List-coloring the Square of a Subcubic Graph

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Abstract

The square $G^2$ of a graph $G$ is the graph with the same vertex set as $G$ and with two vertices adjacent if their distance in $G$ is at most 2. Thomassen showed that for a planar graph $G$ with maximum degree $\Delta(G) = 3$ we have $\chi(G^2) \leq 7$. Kostochka and Woodall conjectured that for every graph, the chromatic number of $G^2$ equals the list-chromatic number of $G^2$, that is $\chi_l(G^2) = \chi(G^2)$ for all $G$. If true, this conjecture (together with Thomassen’s result) implies that every planar graph $G$ with $\Delta(G) = 3$ satisfies $\chi_l(G^2) \leq 7$. We prove that every planar graph with $\Delta(G) = 3$ satisfies $\chi_l(G^2) \leq 8$. In addition, we show that if $G$ is a planar graph with $\Delta(G) = 3$ and girth $g(G) \geq 7$, then $\chi_l(G^2) \leq 7$. Dvořák, Škrekovski, and Tancer showed that if $G$ is a planar graph with $\Delta(G) = 3$ and girth $g(G) \geq 10$ then $\chi_l(G^2) \leq 6$. We improve the girth bound to show that: if $G$ is a planar graph with $\Delta(G) = 3$ and $g(G) \geq 9$, then $\chi_l(G^2) \leq 6$. 