

A HIGHER-ORDER GENUS INVARIANT AND KNOT FLOER HOMOLOGY

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(Communicated by Daniel Ruberman)

ABSTRACT. It is known that knot Floer homology detects the genus and Alexander polynomial of a knot. We investigate whether knot Floer homology of K detects more structure of minimal genus Seifert surfaces for K . We define an invariant of algebraically slice, genus one knots and provide examples to show that knot Floer homology does not detect this invariant. Finally, we remark that certain metabelian L^2 -signatures bound this invariant from below.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knot Floer homology was defined by Peter Ozsváth and Zoltán Szabó [OS04b] and by Jacob Rasmussen [Ras03]. Knot Floer homology is a powerful knot invariant, and it detects such information as the Alexander polynomial [OS04b], [Ras03] and knot genus [OS04a, Theorem 1.2]. Either of these invariants can be computed from a minimal genus Seifert surface. We investigate whether knot Floer homology contains more information about any minimal genus Seifert surface.

In [Hor09], the author defined a geometric invariant for knots in S^3 called the **first-order genus**. Roughly, the first-order genus of K is obtained by adding the individual genera (in $S^3 - K$) of the curves in a symplectic basis on a minimal genus Seifert surface for K , and taking the minimum over all minimal genus Seifert surfaces and all symplectic bases. The first-order genus of a knot is difficult to compute, as there are many symplectic bases for a given Seifert surface. While difficult to compute in general, the first-order genus is a notion of higher-order genus defined for all knots.

In this paper, we define a similar invariant, though it is only defined for algebraically slice, genus one knots. We take a minimum over Seifert surfaces, but what we record is the genus (in $S^3 - K$) of a basis curve which inherits the zero framing from the surface. This invariant is called the **differential genus**. We provide many examples and show that the differential genus is not detected by knot Floer homology.

Theorem 1.1. *There are examples of knots that cannot be distinguished by knot Floer homology, but have different differential genera.*

Received by the editors April 23, 2009, and, in revised form, July 23, 2009.

2010 *Mathematics Subject Classification*. Primary 57M25.

The author was partially supported by National Science Foundation grant DMS-0706929, the Lodieska Stockbridge Vaughn Fellowship at Rice University, and the NSF Mathematical Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellowship DMS-0902786.

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Cochran, Harvey and Leidy [CHL08] defined the first-order L^2 -signatures of a knot. By their definition, each algebraically slice, genus one knot has (at most) three first-order L^2 -signatures. We will discuss the relationship between our higher-order genus invariant and these first-order L^2 -signatures.

2. MOTIVATION AND DEFINITION

Let Σ_g be a compact, oriented surface with one boundary component. If $f : \Sigma_g \hookrightarrow S^3$ is an embedding with $K = f(\partial\Sigma_g)$, then some invariants of K can be computed using this embedded surface $f(\Sigma_g)$. Such a surface is called a **Seifert surface** for K . For example, any Seifert surface can be used to compute the knot's Alexander polynomial. This polynomial is encoded in the knot Floer homology $\widehat{HFK}(K)$. The smallest genus of such embedded surfaces with boundary K is called the genus of K , $g(K)$, and this invariant is also detected by $\widehat{HFK}(K)$. We naively ask whether $\widehat{HFK}(K)$ contains any more information about the embedded surfaces with boundary K . For example, we are interested in whether $\widehat{HFK}(K)$ contains information about the knottedness of certain simple closed curves on Seifert surfaces $f(\Sigma_g)$ for K . In this paper we will restrict our attention to genus one, algebraically slice knots.

Our motivating example is the positively-clasped, untwisted Whitehead double of a knot K , denoted $D(K)$ and depicted in Figure 1. There is an obvious genus one Seifert surface for $D(K)$. In [Hor09], the author defined a knot invariant, $g_1(K)$, that measures the knottedness of the bands in Seifert surfaces for a knot. For many knots K , this invariant applied to $D(K)$ ‘detects’ the genus of K ; i.e. $g_1(D(K)) = 1 + g(K)$. One may ask if $\widehat{HFK}(D(K))$ detects $g_1(D(K)) \approx g(K)$, and by Hedden’s formula [Hed07, Theorem 1.2], the answer is ‘yes’ in the sense that $\widehat{HFK}(D(K), 1)$ has as a direct summand $\bigoplus_{j=-g(K)}^{g(K)} G_j(K)$, where the $G_j(K)$ are certain groups depending on K . Due to computational difficulties, it is unknown whether $\widehat{HFK}(K)$ detects $g_1(K)$ in general. We aim to define an invariant that is more computable than g_1 and which measures, more or less, the same thing.

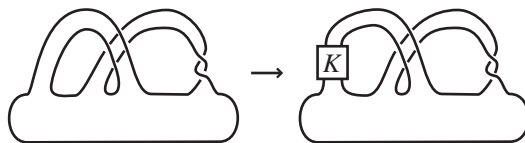


FIGURE 1. $D(K)$: the positively-clasped, untwisted Whitehead double of K

Definition 2.1. Let K be an algebraically slice knot in S^3 of genus one. Let Σ be any genus one Seifert surface for K . Then Σ has a **metabolizer** \mathfrak{m} , a rank one submodule of $H_1(\Sigma; \mathbb{Z})$ on which the Seifert form vanishes. One can show that Σ has exactly two metabolizers \mathfrak{m}_1 and \mathfrak{m}_2 . Let $[\alpha_1]$ and $[\alpha_2] \in H_1(\Sigma; \mathbb{Z})$ be generators of \mathfrak{m}_1 and \mathfrak{m}_2 , respectively. By the classification of essential closed curves on a punctured torus [Min99], each $[\alpha_i]$ determines a unique oriented knot in Σ ; denote this knot by α_i . The knot α_i is called a **derivative of K with respect to the metabolizer \mathfrak{m}_i** .

To sum up, each genus one Seifert surface Σ for an algebraically slice knot K has exactly two (up to orientation) derivatives α_1 and α_2 . We denote this set of derivatives as $\partial(K, \Sigma) = \{\alpha_1, \alpha_2\}$.

Let $\mathcal{G}(K)$ denote the set of isotopy classes (in $S^3 - K$) of genus one Seifert surfaces for K , and if α is a null-homologous knot in $S^3 - K$, let $g^K(\alpha)$ denote the genus of α in $S^3 - K$. We define the **differential genus** of K to be

$$\text{dg}(K) = \min_{\Sigma \in \mathcal{G}(K)} \left\{ \max_{\partial(K, \Sigma) = \{\alpha_1, \alpha_2\}} \{g^K(\alpha_1), g^K(\alpha_2)\} \right\}.$$

Remark 2.2. The differential genus measures the knottedness of self-linking zero curves on (genus one) Seifert surfaces for K . One may define metabolizers and derivatives of algebraically slice knots of higher genus (see [CHL08]), but in the higher genus setting, a metabolizer may have infinitely many distinct derivatives. One may try to generalize the definition of differential genus to higher genus algebraically slice knots; this may be taken up in a future paper.

3. EXAMPLES

Example 3.1. Let K be a knot that is non-trivial and not a cable. By [Whi73], the untwisted Whitehead double of K , $D(K)$, has a unique minimal genus Seifert surface. Each of the untwisted curves on this Seifert surface has the same knot type as K . One can further argue that $\text{dg}(D(K)) = g(K)$.

Example 3.2. Let $R = 9_{46}$ as depicted in Figure 2. A symplectic basis of curves α and β have been drawn for the implied Seifert surface Σ . One can check that α and β have self-linking zero, and so the two derivatives for Σ are α and β . Each of α and β is unknotted; however, $g^R(\alpha) = g^R(\beta) = 1$. The knot Floer homology of R is

$$\begin{matrix} 0 & 0 & 2 \\ 0 & 5 & 0 \\ 2 & 0 & 0 \end{matrix}$$

where the 5 appears in bigrading $(0,0)$. The genus of R is one, and since $\text{rank } \widehat{HFK}(R, 1) = 2 < 4$, we may apply Theorem 2.3 of [Juh08] to conclude that Σ is the unique genus one Seifert surface for R up to isotopy. We conclude that $\text{dg}(R) = 1$.

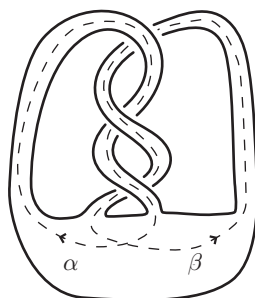


FIGURE 2. The 9_{46} knot

Example 3.3. Now consider the knot K_n in Figure 3. Observe that $K_0 = 9_{46}$. A symplectic basis of curves x and y have been drawn for the implied Seifert surface F . One can check the Seifert form of F to be

$$\begin{pmatrix} 3n & -2 \\ -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

If $n \in \mathbb{N}$, the two curves of self-linking zero are $\alpha_n = x + ny$ and $\beta_n = y$. As in the calculation for 9_{46} , one can check that $g^{K_n}(\beta_n) = 1$. The other curve α_n is more complicated; see Figure 4. The knot α_n can be represented by the braid on $n + 1$ strands depicted in Figure 5.

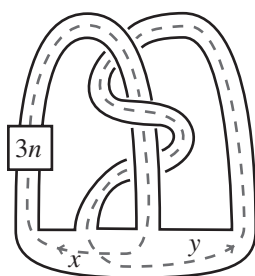


FIGURE 3. A diagram for K_n , and a basis for a Seifert surface

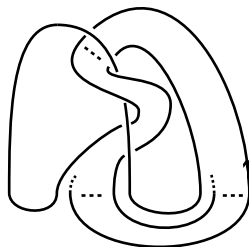


FIGURE 4. A knot diagram of α_n , a curve of self-linking zero

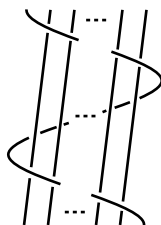


FIGURE 5. A braid representative of α_n using $n + 1$ strands

By [Cro89, Corollary 4.1], the Seifert surface constructed by applying Seifert's algorithm to the braid diagram in Figure 5 has minimal genus. In particular,

$g(\alpha_n) = n$, and hence $g^{K_n}(\alpha_n) \geq n$. We will argue that $\text{dg}(K_n) \geq n$. For a given n , one may easily construct a grid diagram for K_n . For several small values of n , we used Marc Culler’s Gridlink [Cul] to compute the knot Floer homology of K_n . We found that $\widehat{HFK}(K_n) \cong \widehat{HFK}(9_{46})$ for the values $n = -1, \frac{-2}{3}, \frac{-1}{3}, 0, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3}, 1$. A recent result of M. Hedden [Hed08] implies that $\widehat{HFK}(K_n) \cong \widehat{HFK}(9_{46})$ for all n . By [Juh08], F is the unique genus one Seifert surface for K_n . By previous arguments, we conclude that $\text{dg}(K_n) = g^{K_n}(\alpha_n) \geq g(\alpha_n) = n$.

Proof of Theorem 1.1. One can show by calculating the Alexander polynomials of the derivatives of $K_{1/3}$ (which have the knot type of the unknot and 10_{132}) that $\text{dg}(K_{1/3}) \geq 2$. The knot $K_{1/3}$ is called 11_{n139} in the knot tables [CL09]. Thus, $K_{1/3}$ is an explicit example of a knot with the same knot Floer homology as 9_{46} and distinct differential genus. \square

Theorem 3.4. *There exists an infinite family of knots K_n such that*

- $\widehat{HFK}(K_n) \cong \widehat{HFK}(K_m)$ for all m and n , and
- $\text{dg}(K_n) \neq \text{dg}(K_m)$ for $m \neq n$.

Proof. The family is constructed by taking a subsequence of the knots K_n from Example 3.3. \square

4. FIRST-ORDER L^2 -SIGNATURES AND THE DIFFERENTIAL GENUS

Metabelian signatures of knots have been defined by Casson-Gordon, Letsche, Cochran-Orr-Teichner, Friedl, and Cochran-Harvey-Leidy [CG78], [CG86], [Let00], [COT03], [Fri04], [CHL08]. We are interested in those of Cochran, Harvey, and Leidy because each genus one, algebraically slice knot has two “first-order L^2 -signatures.” We now recall some of the background needed to define these signatures.

Suppose K is an oriented knot in S^3 ; M_K denotes the closed, oriented 3-manifold obtained by zero-surgery on K , and $G = \pi_1(M_K)$. Let $G^{(1)}$ denote the commutator subgroup of G and let $G^{(2)}$ denote the commutator subgroup of $G^{(1)}$. The **classical rational Alexander module** of K is

$$\mathcal{A}_0(K) := \frac{G^{(1)}}{G^{(2)}} \otimes_{\mathbb{Z}[t, t^{-1}]} \mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}].$$

Here $G^{(1)}/G^{(2)}$ is identified with the classical Alexander module $H_1(M_K; \mathbb{Z}[t, t^{-1}])$. The **Blanchfield pairing** of K :

$$\mathcal{B}\ell_0^K : \mathcal{A}_0(K) \times \mathcal{A}_0(K) \rightarrow \mathbb{Q}(t)/\mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}],$$

is defined by

$$\mathcal{B}\ell_0^K(x, y) = \sum_{n \in \mathbb{Z}} \frac{(d \cdot yt^n)t^n}{\Delta_K(t)},$$

where $\Delta_K(t)$ is the Alexander polynomial of K and d is a 2-chain with $\partial d = \Delta_K(t) \cdot x$. We say a submodule $P \subset \mathcal{A}_0(K)$ is **Lagrangian** (respectively **isotropic**) if $P = P^\perp$ (respectively $P \subset P^\perp$) with respect to the Blanchfield pairing. To a submodule $P \subset \mathcal{A}_0(K)$, we can associate a metabelian quotient $\phi_P : G \rightarrow G/\tilde{P}$ by setting $\tilde{P} = \ker(G^{(1)} \rightarrow G^{(1)}/G^{(2)} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}_0(K) \rightarrow \mathcal{A}_0(K)/P)$. To this quotient we can associate a real number, called the Cheeger-Gromov von Neumann ρ -invariant, $\rho(M_K, \phi_P)$ [CG85].

Definition 4.1. The **first-order L^2 -signatures of a knot K** are the real numbers $\rho(M_K, \phi_P)$, where P is a Lagrangian submodule of $\mathcal{A}_0(K)$ with respect to $\mathcal{B}\ell_0^K$.

Remark 4.2. These are a subset of the metabelian L^2 -signatures of Cochran, Harvey, and Leidy [CHL08, Definition 4.1], who allow for P to be isotropic.

Assume K is a genus one, algebraically slice knot with a Seifert surface Σ . The reader will recall that $H_1(\Sigma; \mathbb{Z})$ generates $\mathcal{A}_0(K)$ as a $\mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}]$ -module (one must pick a lift of Σ to the infinite cyclic cover). If $\Delta_K(t) = 1$, then $\mathcal{A}_0(K) = 0$ has no Lagrangian submodules. On the other hand, if $\Delta_K(t) \neq 1$, then $\Delta_K(t) = f(t)f(t^{-1})$ for some linear polynomial $f(t)$. $\mathcal{A}_0(K)$ must be isomorphic to $\frac{\mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}]}{\langle f(t)f(t^{-1}) \rangle}$. Thus, any proper submodule P must be

$$\frac{\mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}]}{\langle f(t) \rangle} \quad \text{or} \quad \frac{\mathbb{Q}[t, t^{-1}]}{\langle f(t^{-1}) \rangle}.$$

Since the Blanchfield pairing is primitive, $\mathcal{A}_0(K)$ will have precisely two Lagrangians. By Definition 2.1, K will have precisely two Lagrangians and hence two first-order L^2 -signatures.

Definition 4.3. Suppose $P \subset \mathcal{A}_0(K)$ is a Lagrangian. The metabolizer \mathfrak{m} **represents P** if the image of \mathfrak{m} under the map

$$i_* \circ (\text{id} \otimes 1) : H_1(\Sigma; \mathbb{Z}) \hookrightarrow H_1(\Sigma; \mathbb{Z}) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \twoheadrightarrow \mathcal{A}_0(K)$$

spans P as a \mathbb{Q} -vector space. (To define i_* , it is necessary to choose a lift of Σ to the infinite cyclic cover, but this definition is independent of the choice.)

Proposition 4.4 (Lemma 5.5 of [CHL08]). *Let K be an algebraically slice knot and let P be a Lagrangian of $\mathcal{A}_0(K)$. If Σ is any Seifert surface for K , then some metabolizer of $H_1(\Sigma)$ represents P .*

Proposition 4.5 (Corollary 5.8 of [CHL08]). *Let K be a genus one, algebraically slice knot. Suppose P is a Lagrangian for K , Σ is a genus one Seifert surface for K , \mathfrak{m} is the metabolizer of Σ representing P , and J is the derivative with respect to \mathfrak{m} . Then the first-order L^2 -signature of K with respect to P is equal to $\rho_0(J) = \int_{S^1} \sigma_\omega(J) d\omega$, the integral of the Levine-Tristram signature function.*

Determining $\text{dg}(K)$ involves computing the genus of two curves from each genus one Seifert surface, of which there may be many. Examples of knots that have an arbitrary number of non-isotopic Seifert surfaces are known [Suz91, p. 47]. Yet we have the following remarkable fact: if just one of the first-order L^2 -signatures is large, then the differential genus must be large.

Proposition 4.6. *Let K be a genus one, algebraically slice knot with non-trivial Alexander polynomial. Let ρ_1 and ρ_2 denote the first-order L^2 -signatures of K with respect to the two Lagrangians P_1 and P_2 . Then $2 \text{dg}(K) \geq \max\{|\rho_1|, |\rho_2|\}$.*

Proof. Let Σ be the Seifert surface where the minimum is attained. For either derivative $J_i \subset \Sigma$, where J_i represents the Lagrangian P_i , we have

$$2 \text{dg}(K) \geq 2g^K(J_i) \geq 2g(J_i) \geq \left| \int_{S^1} \sigma_\omega(J_i) d\omega \right| = |\rho_i|. \quad \square$$

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