

Fractional Level WZW Models as Logarithmic CFTs

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A Brief History of CFT

- Conformal field theory (CFT) is one of the success stories of modern physics, finding application in both statistical mechanics and string theory.
- It is founded on the work of Belavin, Polyakov and Zamolodchikov on the minimal models [NPB 241 (1984)], Knizhnik and Zamolodchikov on current algebras [NPB 247 (1984)] and Witten on 2D bosonisation [CMP 92 (1984)].
- This led to the **Wess-Zumino-Witten** (WZW) models as archetypal examples of CFTs. These describe strings propagating on a (compact? simply-connected?) connected Lie group G .
- Much of their study reduces to studying the representation theory of their chiral algebra, the corresponding **untwisted affine Kac-Moody algebra** $\hat{\mathfrak{g}}$.

Fractional Level WZW Models

- One success was to use the unitarity of the WZW models to prove the unitarity of certain minimal models.
- This used the **coset construction** of Goddard, Kent and Olive [PLB 152 (1985)] to construct these unitary minimal models as cosets of WZW models.
- Standard WZW models are parametrised by a non-negative integer k , the **level**. For other k , the action does not define a consistent quantum field theory.
- But, the coset construction would give the remaining (non-unitary) minimal models if we were allowed to use certain fractional values for k .
- Might there exist consistent “**fractional level WZW models**” which need not correspond to strings on a group?

Example: The $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)_k$ WZW Model

- This model describes strings on $SU(2)$, has $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ for a chiral algebra, and its space of states is

$$\mathcal{H} = \bigoplus_{\lambda=0}^k \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\lambda} \otimes \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\lambda} \quad (k \in \mathbb{N}),$$

where $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\lambda}$ is the irreducible $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ -module generated by a highest weight state of $\mathfrak{sl}(2)$ -weight λ .

- The irreps $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\lambda}$, $\lambda = 0, 1, \dots, k$
 - are **integrable** and **unitary**,
 - carry a representation of the **modular group** $SL(2; \mathbb{Z})$,
 - are closed under **fusion**:

$$\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\lambda} \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\mu} = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{|\lambda-\mu|} \oplus \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{|\lambda-\mu|+2} \oplus \dots \oplus \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_{\min\{\lambda+\mu, 2k-\lambda-\mu\}}.$$

- Moreover, fusion and the modular properties are related by the **Verlinde formula**.

- We'd like similar properties to hold for the (posited) fractional level WZW models.
- Kac and Wakimoto discovered [Adv. Math. 70 (1988)] that at the required fractional levels k , there are a finite number of **admissible** irreps whose characters carry a rep of $SL(2; \mathbb{Z})$.
- Led to many attempts to “construct” fractional level models from these irreps [Koh-Sorba, Bernard-Felder, Mathieu-Walton, Awata-Yamada, Ramgoolam, Feigin-Malikov, Andreev, ...].
- There were a few problems:
 1. The Verlinde formula gave **negative** fusion coefficients.
 2. The admissible irreps did not close under **conjugation**.
 3. Other methods of computing fusion rules gave **different** fusion coefficients (with their own problems).
- Many “solutions” proclaimed — none universally agreed upon. CFT textbooks regarded fractional level theories as “intrinsically sick”.

Logarithmic CFT to the Rescue!

- Gaberdiel [NPB 618 (2001)] reanalysed the fusion rules at fractional level. Found that the problem was the assumption that fusion closes on admissible reps.
- At $k = -\frac{4}{3}$, fusion of admissibles generates an **infinite** number of distinct irreducibles. It also generates **indecomposables**, implying a **logarithmic** CFT.
- Lesage, Mathieu, Rasmussen and Saleur [NPB 647 (2002)] later showed that for $k = -\frac{1}{2}$, fusion also generates an infinite number of distinct irreducibles, but **no** indecomposables in this case.
- However, they did propose a “logarithmic lift” in which indecomposables contribute.
- Partial resolution to the fractional level puzzle, but modular properties still unexplained.

Motivation (Why do we care?)

- WZW models are supposed to be fundamental building blocks for rational unitary CFTs.
- Fractional level WZW models were supposed to be fundamental building blocks for rational **non-unitary** CFTs.
- Perhaps they are actually fundamental building blocks for **quasi-rational** non-unitary CFTs, **logarithmic** ones included.
- Logarithmic CFTs describe the continuum limit of non-local observables in statistical models, SLE processes and AdS/CFT-duals to topological gravity models.
- WZW models on supergroups are unlikely to behave like integer level WZW models in general — fractional level models may be expected to capture more of their features.
- Non-compact WZW studies should benefit from fractional level results, *e.g.* that indecomposables are difficult to avoid in general.

$\mathfrak{sl}(2)$ and its Representations

This is the Lie algebra of traceless 2×2 matrices. A convenient basis is $e = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$, $h = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$, $f = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$, so

$$[h, e] = 2e, \quad [e, f] = h, \quad [h, f] = -2f.$$

The eigenvalue of h acting on a state is the state's **weight**.

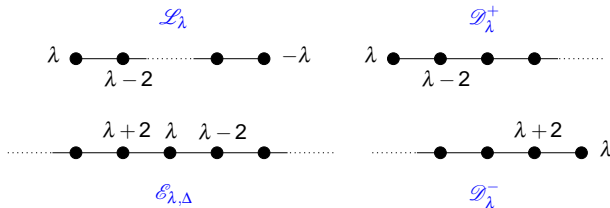
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The (weight) representations fall into four classes: Those with a **highest weight state** ($e|v\rangle = 0$), those with a **lowest weight state** ($f|w\rangle = 0$), those with **both** and those with **neither**.



The Affine Kac-Moody Algebra $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$

This is the Lie algebra $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2) = \mathfrak{sl}(2) \otimes \mathbb{C}[t, t^{-1}] \oplus \mathbb{C}K$, where K is central and

$$[x \otimes t^m, y \otimes t^n] = [x, y] \otimes t^{m+n} + m\kappa(x, y)\delta_{m+n=0}K.$$

Here, $\kappa(x, y) = \text{tr}(xy)$ is the Killing form of $\mathfrak{sl}(2)$. The eigenvalue of K on a cyclic representation is its **level** k . We always write x_n instead of $x \otimes t^n$.

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This is usually supplemented with the element

$$L_0 = \frac{1}{2(k+2)} \sum_{r \in \mathbb{Z}} : \frac{1}{2} h_r h_{-r} + e_r f_{-r} + f_r e_{-r} :$$

of the universal enveloping algebra. We have

$$[L_0, x_n] = -n x_n.$$

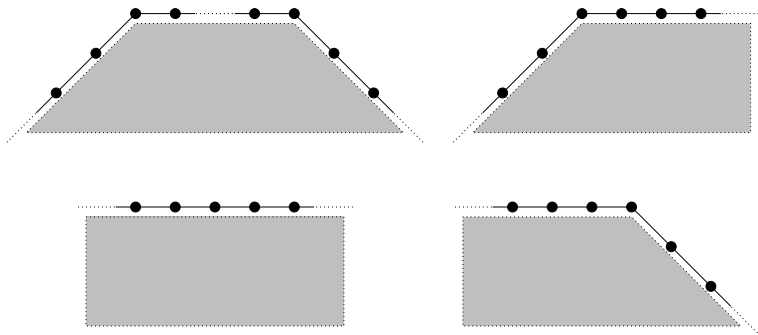
Representations of $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$

The **affine weight** of a state in a representation of $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ is the triple (λ, k, Δ) giving its eigenvalues under h_0 , K and L_0 . Δ is the state's **conformal dimension**.

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Useful $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ -reps for CFT are obtained from $\mathfrak{sl}(2)$ -reps via the **induced module** construction:



Automorphisms of $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$

The only automorphism of $\mathfrak{sl}(2)$ which preserves the Cartan subalgebra $\mathbb{C}h$ is the Weyl reflection w :

$$w(e) = f, \quad w(h) = -h, \quad w(f) = e.$$

This lifts to **conjugation** on $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ as follows:

$$w(e_n) = f_n, \quad w(h_n) = -h_n, \quad w(f_n) = e_n, \quad w(K) = K.$$

The automorphisms of $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ which preserve $\mathbb{C}h_0 \oplus \mathbb{C}K \oplus \mathbb{C}L_0$ are generated by w and the **spectral flow** γ :

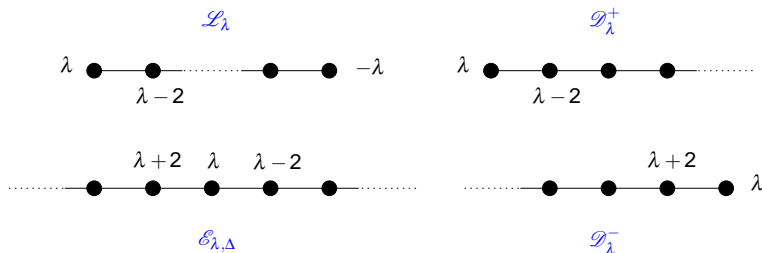
$$\gamma(e_n) = e_{n-1}, \quad \gamma(h_n) = h_n + \frac{1}{2}\delta_{n,0}, \quad \gamma(f_n) = f_{n+1}, \quad \gamma(K) = K.$$

Note that $w(L_0) = L_0$, but $\gamma(L_0) = L_0 - \frac{1}{2}h_0 + \frac{1}{4}K$.

Twisted Representations

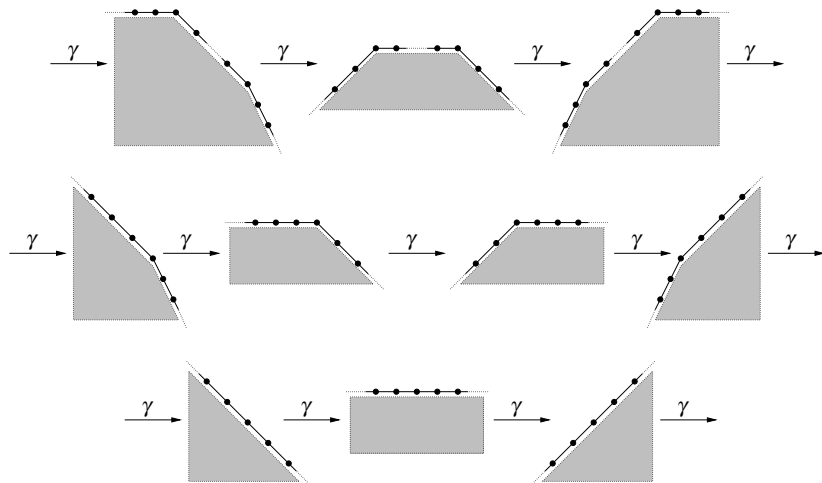
Twisting a representation by w amounts to taking the conjugate representation. For $\mathfrak{sl}(2)$, this gives

$$\mathcal{L}_\lambda \longleftrightarrow \mathcal{L}_\lambda, \quad \mathcal{E}_{\lambda,\Delta} \longleftrightarrow \mathcal{E}_{-\lambda,\Delta}, \quad \mathcal{D}_\lambda^+ \longleftrightarrow \mathcal{D}_{-\lambda}^-.$$



The induced $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ -modules behave identically.

Twisting our induced $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ -modules by γ is far less trivial!



We get **infinitely** many distinct representations.

Constructions at $k = -\frac{1}{2}$ ($c = -1$)

This level is interesting because the $\beta\gamma$ ghost system has $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)_{-1/2}$ symmetry. Let $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_\lambda$, $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_\lambda^+$, $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_\lambda^-$ and $\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda,\Delta}$ denote the irreducible quotients induced from \mathcal{L}_λ , \mathcal{D}_λ^+ , \mathcal{D}_λ^- and $\mathcal{E}_{\lambda,\Delta}$. $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0$ is the **vacuum module**. Its irreducibility means that

$$(156e_{-3}e_{-1} - 71e_{-2}^2 + 44e_{-2}h_{-1}e_{-1} - 52h_{-2}e_{-1}^2 + 16f_{-1}e_{-1}^3 - 4h_{-1}^2e_{-1}^2) |0\rangle = 0.$$

Using the state-field correspondence (or Zhu's algebra), this restricts the “allowed modules” to the irreducibles

$$\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0, \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1, \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+, \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+, \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{1/2}^-, \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{3/2}^-, \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda,-1/8}.$$

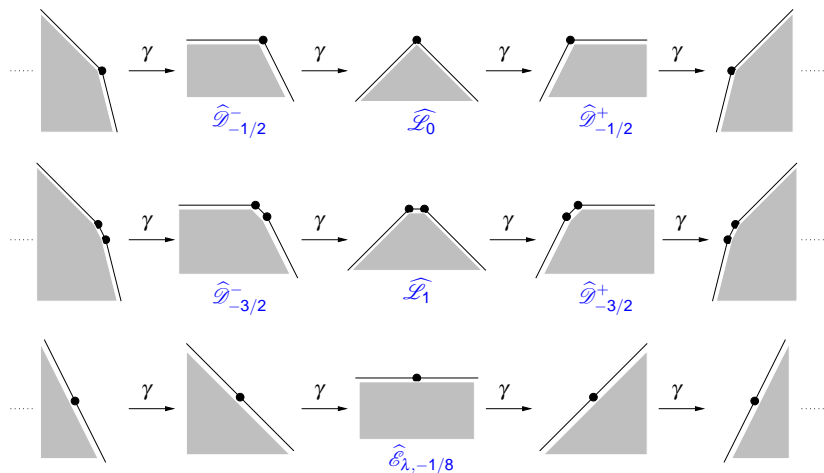
For the $\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda,-1/8}$, any λ is allowed. However, $\lambda = \frac{1}{2}, \frac{3}{2}$ do not give irreducibles. Rather, one gets four allowed **indecomposables** corresponding to the four ways of coupling $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{\mp 1/2}^\pm$ with $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{\mp 3/2}^\pm$.

The conformal dimensions of the zero-grade states of $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0$ and $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1$ are 0 and $\frac{1}{2}$. For the other modules, such states have conformal dimension $-\frac{1}{8}$. We remark that:

- The allowed highest weight modules, $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0$, $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1$, $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+$ and $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+$, are precisely the **admissible modules** of Kac and Wakimoto when $k = -\frac{1}{2}$.
- The set of allowed modules is closed under conjugation.
- The set of allowed modules does not close under spectral flow! But,

$$\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{1/2}^- \xrightarrow{\gamma} \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \xrightarrow{\gamma} \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+ \quad \text{and} \quad \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{3/2}^- \xrightarrow{\gamma} \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 \xrightarrow{\gamma} \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+,$$

suggesting that the other spectral flow images should also be allowed modules.



A schematic illustration of the “allowed modules” in a $k = -\frac{1}{2}$ fractional level WZW model showing the induced action of the spectral flow automorphism γ .

A Minimal Theory

We can try to construct a **minimal** CFT generated by the admissible representations of Kac and Wakimoto. Requiring closure under conjugation gives all the “allowed modules” except the $\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda, -1/8}$.

Any CFT spectrum must closed under the **fusion** operation \times . We compute (carefully) that

$$\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0, \quad \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1, \quad \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0.$$

This gives **all** fusion rules (if spectral flow behaves itself), eg.

$$\begin{aligned} \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+ \times \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{3/2}^- &= \gamma(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1) \times \gamma^{-1}(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1) = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 = \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0, \\ \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+ \times \widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+ &= \gamma(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0) \times \gamma(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0) = \gamma^2(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \times \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0) = \gamma^2(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0). \end{aligned}$$

Closure under fusion therefore **requires** that all spectral flow images contribute to the theory.

Modular Properties

The minimal spectrum generated by the admissible modules under fusion is then the set of spectral flow images of $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0$ and $\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1$. We want the admissibles for their **modular** properties. Their characters may be expressed in terms of Jacobi theta functions and Dedekind's eta function:

$$\begin{aligned} \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0} &= \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_4(z;q)} + \frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_3(z;q)} \right] & \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1} &= \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_4(z;q)} - \frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_3(z;q)} \right] \\ \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-1/2}^+} &= \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{-i\eta(q)}{\vartheta_1(z;q)} + \frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_2(z;q)} \right] & \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-3/2}^+} &= \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{-i\eta(q)}{\vartheta_1(z;q)} - \frac{\eta(q)}{\vartheta_2(z;q)} \right]. \end{aligned}$$

These characters form a (reducible) rep of $SL(2; \mathbb{Z})$:

$$S = \frac{1}{2} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 & 1 & -1 \\ -1 & 1 & 1 & -1 \\ 1 & 1 & i & i \\ -1 & -1 & i & i \end{pmatrix} \quad T = \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\pi/12} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & -e^{i\pi/12} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & e^{-i\pi/6} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & e^{-i\pi/6} \end{pmatrix}.$$

What about the spectral flow images?

It turns out that we have a **periodicity** of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \dots &\xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1} \xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+} \xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \dots \\ \dots &\xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0} \xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-1/2}^+} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+} \xrightarrow{\gamma} -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0} \xrightarrow{\gamma} \dots \end{aligned}$$

at the level of modular functions. There are only **four** linearly independent characters! As power series,

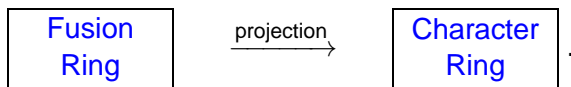
$$\chi_{\gamma^\ell(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_\lambda)}(z; q) = \text{tr}_{\gamma^\ell(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_\lambda)} z^{h_0} q^{L_0+1/24}$$

converges for $|q| < 1$ and $|q|^{(-\ell+1)/2} < |z| < |q|^{(-\ell-1)/2}$.

Equating the character of $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{-3/2}^+ = \gamma(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1)$ with **minus** that of $\widehat{\mathcal{D}}_{1/2}^- = \gamma^{-1}(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0)$ is analogous to

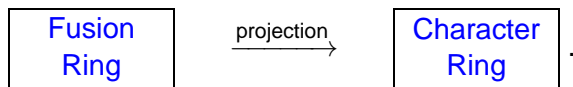
$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} z^{\lambda-2n} = \frac{z^\lambda}{1-z^2} = -\frac{z^{\lambda+2}}{1-z^2} = -\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} z^{\lambda+2n}.$$

Formally, the map from the modules to the characters (as meromorphic theta functions) is not 1–1:



Its kernel is spanned by the modules $\gamma^{\ell\pm 1}(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0) \oplus \gamma^{\ell\mp 1}(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1)$ and these form an **ideal** in the fusion ring. Fusion then **descends** to the character ring.

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Recall fusion and modular S-matrix should be related by the Verlinde formula (but negative coefficients!).

Resolution: The modular properties determine only the character ring. eg. S^2 is conjugation:

$$S^2 = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -1 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \Leftrightarrow \begin{cases} \chi_w(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0) = \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0} & \chi_w(\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1) = \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1} \\ \chi_w(\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-1/2}^+) = \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{1/2}^-} = -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-3/2}^+} \\ \chi_w(\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-3/2}^+) = \chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{3/2}^-} = -\chi_{\widehat{\mathcal{G}}_{-1/2}^+} \end{cases} .$$

Augmenting the Theory

- It seems that we have a good spectrum. It is **modular invariant** and closed under **fusion**, strong evidence that one can construct a consistent CFT. But we lost the $\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda, -1/8}$.
- We can probe the CFT by using it as a “fundamental building block” to construct new theories. One simple example is to consider its **coset** by the subalgebra generated by the h_n and K . These generate the affine Kac-Moody algebra $\widehat{u}(1)$.
- The coset algebra contains the Virasoro algebra of central charge $c = -2$, but can be shown to be bigger. In fact, it can be identified as the **triplet algebra** $\mathfrak{W}(2, 3, 3, 3)$ of Kausch. [PLB 259 (1991)]
- However, our spectrum reduces to only two \mathfrak{W} -irreducibles under the coset mechanism. The triplet model needs **four...**

We should therefore augment our spectrum by whichever $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)_{-1/2}$ -modules (if any) reduce to the remaining two \mathfrak{W} -irreducibles under the coset mechanism. The only ones which do the job turn out to be the self-conjugate irreducibles

$$\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0,-1/8} \quad \text{and} \quad \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1,-1/8},$$

and their images under spectral flow.

We now have to check the fusion rules of the **augmented** spectrum. We find that

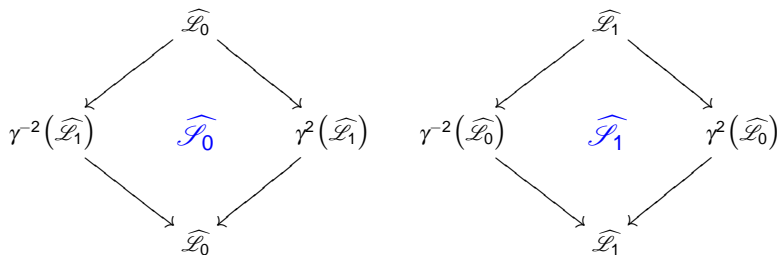
$$\begin{aligned} \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0,-1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0,-1/8} & \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0,-1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1,-1/8} \\ \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_0 \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1,-1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1,-1/8} & \widehat{\mathcal{L}}_1 \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1,-1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0,-1/8}. \end{aligned}$$

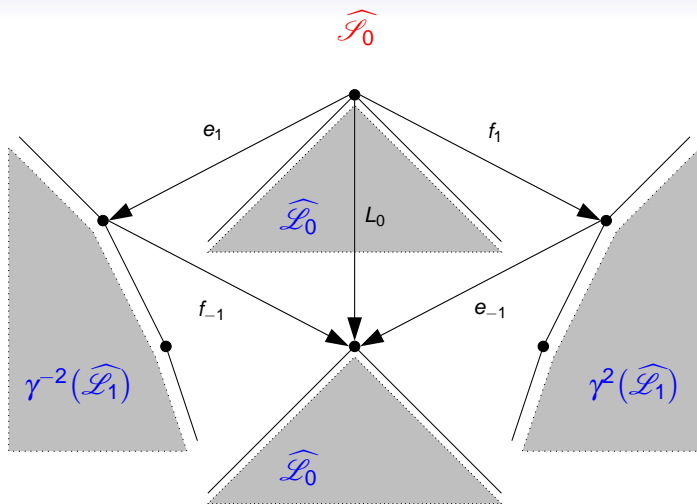
However, we do not expect that the fusion rules will close on this augmented spectrum (the four \mathfrak{W} -irreducibles are not closed under fusion in the triplet model).

The fusion rules of the $\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{\lambda, -1/8}$ among themselves are **significantly** more delicate to compute. Nevertheless, we find

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0, -1/8} \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0, -1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{I}}_0 & \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1, -1/8} \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1, -1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{I}}_0 \\ \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{0, -1/8} \times \widehat{\mathcal{E}}_{1, -1/8} &= \widehat{\mathcal{I}}_1,\end{aligned}$$

where $\widehat{\mathcal{I}}_0$ and $\widehat{\mathcal{I}}_1$ are new **indecomposable** modules. They are formed from **four** irreducibles coupled together:





A schematic illustration of the indecomposable $\widehat{\mathcal{F}}_0$ showing how its constituent irreducibles are glued together.

Conclusions

- We have seen that at $k = -\frac{1}{2}$, there is a subset of the allowed $\widehat{\mathfrak{sl}}(2)$ -modules which is modular invariant and closed under fusion.
- The problematic negative integers given by conjugation and the Verlinde formula have been explained as describing the character ring rather than the fusion ring.
- Fractional level theories are built using an infinite number of unfamiliar irreducible modules whose conformal dimensions are not bounded below. Spectral flow allows us to control this.
- Consistency may require augmenting with further modules, and these modules generate indecomposables under fusion. Fractional level WZW models will then be logarithmic CFTs.

Outlook

This leads to many questions, *eg*:

- Can we construct consistent (logarithmic) CFTs in the bulk from these modules? If so, what are the boundary CFTs?
- Do the indecomposables encountered have a structure theory?
- Is the story similar for the other fractional levels?
- Is it similar for other affine (super)algebras?
- What other interesting CFTs can be constructed from these models?
- Can we realise the non-unitary minimal models as cosets if the consistent fractional level WZW models turn out to be logarithmic?
- Can we use fractional level WZW models to study logarithmic versions of the minimal models?