Revista Colombiana de Matemáticas
Volumen 41(2007)2, páginas 393-395

Unmixed bipartite graphs

Grafos bipartitos sin mezcla

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ABSTRACT. In this note we give a combinatorial characterization of all the unmixed bipartite graphs.

Key words and phrases. Unmixed graph, minimal vertex cover, bipartite graph, König theorem.

2000 Mathematics Subject Classification. 05C75, 05C90, 13H10.

RESUMEN. En esta nota nosotros presentamos una caracterización combinatoria de todos los grafos bipartitos no-mezcladas.

Palabras y frases clave. Grafos no-mezclados, cubrimiento de vértices mínimo, grafos bipartitos, teorema de König.

1. Unmixed graphs

In the sequel we use [3] as a reference for standard terminology and notation on graph theory.

Let G be a simple graph with vertex set $V(G)$ and edge set $E(G)$. A subset $C \subset V(G)$ is a *minimal vertex cover* of G if: (1) every edge of G is incident with one vertex in C, and (2) there is no proper subset of C with the first property. If C satisfies condition (1) only, then C is called a *vertex cover* of G. Notice that C is a minimal vertex cover if and only if $V(G) \setminus C$ is a maximal independent set. A graph G is called *unmixed* if all the minimal vertex covers of G have the same number of elements and it is called *well covered* [6] if all the maximal independent sets of G have the same number of elements.

[a]Partially supported by CONACyT grant 49251-F and SNI, México.

The notion of unmixed graph is related to some other graph theoretical and algebraic properties. The following implications hold for any graph without isolated vertices [1, 3, 8]:

$$\text{Cohen-Macaulay} \implies \text{unmixed} \implies B\text{-graph} \implies \text{vertex-critical}.$$

Structural aspects of Cohen-Macaulay bipartite graphs were first studied in [2]. In loc. cit. it is shown that G is Cohen-Macaulay if and only if the simplicial complex Δ_G generated by the maximal independent sets of G is shellable. The main result that we present in this note is the following combinatorial characterization of all the unmixed bipartite graphs. Our result is inspired by a criterion of Herzog and Hibi [4, Theorem 3.4] that describe all Cohen-Macaulay bipartite graphs in combinatorial terms.

Theorem 1.1. *Let G be a bipartite graph without isolated vertices. Then G is unmixed if and only if there is a bipartition $V_1 = \{x_1, \dots, x_g\}$, $V_2 = \{y_1, \dots, y_g\}$ of G such that:* (a) $\{x_i, y_i\} \in E(G)$ *for all i, and* (b) *if $\{x_i, y_j\}$ and $\{x_j, y_k\}$ are in $E(G)$ and i, j, k are distinct, then $\{x_i, y_k\} \in E(G)$.*

Proof. $\Rightarrow$) Since G is bipartite, there is a bipartition (V_1, V_2) of G, i.e., $V(G) = V_1 \cup V_2$, $V_1 \cap V_2 = \emptyset$, and every edge of G joins V_1 with V_2. Let g be the vertex covering number of G, i.e., g is the number of elements in any minimal vertex cover of G. Notice that V_1 and V_2 are both minimal vertex covers of G, hence $g = |V_1| = |V_2|$. By König theorem [3, Theorem 10.2, p. 96] g is the maximum number of independent edges of G. Therefore after permutation of the vertices we obtain that $V_1 = \{x_1, \dots, x_g\}$, $V_2 = \{y_1, \dots, y_g\}$, and that $\{x_i, y_i\} \in E(G)$ for $i = 1, \dots, g$. Thus we have proved that (a) holds. To prove (b) take $\{x_i, y_j\}$ and $\{x_j, y_k\}$ in $E(G)$ such that i, j, k are distinct. Assume that x_i is not adjacent to y_k. Then there is a maximal independent set of vertices A containing x_i and y_k. Notice that $|A| = g$ because G is unmixed. Hence $C = V(G) \setminus A$ is a minimal vertex cover of G with g vertices. Since x_i and y_k are not on C, we get that y_j and x_j are both in C. As C intersects $\{x_\ell, y_\ell\}$ in at least one vertex for $\ell \neq j$, we obtain that $|C| \geq g + 1$, a contradiction.

$\Leftarrow$) Let C be a minimal vertex cover of G. It suffices to prove that C intersects $\{x_j, y_j\}$ in exactly one vertex for $j = 1, \dots, g$. Assume that x_j and y_j belong to C for some j. If $v \in V(G)$, we denote the neighbor set of v by $N_G(v)$. Thus there are $x_i \in N_G(y_j) \setminus \{x_j\}$ and $y_k \in N_G(x_j) \setminus \{y_j\}$ such that $x_i \notin C$ and $y_k \notin C$. Notice that i, j, k are distinct. Indeed if $i = k$, then $\{x_i, y_i\}$ is an edge of G not covered by C, which is impossible. Therefore using (b) we get that $\{x_i, y_k\}$ is an edge of C, a contradiction. ☑

Ravindra [7] has shown a characterization of well covered bipartite graphs. Namely, G is well covered if and only if for every edge $\{x, y\}$ in the perfect matching, the induced subgraph $\langle N_G(x) \cup N_G(y) \rangle$ is a complete bipartite graph. The advantage of our characterization is that it admits a natural possible extension to hypergraphs and clutters with a perfect matching of König type [5].

As a consequence of Theorem 1.1 we recover the following result on the structure of unmixed trees.

Corollary 1.1. [8, Theorem 2.4, Corollary 2.5] *Let G be a tree with at least three vertices. Then G is unmixed if and only if there is a bipartition* $V_1 = \{x_1, \dots, x_g\}$, $V_2 = \{y_1, \dots, y_g\}$ *of G such that:* (a) $\{x_i, y_i\} \in E(G)$ *for all i, and* (b) *for each i either* $\deg(x_i) = 1$ *or* $\deg(y_i) = 1$.

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(Recibido en julio de 2007. Aceptado en agosto de 2007)

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