1$  bands to obtain the torus knot  $T_{m,m(r-s)-1}$ . Proceeding through the same steps as before, we obtain

$$(4) \quad -2(m-1) \leq g(r) - g(s) \leq 0.$$

Combining (3) and (4), we have

$$-(m-1) \leq g(r) - g(s) \leq 0$$

for all integers  $r > s$ , as desired.  $\square$

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*Department of Mathematics, University of San Francisco  
San Francisco, California, 94117*

cvancott@usfca.edu

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