THERE ARE NO PURE RELATIONAL WIDTH 2 CONSTRAINT SATISFACTION PROBLEMS

VÍCTOR DALMAU

Departament de tecnologies de la informació i les comunicacions,
Universitat Pompeu Fabra,
Estació de França, Passeig de la circumval.laci 8, 08003, Barcelona (Spain)
victor.dalmau@upf.edu

Abstract. In this note, we show that every constraint satisfaction problem that has relational width 2 has also relational width 1. This is achieved by means of an obstruction-like characterization of relational width which we believe to be of independent interest.

Keywords: Computational Complexity, Constraint Satisfaction Problems.

1. Introduction

Let **B** be a relational structure. In a *constraint satisfaction problem with template* **B**, CSP(**B**), we are given a relational structure **A** and the goal is to decide whether **A** is homomorphic to **B**. Motivated by the Feder-Vardi dichotomy conjecture [9] stating that for each **B**, CSP(**B**) is either solvable in polynomial time or NP-complete, there has been a good wealth of research aimed to distinguish those templates **B** that give rise to tractable (i.e., solvable in polynomial time) CSPs from those that do not. The length of the list of tractable cases known so far (see [5, 7] for recent surveys) contrasts sharply with the number of algorithmic principles which is very limited. Indeed, all known tractable cases are solvable either by the query language Datalog [9], via the "few subpowers" property [10], or by a combination (sometimes very non-trivial) of the two. Whereas the few subpowers properly is well understood [10], the reach of Datalog Programs as a tool to solve CSPs has not yet been precisely delineated, despite considerable effort (see [6] for a survey on the topic). Datalog Programs have been parameterized in several ways (number of variables per rule, arity of the IDBs) giving rise to different notions of *width*. Among them, the *relational width*, introduced by Bulatov [4], has received considerable interest (see [4, 1, 2, 3, 13, 11]). An interesting feature of relational width is its independence on the arity of the relations of **B**, which makes it particularly appealing for the so-called algebraic approach to the CSP [5]. The class of problems with relational width 1 corresponds, in artificial intelligence terminology, to those solvable by the arc-consistency algorithm [8]. Feder and Vardi [9] gave a complete characterization leading to a decision procedure for deciding if a structure **B** gives rise to a constraint satisfaction problem, CSP(**B**) of relational width 1. Little is known for higher levels of relational width. For $k = 2$ or $k \geq 4$ we do not possess examples of *pure* relational width k problems, i.e, structures **B** that have relational width k but not $k-1$. In this note we adress and solve the case $k = 2$ showing that there are not pure relational width 2 problems. This is achieved by providing an obstruction-like characterization of relational width.

2. Preliminaires and Statement of the Main Result

Most of the terminology introduced in this section is fairly standard. A *vocabulary* is a finite set of relation symbols or predicates. In what follows, τ always denotes a vocabulary. Every relation symbol P in τ has an *arity* $r = \rho(P) \geq 0$ associated to it. We also say that P is an r-ary relation symbol.

A τ-structure $\mathbf{A}$ consists of a set A, called the *universe* of $\mathbf{A}$, and a relation $P^{\mathbf{A}} \subseteq A^r$ for every relation symbol $P \in \tau$ where r is the arity of P. For ease of notation, we shall say that $P(a_1, \dots, a_r)$ *holds* in $\mathbf{A}$ to indicate that $(a_1, \dots, a_r) \in P^{\mathbf{A}}$. All structures in this paper are assumed to be *finite*, i.e., structures with a finite universe. Throughout the paper we use the same boldface and slanted capital letters to denote a structure and its universe, respectively.

A *homomorphism* from a τ-structure $\mathbf{A}$ to a τ-structure $\mathbf{B}$ is a mapping $h : A \to B$ such that for every r-ary $P \in \tau$ and every $(a_1, \dots, a_r) \in P^{\mathbf{A}}$, we have $(h(a_1), \dots, h(a_r)) \in P^{\mathbf{B}}$. We say that $\mathbf{A}$ is homomorphic to $\mathbf{B}$ and denote this by $\mathbf{A} \to \mathbf{B}$ if there exists a homomorphism from $\mathbf{A}$ to $\mathbf{B}$.

If $\mathbf{A}$ is a τ-structure and $f : A \to B$ a mapping with domain the universe of A and image a finite set B, we define the homomorphic image of $\mathbf{A}$ by f, $f(\mathbf{A})$, to be the τ-structure with domain $f(A)$, and such that for every $P \in \tau$ of arity, say r,

$$P^{f(\mathbf{A})} = \{(f(a_1), \dots, f(a_r)) | (a_1, \dots, a_r) \in P^{\mathbf{A}}\}$$

We define the union $\mathbf{A} \cup \mathbf{B}$ of τ-structures $\mathbf{A}$ and $\mathbf{B}$ to be the τ-structure with universe $A \cup B$ and such that $P^{\mathbf{A} \cup \mathbf{B}} = P^{\mathbf{A}} \cup P^{\mathbf{B}}$ for every $P \in \tau$.

The concept of relational width was introduced initially by Bulatov in [4]. The presentation given here follows [6].

For any mapping f and $I \subseteq \text{dom}(f)$ we denote by f_I the restriction of f to I,. For every f, g partial mappings from A to B, we write $f \subseteq g$ to indicate that $\text{dom}(f) \subseteq \text{dom}(g)$ and that $g_{\text{dom}(f)} = f$. We also say that g is an *extension of* f or alternatively that f is a *restriction* of g.

Definition 1. *Let* $\mathbf{A}$,$\mathbf{B}$ *be* τ*-structures and let* $k \geq 1$*. A* k*-minimal family for* $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ *is nonemtpy set* H *of partial mappings from* A *to* B *such that for every* $h \in H$*:*

- (i) *for every tuple* $P(a_1, \dots, a_m)$ *in* $\mathbf{A}$ *there exists some tuple* $P(b_1, \dots, b_m)$ *in* $\mathbf{B}$ *such that* $h(a_i) = b_i$ *for every* $a_i \in \text{dom}(h)$ *and such that for every subset* I *of* $\{a_1, \dots, a_n\}$ *with* $|I| \leq k$*, there exits a mapping* h' *in* H *such that* $h'(a_i) = b_i$ *for every* $a_i \in I$*.*
- (ii) $h' \in H$ *for every* $h' \subseteq h$*.*
- (iii) *if* $\text{dom}(h) < k$ *then for every* $a \in A$*, there exists some* $h' \in H$ *with* $a \in \text{dom}(h')$ *and* $h \subseteq h'$

There exists a very simple procedure, called *k-minimal test*, that decides, given two relational structures $\mathbf{A}$ and $\mathbf{B}$, whether there exists a k-minimal family for $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ (and actually finds one). The k-minimal test starts by placing in the hypothetical k-minimal family H all partial mappings from A to B of domain size at most k. Then in an interative fashion it removes from H all mappings that do not satisfy any of conditions (1-3) of k-minimal family until the process stabilizes. Since the number of partial mappings from A to B with domain size k is bounded by $|A||B|^k$ the k-minimal test runs in polynomial time. We say that $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ passes the k-minimal test if the resulting H is nonempty and that fails otherwise. A structure $\mathbf{B}$ has *relational width* k if $\mathbf{A} \rightarrow \mathbf{B}$ for every structure $\mathbf{A}$ such that $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ passes the k-minimal test.

The main result of this paper is the following

Theorem 1. *Every structure with relational width* 2 *has also relational width* 1.

3. Proof of Theorem 1

The proof has two ingredients: The first one is an obstruction-like characterization of relational width (Theorem 3). The second ingredient is the Sparse Incomparability Lemma [12].

Let $m \geq 1$. A *cycle in a τ-structure* $\mathbf{A}$ *of length* m is a collection of m different tuples $P_0(a_1^0, \ldots, a_{r_0}^0), \ldots, P_{m-1}(a_1^{m-1}, \ldots, a_{r_{m-1}}^{m-1})$ that hold in $\mathbf{A}$ such that the cardinality of the set $\{a_j^i \mid 0 \leq i \leq m-1, 1 \leq j \leq r_i\}$ is less than $1+\sum_{1\leq i\leq m-1}(r_i - 1)$. The *girth* of a τ-structure is the length of its shortest cycle.

Theorem 2. *(Sparse Incomparability Lemma) Let k, l be positive integers and let $\mathbf{A}$ be a structure. Then there exists a structure $\mathbf{G}$ with the following properties:*

1. $\mathbf{G}$ *is homomorphic to* $\mathbf{A}$
2. *For every structure* $\mathbf{B}$ *with at most k elements,* $\mathbf{A}$ *is homomorphic to* $\mathbf{B}$ *iff* $\mathbf{G}$ *is homomorphic to* $\mathbf{B}$
3. $\mathbf{G}$ *has girth* $\geq l$.

Tree-like structures are usually defined by means of tree-decompositions.

Definition 2. *Let $\mathbf{A}$ be a τ-structure. A tree-decomposition of $\mathbf{A}$ is a pair (T, φ) where T is a tree and $\varphi : V(T) \rightarrow \mathcal{P}(A)$ is a mapping that assigns to every node of T a set of elements of A, satisfying the following conditions:*

1. *nodes containing any given element of A form a subtree,*
2. *for any tuple in any relation of $\mathbf{A}$, there is a node in T containing all elements from that tuple.*

Note: for ease of notation we say that a node $v \in V(T)$ contains an element $a \in A$ if $a \in \varphi(v)$.

Definition 3. *A τ-structure $\mathbf{A}$ is a k-relational tree (or k-reltree) if there exists a tree-decomposition (T, φ) of $\mathbf{A}$ such that:*

- *(i) two different nodes of T share at most k elements*
- *(ii) for every node t of T there exists a tuple of $\mathbf{A}$ that contains every element of t or t has size at most k.*

Generally, a relational structure $\mathbf{A}$ is called a *tree* if its *incidence multigraph* is a tree in the usual graph-theoretic sense (see [6] for example). In our terminology, trees are precisely 1-relational trees. Observe also that if all predicates in τ have arity at most k then a τ-structure is a k-relational tree iff its Gaiffman graph has treewidth at most $k - 1$.

In our proofs it will be more convenient to use an alternative but equivalent inductive definition of k-reltrees.

Definition 4. *Let* $\mathbf{T}$ *be a relational structure and let* I *be a subset of nodes of* $\mathbf{T}$ *with* $|I| \leq k$*. The pair* $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ *is called a* k*-reltree if*

(1) $\mathbf{T}$ *contains only one tuple, or*
(2) *there is a finite collection* $(\mathbf{T}_j, I_j), j \in J$ *of* k*-reltrees and (not necessarily distinct)* $e_1, \ldots, e_n \in T$, $n \geq 0$ *such that for all* $j \in J$ $T_j \cap \{e_1, \ldots, e_n\} \subseteq I_j$ *and for all* $i, j \in J$, $T_i \cap T_j \subseteq \{e_1, \ldots, e_n\}$*, and*
   (a) $\mathbf{T}$ *is the union of tuple* $P(e_1, \ldots, e_n)$ *(for some* n*-ary* $P \in \tau$*) and* $\bigcup_{j \in J} \mathbf{T}_j$*,and* $I \subseteq \{e_1, \ldots, e_n\}$ *or*
   (b) $\mathbf{T} = \bigcup_{j \in J} \mathbf{T}_j$ *and* $I = \{e_1, \ldots, e_n\}$*, or*
(3) *there is a* k*-reltree* $(\mathbf{T}, I')$ *with* $I \subseteq I'$*.*

Finally, a structure $\mathbf{T}$ *is a* k*-reltree if* $(\mathbf{T}, \emptyset)$ *is a* k*-reltree.*

The proof of the equivalence between the two definitions of k-reltree is very simple and omitted.

Theorem 3. *Let* $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}$ *be structures and let* $k \geq 1$*. T.f.a.e:*

(a) $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ *passes the* k*-minimal test*
(b) *there is a* k*-minimal family for* $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$
(c) *every* k*-reltree homomorphic to* $\mathbf{A}$ *is homomorphic to* $\mathbf{B}$

Proof.

$[(a) \Leftrightarrow (b)]$. This is precisely the proof of the correctness of the k-minimal test, which is straightforward.
$[(b) \Rightarrow (c)]$ Let H be a k-minimal family for $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$. We shall prove that if $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ is a k-reltree, f an homomorphism from $\mathbf{T}$ to $\mathbf{A}$ and h is a mapping in H with $\text{dom}(h) = f(I)$ then there exists a homomorphism g from $\mathbf{T}$ to $\mathbf{B}$ such that $g_I = (h \circ f_I)$. The proof is by estructural induction on $(\mathbf{T}, I)$.

(1) $\mathbf{T}$ is simply a tuple $P(e_1, \ldots, e_n)$ and I is any subset of $\{e_1, \ldots, e_n\}$ with $|I| \leq k$. Let $P(a_1, \ldots, a_n)$ be the image of $P(e_1, \ldots, e_n)$ according to f. Let $P(b_1, \ldots, b_n)$ be the tuple in $\mathbf{B}$ guaranteed to exist because h satisfies condition (i) of k-minimal family. The mapping $g : \{e_1, \ldots, e_n\} \to B$, $g(e_i) = b_i$, $1 \leq i \leq n$ satisfies the required conditions.

(2a) Let $P(a_1, \ldots, a_n)$ be the image of $P(e_1, \ldots, e_n)$ according to f. Let $P(b_1, \ldots, b_n)$ be the tuple in $\mathbf{B}$ that guaranteed to exist because h satisfies condition (i) of k-minimal family. Set $g(e_i) = b_i$ for $1 \leq i \leq n$. In order to define g over the rest of T do the following:

For $j \in J$, consider the the mapping $h'_j : f(I_j) \cap \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\} \to B$ defined by $h'_j(a_i) = b_i$, $a_i \in \text{dom}(h_j)$. Condition (ii) of k-minimal family guarantees that $h'_j \in H$. Furthermore, by condition (iii) of k-minimal family, H contains an extension h_j of h'_j with domain $f(I_j)$. By induction hypothesis there exists a homomorphism g_j from $\mathbf{T}_j$ to $\mathbf{B}$ such that $g_j(e) = h_j(f(e))$ for every $e \in I_j$. Define $g(e) = g_j(e)$ for every $j \in J$ and every $e \in T_j$. Mapping g satisfies the required conditions.

(2b) $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ is obtained by rule $(2b)$. Define $g(e) = h(f(e))$ for all $e \in I$ and extend g over the rest of T as in the previous case.

(3) $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ is obtained by rule (3) from $(\mathbf{T}, I')$ with $I \subseteq I'$. By property (iii) of H there exists h' defined over $f(I')$ that extends h. The mapping g guaranteed to exist for $(\mathbf{T}, I')$, f and h' satisfies the required conditions.

$[(c) \Rightarrow (a)]$ We shall show that for every mapping h removed from H by the k-minimal test there exists a k-reltree $(\mathbf{T}, I)$, some homomorphism f from $\mathbf{T}$ to $\mathbf{A}$, with f_I one-to-one, $f(I) = \text{dom}(h)$, and such that for every homomorphism $g : \mathbf{T} \to \mathbf{B}$, $g_I \neq (h \circ f_I)$. We shall prove it by induction on the elimination order of h.

If h is removed in the first iteration, then necessarily condition (i) of k-minimal family is falsified by h. Set $\mathbf{T}$ be the structure containing only the tuple $P(a_1, \ldots, a_n)$ given by the condition, define f to be the identity mapping, and let $I = \text{dom}(h)$.

Assume now that h is removed in some subsequent iteration. We do a case analisis depending on which condition of k-minimal family is falsified by h

(i) Let $P(a_1, \ldots, a_n)$ be the tuple that forces h to be eliminated and let h_j, $j \in J$ be the set of mappings with domain entirely contained in $\{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$ that have been previously removed from H. For each $j \in J$, let $(\mathbf{T}_j, I_j)$ and f_j be the k-reltree and mapping respectively for h_j. By renaming adequately the nodes of $\mathbf{T}_j$ we can assume that f_j restricted to I_j is the identity and that all the other variables are new, i.e., $I_j = T_j \cap \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$. We can also assume that apart from the elements in $\{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$ any two of these structures do not share any other element, i.e, for every $i \neq j \in J$, $T_i \cap T_j \subseteq \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$. We are now in a situation to define $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ and f. $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ is constructed by rule $(2b)$ from $(\mathbf{T}_j, I_j)$, $j \in J$, tuple $P(a_1, \ldots, a_m)$, and $I = \text{dom}(h)$. $f(x)$ is defined to be the identity if $x \in \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$ and $f_j(x)$ if $x \in T_j$, otherwise. It is easy to verify that $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ and f satisfy the required conditions.

(ii) There exists some $h \subseteq h'$ such that h' was previously removed from H. Let $(\mathbf{T}', I')$ and f' be guaranteed by the hypothesis condition. In this case we only need to set $\mathbf{T} = \mathbf{T}'$, $I = \text{dom}(h)$, and $f = f'$.

(iii) Hence h is eliminated because $|\text{dom}(h)| = n < k$ and there exists some a such that H does not contain any extension of h defined over a. Hence, every possible every extension $h_j : \text{dom}(h) \cup \{a\}$, $j \in J$ of h has been previously removed from H. For every $j \in J$, there exists suitable $(\mathbf{T}_j, I_j)$, and f_j. Let $\text{dom}(h) = \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$ and rename the variables of the structures $\mathbf{T}_j$, $j \in J$ so that for every $j \in J$, $T_j \cap \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\} \subseteq I_j$, f_j is the identity on $T_j \cap \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$, and for all $i \neq j \in J$, $T_i \cap T_j \subseteq \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$. We set $\mathbf{T}$ to be $\bigcup_{j \in J} \mathbf{T}_j$, $I = \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$, and set $f(x)$ to be the identity if $x \in \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$ and $f_j(x)$ where $x \in T_j$, otherwise. $(\mathbf{T}, I)$ and f satisfy the required conditions.

Finally the prove the contrapositive of the implication. If the k-minimal test fails then the mapping h with empty domain is removed. This implies that condition (c) is false.

■

As a corollary of Theorem 3 we obtain an obstruction-like characterization of relational width.

Definition 5. *Let* $\mathbf{B}$ *be a* τ*-structure. A set* $\mathcal{O}$ *of* τ*-structures is an obstruction set of* $\mathbf{B}$ *if for every* τ*-structure* $\mathbf{A}$

$$\mathbf{A} \to \mathbf{B} \;\; \textit{iff} \; \forall \mathbf{O} \in \mathcal{O}, \mathbf{O} \not\to \mathbf{A}$$

Corollary 1. *An structure has relational width k iff it has an obstruction set consisting of k-reltrees.*

Lemma 1. *Every 2-reltree with girth at least 3 is a tree*

Proof. We shall prove the stronger claim that every 2-reltree $\mathbf{A}$ is cycle-free. We shall prove it by contradiction. Let $P_1(a^1_1, \dots, a^1_{r_1}), \dots, P_{m-1}(a^{m-1}_1, \dots, a^{m-1}_{r_{m-1}})$ be a cycle in $\mathbf{A}$ and let us assume that m is minimal. Hence $r_i \geq 2$ for $i = 1, \dots, m-1$. Furthermore, by the minimality of m we we can assume that there exists different elements $a_0, \dots, a_{m-1} \in A$ such that for every $0 \leq i \neq j \leq m-1$, the ith and the jth tuple share only element a_i if $i + 1 = j \pmod m$ and none otherwise.

Let (T, φ) be a suitable tree-decomposition of $\mathbf{A}$ that certifies that $\mathbf{A}$ is a 2-reltree. By the definition of tree-decomposition, for every $0 \leq i \leq m-1$, T contains a node, let us call it n_i, that contains $\{a^i_1, \dots, a^i_{r_i}\}$. Since $r_i \geq 2$ then , by definition 3, n_i should be precisely $\{a^i_1, \dots, a^i_{r_i}\}$, since we cannot have two different tuples containing $\{a^i_1, \dots, a^i_{r_i}\}$ as this would be a cycle of length 2. Consider the following walk in T: Start in n_0 and follow the unique path from n_0 to n_1, then continue following the unique path from n_1 to n_2, and proceed in the same way until by crossing the path from n_{m-1} to n_0 the walk returns to n_0. Let us start by showing that after reaching node n_1 for the first time, the walk must reverse direction. Indeed, let $i \geq 1$ such that n_1 is crossed back later when following the path from n_i to n_{i+1} (mod m). By the definition of tree-decomposition every node in the path from n_i to n_{i+1} contains a_i and hence a_i belongs to n_1. But this is only possible if $i = 1$ and hence the walk must reverse direction.

The walk then proceeds by following the path from n_1 to n_2. Every node in this segment contains a_1 and hence by the same type of reasonning it cannot cross n_0. Hence there is some node u at which this path stops going towards n_0 and branches off in a different direction. Necessarily $\{a_0, a_1\} \subseteq u$ as u participates both in the path going from n_0 to n_1 and the path going from n_1 to n_2. Later on during the walk, u must be necessarily crossed back, say, when walking the path from node n_i to n_{i+1} (mod m) for some $i \geq 2$. Hence u contains a_i as well. Since u has cardinality at least 3 there exists a tuple in $\mathbf{A}$ containing $\{a_0, a_1, a_i\}$. This tuple jointly with tuple $P_1(a^1_1, \dots, a^1_{r_1})$ constitutes a cycle of length 2, which is impossible.

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Proof. (of Theorem 1)

Let $\mathbf{B}$ be an τ-structure with relational width 2. We shall show that if $\mathbf{A}$ is a structure not homomorphic to $\mathbf{B}$ then $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ fails the 1-minimal test. By the Sparse Incomparability Lemma, if $\mathbf{A}$ is not homomorphic to $\mathbf{B}$ there exists some structure $\mathbf{G}$ with girth at least 3 that is homomorphic to $\mathbf{A}$ and not homomorphic to $\mathbf{B}$. Hence $(\mathbf{G}, \mathbf{B})$ fails the 2-minimal test and by Theorem 3 there exists some 2-reltree $\mathbf{C}$ that is homomorphic to $\mathbf{G}$ but not to $\mathbf{B}$. Pick such $\mathbf{C}$ with minimum number of nodes. We shall see that the girth of $\mathbf{C}$ is at least 3, and hence, by Lemma 1, $\mathbf{C}$ is a tree. By composition of homomorphisms $\mathbf{C}$ is homormorphic to $\mathbf{A}$ but not to $\mathbf{B}$. Therefore by Theorem 3, $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ fails the 1-minimal test.

It only remains to check that if $\mathbf{C}$ is a 2-reltree with minimum number of nodes homorphic to $\mathbf{G}$ but not to $\mathbf{B}$ then $\mathbf{C}$ does not have cycles of length at most 2. Clearly, if $\mathbf{C}$ has a cycle of length 1 then its image in $\mathbf{G}$ is, as well, a cycle of lenght 1 which is impossible. The same reasonning does not always apply to cycles of length 2. Indeed, if $P_0(a^0_1, \dots, a^0_{r_0})$, $P_1(a^1_1, \dots, a^1_{r_1})$ is a cycle of $\mathbf{C}$ and h is a homomorphism from **C** to **G** then it is possible that the image $P_0(h(a_1^0),\dots,h(a_{r_0}^0))$ $P_1((a_1^1),\dots,(a_{r_1}^1))$ is not a cycle of **G** *if the two tuples of the image are the same.* Hence we can assume that the two predicates are the same and for ease of notation we write $P = P_0 = P_1$ and $r = r_0 = r_1$.

Define the mapping $f : C \to C$ with $f(a_i^1) = a_i^0$ for all $i = 1,\dots,r$ and f acting as the identity in all other cases. Mapping f cannot be exhaustive, since otherwise tuples $P(a_1^0,\dots,a_r^0)$, $P(a_1^1,\dots,a_r^1)$ would be identical, and hence $f(\mathbf{C})$ has less nodes than **C**. Clearly $f(\mathbf{C})$ is homomorphic to **G** -because $h(a_i^0) = h(a_i^1)$ for all $i = 1,\dots,r$- and not homomorphic to **B**. We shall show that $f(\mathbf{C})$ is a 2-reltree contradicting the minimality of **C**. Tuples $P(a_1^0,\dots,a_r^0)$ and $P(a_1^1,\dots,a_r^1)$ share at least 2 vertices because they constitute a cycle and at most 2 because otherwise **C** would not be a 2-reltree. We can assume for ease of notation that the shared elements are precisely the first two and write $a_1 = a_1^0 = a_1^1$ and $a_2 = a_2^0 = a_2^1$. Let (T,φ) be a suitable tree-decomposition of **C**.

The set $V(T)$ can be partitioned in two sets of nodes V_0 and V_1 such that:

- V_0 and V_1 are connected in T,
- $\bigcup_{v\in V_0}\varphi(v) \cap \bigcup_{v\in V_1}\varphi(v) = \{a_0,a_1\}$, and
- $a_i^j \in \bigcup_{v\in V_j}\varphi(v)$ for all $i = 1,\dots,r$.

The partition can be obtained in the following way: let u_0 (u_1 resp.) be a node of $V(T)$ that contains all elements of the first (resp. second tuple) of the cycle. Define V_0 to be the set of all elements reachable from u_0 without crossing u_1 and V_1 to be the rest of nodes. It is clear that V_0 and V_1 satisfy all the requiered conditions.

For $i = 0,1$, let $\mathbf{C}_i$ be the substructure of **C** induced by $\bigcup_{v\in V_i}\varphi(v)$. Then $f(\mathbf{C}) = \mathbf{C}_0 \cup f(\mathbf{C}_1)$. Since f is injective over C_1, both $\mathbf{C}_0$ and $f(\mathbf{C}_1)$ are 2-reltrees. Let (T_0,φ_0) and (T_1,φ_1) be suitable tree-decompositions of $\mathbf{C}_0$ and $f(\mathbf{C}_1)$. Finally, let u_0 be an element of $V(T_0)$ containing all the elements of the first tuple. Indeed, by Definition 3, $\varphi_0(u_0)$ is precisely $\{a_1^0,a_2^0,\dots,a_r^0\}$. By an identical reasonning there is an element u_1 of $V(T_1)$ with $\varphi_1(u_1) = \{a_1^0,a_2^0,\dots,a_r^0\}$. Define T' to be the tree obtained by making the disjoint union of T_0 and T_1 and glying toghether u_0 and u_1. Define $\varphi' : V(T') \to f(C)$ to be $\varphi_0(v)$ if $v \in T_0$ and $\varphi_1(v)$ if $v \in T$. The pair (T',φ') is a suitable tree-decomposition of $f(\mathbf{C})$.

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