

## On the Convolution Inequality $f \geq f \star f$

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We consider the inequality  $f \geq f \star f$  for real functions in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  where  $f \star f$  denotes the convolution of  $f$  with itself. We show that all such functions  $f$  are nonnegative, which is not the case for the same inequality in  $L^p$  for any  $1 < p \leq 2$ , for which the convolution is defined. We also show that all solutions in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfy  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx \leq \frac{1}{2}$ . Moreover, if  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx = \frac{1}{2}$ , then  $f$  must decay fairly slowly:  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x| f(x) dx = \infty$ , and this is sharp since for all  $r < 1$ , there are solutions with  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx = \frac{1}{2}$  and  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^r f(x) dx < \infty$ . However, if  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx =: a < \frac{1}{2}$ , the decay at infinity can be much more rapid: we show that for all  $a < \frac{1}{2}$ , there are solutions such that for some  $\varepsilon > 0$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} e^{\varepsilon|x|} f(x) dx < \infty$ .

### 1 Introduction

Our subject is the set of real, integrable solutions of the inequality

$$f(x) \geq f \star f(x), \quad \forall x \in \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (1)$$

where  $f \star f(x)$  denotes the convolution  $f \star f(x) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x-y)f(y) dy$ . By Young's inequality [6, Theorem 4.2], for all  $1 \leq p \leq 2$  and all  $f \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ,  $f \star f$  is well defined as an element

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of  $L^{p/(2-p)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . Thus, one may consider the inequality (1) in  $L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for all  $1 \leq p \leq 2$ , but the case  $p = 1$  is special: the solution set of (1) is restricted in a number of surprising ways. Integrating both sides of (1), one sees immediately that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx \leq 1$ . We prove that, in fact, all integrable solutions satisfy  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx \leq \frac{1}{2}$ , and this upper bound is sharp.

Perhaps even more surprising, we prove that all integrable solutions of (1) are nonnegative. This is *not true* for the solutions in  $L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ,  $1 < p \leq 2$ . For  $f \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ,  $1 \leq p \leq 2$ , the Fourier transform  $\widehat{f}(k) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} e^{-i2\pi k \cdot x} f(x) dx$  is well defined as an element of  $L^{p/(p-1)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . If  $f$  solves the equation  $f = f \star f$ , then  $\widehat{f} = \widehat{f}^2$ , and hence  $\widehat{f}$  is the indicator function of a measurable set. By the Riemann–Lebesgue theorem, if  $f \in L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , then  $\widehat{f}$  is continuous and vanishes at infinity and the only such indicator function is the indicator function of the empty set. Hence, the only integrable solution of  $f = f \star f$  is the trivial solution  $f = 0$ . However, for  $1 < p \leq 2$ , solutions abound: take  $d = 1$ , and define  $g$  to be the indicator function of the interval  $[-a, a]$ . Define

$$f(x) = \int_{\mathbb{R}} e^{-i2\pi kx} g(k) dk = \frac{\sin 2\pi xa}{\pi x} \quad (2)$$

which is not integrable but belongs to  $L^p(\mathbb{R})$  for all  $p > 1$ . By the Fourier inversion theorem  $\widehat{f} = g$ . Taking products, one gets examples in any dimension.

To construct a family of solutions to (1), fix  $a, t > 0$ , and define  $g_{a,t}(k) = ae^{-2\pi|k|t}$ . By [9, Theorem 1.14],

$$f_{a,t}(x) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} e^{-i2\pi kx} g_{a,t}(k) dk = a\Gamma((d+1)/2)\pi^{-(d+1)/2} \frac{t}{(t^2 + x^2)^{(d+1)/2}}.$$

Since  $g_{a,t}^2(k) = g_{a^2,2t}$ ,  $f_{a,t} \star f_{a,t} = f_{a^2,2t}$ . Thus,  $f_{a,t} \geq f_{a,t} \star f_{a,t}$  reduces to

$$\frac{t}{(t^2 + x^2)^{(d+1)/2}} \geq \frac{2at}{(4t^2 + x^2)^{(d+1)/2}},$$

which is satisfied for all  $a \leq 1/2$ . Since  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f_{a,t}(x) dx = a$ , this provides a class of solutions of (1) that are nonnegative and satisfy

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx \leq \frac{1}{2} \quad (3)$$

all of which have fairly slow decay at infinity, so that in every case,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|f(x) dx = \infty. \quad (4)$$

Our results show that this class of examples of integrable solutions of (1) is surprisingly typical of *all* integrable solutions: every real integrable solution  $f$  of (1) is positive and satisfies (3), and if there is equality in (3),  $f$  also satisfies (4). The positivity of all real solutions of (1) in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  may be considered surprising since it is false in  $L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for all  $p > 1$ , as example (2) shows. We also show that when strict inequality holds in (3) for a solution  $f$  of (1), it is possible for  $f$  to have a rather fast decay; we construct examples such that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} e^{\varepsilon|x|} f(x) dx < \infty$  for some  $\varepsilon > 0$ . The conjecture that integrable solutions of (1) are necessarily positive was motivated by recent works [3, 4] on a partial differential equation involving a quadratic nonlinearity of  $f \star f$  type, and the result proved here is the key to the proof of positivity for the solutions of this partial differential equation; see [3]. Autoconvolutions  $f \star f$  have been studied extensively; see [7] and the work quoted there. However, the questions investigated by these authors are quite different from those considered here.

## 2 Theorems and proofs

**Theorem 1.** Let  $f$  be a real-valued function in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  such that

$$f(x) - f \star f(x) =: u(x) \geq 0 \tag{5}$$

for all  $x$ . Then,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx \leq \frac{1}{2}$ , and  $f$  is given by the series

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n 4^n (\star^n u)(x), \tag{6}$$

which converges in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  and where the  $c_n \geq 0$  are the Taylor coefficients in the expansion of  $\sqrt{1-x}$

$$\sqrt{1-x} = 1 - \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n x^n, \quad c_n = \frac{(2n-3)!!}{2^n n!} \sim n^{-3/2}. \tag{7}$$

In particular,  $f$  is positive. Moreover, if  $u \geq 0$  is any integrable function with  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} u(x) dx \leq \frac{1}{4}$ , then the sum on the right in (6) defines an integrable function  $f$  that satisfies (5), and  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) dx = \frac{1}{2}$  if and only if  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} u(x) dx = \frac{1}{4}$ .

**Proof.** Note that  $u$  is integrable. Let  $a := \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) \, dx$  and  $b := \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} u(x) \, dx \geq 0$ . Fourier transforming, (5) becomes

$$\widehat{f}(k) = \widehat{f}(k)^2 + \widehat{u}(k). \tag{8}$$

At  $k = 0$ ,  $a^2 - a = -b$ , so that  $(a - \frac{1}{2})^2 = \frac{1}{4} - b$ . Thus,  $0 \leq b \leq \frac{1}{4}$ . Furthermore, since  $u \geq 0$ ,

$$|\widehat{u}(k)| \leq \widehat{u}(0) \leq \frac{1}{4}, \tag{9}$$

and the 1st inequality is strict for  $k \neq 0$ . Hence, for  $k \neq 0$ ,  $\sqrt{1 - 4\widehat{u}(k)} \neq 0$ . By the Riemann–Lebesgue theorem,  $\widehat{f}(k)$  and  $\widehat{u}(k)$  are both continuous and vanish at infinity, and hence, we must have that

$$\widehat{f}(k) = \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{1 - 4\widehat{u}(k)} \tag{10}$$

for all sufficiently large  $k$ , and in any case  $\widehat{f}(k) = \frac{1}{2} \pm \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{1 - 4\widehat{u}(k)}$ . But by continuity and the fact that  $\sqrt{1 - 4\widehat{u}(k)} \neq 0$  for any  $k \neq 0$ , the sign cannot switch. Hence, (10) is valid for all  $k$ , including  $k = 0$ , again by continuity. At  $k = 0$ ,  $a = \frac{1}{2} - \sqrt{1 - 4b}$ , which proves (3). The fact that  $c_n$  as specified in (7) satisfies  $c_n \sim n^{-3/2}$  is a simple application of Stirling’s formula, and it shows that the power series for  $\sqrt{1 - z}$  converges absolutely and uniformly everywhere on the closed unit disc. Since  $|4\widehat{u}(k)| \leq 1$ ,  $\sqrt{1 - 4\widehat{u}(k)} = 1 - \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n (4\widehat{u}(k))^n$ . Inverting the Fourier transform yields (6), and since  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} 4^n \star^n u(x) \, dx \leq 1$ , the convergence of the sum in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  follows from the convergence of  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n$ . The final statement follows from the fact that if  $f$  is defined in terms of  $u$  in this manner, then (10) is valid, and then (8) and (5) are satisfied. ■

**Theorem 2.** Let  $f \in L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfy (1) and  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) \, dx = \frac{1}{2}$ . Then,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|f(x) \, dx = \infty$ .

**Proof.** If  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) \, dx = \frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} 4u(x) \, dx = 1$ , then  $w(x) = 4u(x)$  is a probability density, and we can write  $f(x) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n \star^n w$ . Aiming for a contradiction, suppose that  $|x|f(x)$  is integrable. Then,  $|x|w(x)$  is integrable. Let  $m := \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} xw(x) \, dx$ . Since the 1st moments add under convolution, the trivial inequality  $|m||x| \geq m \cdot x$  yields

$$|m| \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x| \star^n w(x) \, dx \geq \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} m \cdot x \star^n w(x) \, dx = n|m|^2.$$

It follows that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|f(x) \, dx \geq \frac{|m|}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} nc_n = \infty$ . Hence,  $m = 0$ .

Suppose temporarily that in addition,  $|x|^2 w(x)$  is integrable. Let  $\sigma^2$  be the variance of  $w$  that is,  $\sigma^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 w(x) dx$ . Define the function  $\varphi(x) = \min\{1, |x|\}$ . Then,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x| \star^n w(x) dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |n^{1/2}x| \star^n w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2} dx \geq n^{1/2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} \varphi(x) \star^n w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2} dx.$$

By the central limit theorem, since  $\varphi$  is bounded and continuous,

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} \varphi(x) \star^n w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2} dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} \varphi(x)\gamma(x) dx =: C > 0, \tag{11}$$

where  $\gamma(x)$  is a centered Gaussian probability density with variance  $\sigma^2$ .

This shows that there is a  $\delta > 0$  such that for all sufficiently large  $n$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x| \star^n w(x) dx \geq \sqrt{n}\delta$ , and then since  $c_n \sim n^{-3/2}$ ,  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x| \star^n w(x) dx = \infty$ .

To remove the hypothesis that  $w$  has finite variance, note that if  $w$  is a probability density with zero mean and infinite variance,  $\star^n w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2}$  is “trying” to converge to a “Gaussian of infinite variance”. In particular, one would expect that for all  $R > 0$ ,

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \int_{|x| \leq R} \star^n w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2} dx = 0 \tag{12}$$

so that the limit in (11) has the value 1. The proof then proceeds as above. The fact that (12) is valid is a consequence of Lemma 6 below, which is closely based on the proof of [2, Corollary 1]. ■

**Theorem 3.** Let  $f \in L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfy (5),  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} xu(x) dx = 0$  and  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 u(x) dx < \infty$ . Then, for all  $0 \leq p < 1$ ,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^p f(x) dx < \infty. \tag{13}$$

**Proof.** We may suppose that  $f$  is not identically 0. Let  $t := 4 \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} u(x) dx \leq 1$ . Then,  $t > 0$ . Define  $w := t^{-1}4u$ ;  $w$  is a probability density and

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_n t^n \star^n w(x). \tag{14}$$

By hypothesis,  $w$  has a zero mean and variance  $\sigma^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 w(x) \, dx < \infty$ . Since variance is additive under convolution,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 \star^n w(x) \, dx = n\sigma^2.$$

By Hölder's inequality, for all  $0 < p < 2$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^p \star^n w(x) \, dx \leq (n\sigma^2)^{p/2}$ . It follows that for  $0 < p < 1$ ,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^p f(x) \, dx \leq \frac{1}{2}(\sigma^2)^{p/2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} n^{p/2} c_n < \infty,$$

again using the fact that  $c_n \sim n^{-3/2}$ . ■

**Remark 4.** In the subcritical case  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) \, dx < \frac{1}{2}$ , the hypothesis that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} xu(x) \, dx = 0$  is superfluous, and one can conclude more. In this case, the quantity  $t$  in (14) satisfies  $0 < t < 1$ , and if we let  $m$  denote the mean of  $w$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 \star^n w(x) \, dx = n^2|m|^2 + n\sigma^2$ . For  $0 < t < 1$ ,  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} n^2 c_n t^n < \infty$  and we conclude that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |x|^2 f(x) \, dx < \infty$ . Finally, the final statement of Theorem 1 shows that critical case functions  $f$  satisfying the hypotheses of Theorem 2 are readily constructed.

Theorem 2 implies that when  $\int f = \frac{1}{2}$ ,  $f$  cannot decay faster than  $|x|^{-(d+1)}$ . However, integrable solutions  $f$  of (1) such that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} f(x) \, dx < \frac{1}{2}$  can decay more rapidly, as indicated in the previous remark. In fact, they may even have finite exponential moments, as we now show.

Consider a nonnegative, integrable function  $u$ , which integrates to  $r < \frac{1}{4}$  and satisfies

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} u(x)e^{\lambda|x|} \, dx < \infty \tag{15}$$

for some  $\lambda > 0$ . The Laplace transform of  $u$  is  $\tilde{u}(p) := \int e^{-px} u(x) \, dx$ , which is analytic for  $|p| < \lambda$ , and  $\tilde{u}(0) < \frac{1}{4}$ . Therefore, there exists  $0 < \lambda_0 \leq \lambda$  such that, for all  $|p| \leq \lambda_0$ ,  $\tilde{u}(p) < \frac{1}{4}$ . By Theorem 1,  $f(x) := \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} 4^n c_n (\star^n u)(x)$  is an integrable solution of (1). For  $|p| \leq \lambda_0$ , it has a well-defined Laplace transform  $\tilde{f}(p)$  given by

$$\tilde{f}(p) = \int e^{-px} f(x) \, dx = \frac{1}{2}(1 - \sqrt{1 - 4\tilde{u}(p)}), \tag{16}$$

which is analytic for  $|p| \leq \lambda_0$ . Note that  $e^{s|x|} \leq \prod_{j=1}^d e^{|sx_j|} \leq \frac{1}{d} \sum_{j=1}^d e^{d|sx_j|} \leq \frac{2}{d} \sum_{j=1}^d \cosh(dsx_j)$ . Thus, for  $|s| < \delta := \lambda_0/d$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} \cosh(dsx_j)f(x) dx < \infty$  for each  $j$ , and hence  $|s| < \delta$ ,  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^d} e^{s|x|}f(x) dx < \infty$ .

However, there are no integrable solutions of (1) that have compact support: we have seen that all solutions of (1) are nonnegative, and if  $A$  is the support of a nonnegative integrable function, the Minkowski sum  $A + A$  is the support of  $f \star f$ .

**Remark 5.** One might also consider the inequality  $f \leq f \star f$  in  $L^1(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , but it is simple to construct solutions that have both signs. Consider any radial Gaussian probability density  $g$ . Then,  $g \star g(x) \geq g(x)$  for all sufficiently large  $|x|$ , and taking  $f := ag$  for  $a$  sufficiently large, we obtain  $f < f \star f$  everywhere. Now, on a small neighborhood of the origin, replace the value of  $f$  by  $-1$ . If the region is taken small enough, the new function  $f$  will still satisfy  $f < f \star f$  everywhere.

We close with a lemma validating (12) that is closely based on a construction in [2].

**Lemma 6.** Let  $w$  be a mean zero, infinite variance probability density on  $\mathbb{R}^d$ . Then, for all  $R > 0$ , (12) is valid.

**Proof.** Let  $X_1, \dots, X_n$  be  $n$  independent samples from the density  $w$ , and let  $B_R$  denote the centered ball of radius  $R$ . The quantity in (12) is  $p_{n,R} := \mathbb{P}(n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n X_j \in B_R)$ . Let  $\tilde{X}_1, \dots, \tilde{X}_n$  be another  $n$  independent samples from the density  $w$ , independent of the 1st  $n$ . Then, also  $p_{n,R} := \mathbb{P}(-n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n \tilde{X}_j \in B_R)$ . By the independence and the triangle inequality,

$$p_{n,R}^2 \leq \mathbb{P}(n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n (X_j - \tilde{X}_j) \in B_{2R}).$$

The random variable  $X_1 - \tilde{X}_1$  has a zero mean, an infinite variance, and an even density. Therefore, without loss of generality, we may assume that  $w(x) = w(-x)$  for all  $x$ .

Pick  $\varepsilon > 0$ , and choose a large value  $\sigma_0$  such that  $(2\pi\sigma_0^2)^{-d/2}R^d|B| < \varepsilon/3$ , where  $|B|$  denotes the volume of the unit ball  $B$ . The point of this is that if  $G$  is a centered Gaussian random variable with variance at least  $\sigma_0^2$ , the probability that  $G$  lies in any particular translate  $B_R + \gamma$  of the ball of radius  $R$  is no more than  $\varepsilon/3$ . Let  $A \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  be a centered cube such that

$$\int_A |x|^2 w(x) dx =: \sigma^2 \geq 2\sigma_0^2 \quad \text{and} \quad \int_A w(x) dx > \frac{3}{4}$$

and note that since  $A$  and  $w$  are even,  $\int_A xw(x) dx = 0$ .

It is then easy to find mutually independent random variables  $X$ ,  $Y$ , and  $\alpha$  such that  $X$  takes values in  $A$ , has zero mean and variance  $\sigma^2$  and  $\alpha$  is a Bernoulli variable with success probability  $\int_A w(x) dx$ , and finally, such that  $\alpha X + (1 - \alpha)Y$  has the probability density  $w$ . Taking independent identically distributed (i.i.d.) sequences of such random variables,  $w(n^{1/2}x)n^{d/2}$  is the probability density of  $W_n := n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n \alpha_j X_j + n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n (1 - \alpha_j) Y_j$ , and we seek to estimate the expectation of  $1_{B_R}(W_n)$ . We first take the conditional expectation, given the values of the  $\alpha$ s and the  $Y$ s, and we define  $\hat{n} = \sum_{j=1}^n \alpha_j$ . These conditional expectations have the form  $\mathbb{E} \left[ 1_{B_R+Y} \left( \sum_{j=1}^n n^{-1/2} \alpha_j X_j \right) \right]$  for some translate  $B_R + Y$  of  $B_R$ , the ball of radius  $R$ . The sum  $n^{-1/2} \sum_{j=1}^n \alpha_j X_j$  is actually the sum of  $\hat{n}$  i.i.d. random variables with zero mean and variance  $\sigma^2/n$ . The probability that  $\hat{n}$  is significantly less than  $\frac{3}{4}n$  is negligible for large  $n$ ; by classical estimates associated with the law of large numbers, for all  $n$  large enough, the probability that  $\hat{n} < n/2$  is no more than  $\varepsilon/3$ . Now, let  $Z$  be a Gaussian random variable with mean zero and variance  $\sigma^2 \hat{n}/n$ , which is at least  $\sigma_0^2$  when  $\hat{n} \geq n/2$ . Then, by the multivariate version [8] of the Berry–Esseen theorem [1, 5], a version of the central limit theorem with rate information, there is a constant  $K_d$  depending only on  $d$  such that

$$\left| \mathbb{E} \left[ 1_{B_R+Y} \left( \sum_{j=1}^n n^{-1/2} \alpha_j X_j \right) \right] - \mathbb{P}\{Z \in B_R + Y\} \right| \leq K_d \hat{n} \frac{\mathbb{E}|X_1|^3}{n^{3/2}} \leq K_d \frac{\mathbb{E}|X_1|^3}{n^{1/2}}.$$

Since  $A$  is bounded,  $\mathbb{E}|X_1|^3 < \infty$ , and hence for all sufficiently large  $n$ , when  $\hat{n} \geq n/2$ ,

$$\mathbb{E} \left[ 1_{B_R+Y} \left( \sum_{j=1}^n n^{-1/2} \alpha_j X_j \right) \right] \leq \frac{2}{3} \varepsilon.$$

Since this is uniform in  $Y$ , we finally obtain  $\mathbb{P}(W_n \in B_R) \leq \varepsilon$  for all sufficiently large  $n$ . Since  $\varepsilon > 0$  is arbitrary, (12) is proved.  $\blacksquare$

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