# MINIMAX OPTIMALITY (PROBABLY) DOESN'T IMPLY DISTRIBUTION LEARNING FOR GANS

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## ABSTRACT

Arguably the most fundamental question in the theory of generative adversarial networks (GANs) is to understand when GANs can actually learn the underlying distribution. Theoretical and empirical evidence (see e.g. (Arora et al., 2018)) suggests local optimality of the empirical training objective is insufficient. Yet, it does not rule out the possibility that achieving a true population minimax optimal solution might imply distribution learning. In this paper, we show that standard cryptographic assumptions imply that this stronger condition is still insufficient. Namely, we show that if local pseudorandom generators (PRGs) exist, then for a large family of natural target distributions, there are ReLU network generators of constant depth and poly size which take Gaussian random seeds so that (i) the output is far in Wasserstein distance from the target distribution, but (ii) no polynomially large Lipschitz discriminator ReLU network can detect this. This implies that even achieving a population minimax optimal solution to the Wasserstein GAN objective is likely insufficient for distribution learning. Our techniques reveal a deep connection between GANs and PRGs, which we believe will lead to further insights into the computational landscape of GANs.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

When will a generative adversarial network (GAN) trained with samples from a distribution $\mathcal{D}$ actually output samples from a distribution that is close to $\mathcal{D}$? This question is one of the most foundational questions in GAN theory—indeed, it was raised since the original paper introducing GANs. However, despite significant interest, this question still remains to be fully understood for general classes of generators and discriminators.

A significant literature has developed discussing the role of the training dynamics (Liu et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018; Arora et al., 2018; Berard et al., 2019; Wiatrak et al., 2019; Thanh-Tung & Tran, 2020; Allen-Zhu & Li, 2021), as well as the generalization error of the GAN objective (Zhang et al., 2017; Arora et al., 2017; Thanh-Tung et al., 2019). In most cases, researchers have demonstrated that given sufficient training data, GANs are able to learn some specific form of distributions after successful training. Underlying these works appears to be a tacit belief that if we are able to achieve the minimax optimal solution to the population-level GAN objective, then the GAN should be able to learn the target distribution. In this work, we take a closer look at this assumption.

**What does it mean to learn the target distribution?** As a starting point, we must first formally define what we mean by learning a distribution; more concretely, what do we mean when we say that two distributions are close? The original paper of (Goodfellow et al., 2020) proposed to measure closeness with KL divergence. However, learning the target distribution in KL divergence is quite unlikely to be satisfied for real-world distributions. This is because learning distributions in KL divergence also requires us to exactly recover the support of the target distribution, which we cannot really hope to do if the distribution lies in an unknown (complicated) low-dimensional manifold. To rectify this, one may instead consider learning in Wasserstein distance, as introduced in the context of GANs by (Arjovsky et al., 2017), which has no such "trivial" barriers. Recall that the Wasserstein distance between two distributions $\mathcal{D}_1, \mathcal{D}_2$ over $\mathbb{R}^d$ is given by

$$W_1(\mathcal{D}_1, \mathcal{D}_2) = \sup_{\mathrm{Lip}(f) \leq 1} \mathbb{E}_{\mathcal{D}_1}[f] - \mathbb{E}_{\mathcal{D}_2}[f] \ ,$$

where for any $f : \mathbb{R}^d \to R$, we let $\mathrm{Lip}(f)$ denote the Lipschitz constant of $f$. That is, two densities are close in Wasserstein distance if no Lipschitz function can distinguish between them.

Indeed, if the class of discriminators contains sufficiently large neural networks, then minimax optimality of the GAN objective does imply learning in Wasserstein distance. This is because we can approximate any Lipschitz function arbitrarily well, with an exponentially large network with one hidden layer (see e.g. (Poggio et al., 2017)). Thus, in this case, minimizing the population GAN objective is actually equivalent to learning in Wasserstein distance. Of course in practice, however, we are limited to polynomially large networks for both the generator and the discriminator. This raises the natural question:

*Does achieving small error against all poly-size neural network discriminators imply that the poly-size generator has learned the distribution in Wasserstein distance?*

One might conjecture that this claim is true, since the generator is only of poly-size. Thus, using a (larger) poly-size discriminator (as opposite to the class of all 1-Lipschitz functions) might still be sufficient to minimize the actual Wasserstein distance. In this paper, however, we provide strong evidence to the contrary. We demonstrate that widely accepted cryptographic assumptions imply that this is false, *even if the generator is of constant depth*:

**Theorem 1.1** (Informal, see Theorem 3.1)**.** *Assuming local pseudorandom generators exist, the following holds: For any sufficiently large $m \in \mathbb{Z}$, $d, r \leq \mathrm{poly}(m)$, and any diverse*[1] *target distribution $\mathcal{D}^*$ over $[0,1]^d$ given by the pushforward of the uniform distribution $I_r$ on $[0,1]^r$ by a constant depth ReLU network of polynomial size/Lipschitzness.*

*There exist generators $G : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^d$ computed by ReLU networks of* constant depth *and polynomial size for which no ReLU network of polynomial depth/size/Lipschitzness can tell apart the distributions $G(\gamma_m)$ and $\mathcal{D}^*$, yet $G(\gamma_m)$ and $\mathcal{D}^*$ are $\Omega(1)$-far in Wasserstein distance.*

In fact, if we replace $\mathcal{D}^*$ and $\gamma_m$ by the uniform distributions over $\{\pm 1\}^d$ and $\{\pm 1\}^m$, we show this holds for generators whose output coordinates are given by *constant-size* networks (see Theorem 3.2).

We defer the formal definition of local pseudorandom generators (PRGs) to Section 2.2. We pause to make a number of remarks about this theorem. First, our theorem talks about the population loss of the GAN objective; namely, it says that the true population GAN objective is small for this generator $G$, meaning that for every ReLU network discriminator $f$ of polynomial depth/size/Lipschitzness, we have that

$$|\mathbb{E}[f(\mathcal{D}^*)] - \mathbb{E}[f(G(\gamma_m))]| \leq \frac{1}{d^{\omega(1)}} \, .$$

In other words, our theorem states that even optimizing the true population minimax objective is insufficient for distribution learning. Second, notice that our generator is extremely simple: notably, it is only constant depth. On the other hand, the discriminator is allowed to be much more complex. Despite this, we show that the discriminators are still not powerful enough to distinguish the output of the (much simpler) generator from the target distribution. Third, our conclusions hold both for $d \geq m$ and $d \leq m$, so long as the input and output dimensions are related by polynomial factors. Finally, we formally define the class of target distributions for which our conclusions hold in Section 2.3. We note that our assumption is quite general: for instance, it includes pushforwards of the uniform distribution under random leaky ReLU networks (see Lemma 2.4).

**Empirical results.** To complement these theoretical results, we also perform some empirical validations of our findings (see Section 4). Our theorem is constructive; that is, given a local PRG, we give an explicit generator which satisfies the theorem. We instantiate this construction with Goldreich's PRG with the "Tri-Sum-And" (TSA) predicate (Goldreich, 2011), which is an explicit function which is believed to satisfy the local PRG property. We then demonstrate that a neural network discriminator trained via standard methods empirically cannot distinguish between the output of this generator and the uniform distribution. While of course we cannot guarantee that we achieve the truly optimal discriminator using these methods, this still demonstrates that our construction leads to a function which does appear to be hard to distinguish in practice.

[1] See Definition 6.

**GANs, PRGs, and circuit lower bounds.** At a high level, our results and techniques demonstrate surprising and deep connections between GANs and more "classical" problems in cryptography and complexity theory. Theorem 1.1 already shows that cryptographic assumptions may pose a fundamental barrier to the most basic question in GAN theory. In addition to this, we also show a connection between this question and circuit lower bounds. In the supplementary material, we show that if we are able to unconditionally exhibit generators which can fool polynomially large ReLU network discriminators, then we would obtain breakthrough circuit lower bounds against $\mathsf{TC}^0$ (see Theorem C.2 and Remark C.3). This complements Theorem 1.1, as it says that if we can unconditionally construct generators which fool realistic discriminators, then we make progress on long-standing questions in circuit complexity. We believe that exploring these connections may be crucial to achieving a deeper understanding of what GANs can and cannot learn.

### 1.1 Related Work

**GANs and Distribution Learning** The literature on GAN theory is vast and we cannot hope to do it full justice here. For a more extensive review, see e.g. (Gui et al., 2020). Besides the previously mentioned work on understanding GAN dynamics and generalization, we only mention the most relevant papers here. One closely related line of work derives concrete bounds on when minimax optimality of the GAN objective implies distribution learning (Bai et al., 2018; Liang, 2018; Singh et al., 2018; Uppal et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020a; Schreuder et al., 2021). However, the rates they achieve scale poorly with the dimensionality of the data, and/or require strong assumptions on the class of generators and discriminators, such as invertability. Another line of work has demonstrated that first order methods can learn very simple GAN architectures in polynomial time (Feizi et al., 2017; Daskalakis et al., 2017; Gidel et al., 2019; Lei et al., 2020). However, these results do not cover many of the generators used in practice, such as ReLU networks with $> 1$ hidden layers.

**Local PRGs and Learning** Pseudorandom generators (PRGs) have had a rich history of study in cryptography and complexity theory (see e.g. (Vadhan, 2012)). From this literature, the object most relevant to the present work is the notion of a *local PRG*. These are part of a broader research program of building constant parallel-time cryptography (Applebaum et al., 2006). One popular local PRG candidate was suggested in (Goldreich, 2011). By now there is compelling evidence that this candidate is a valid PRG, as a rich family of algorithms including sum-of-squares (ODonnell & Witmer, 2014) and statistical query algorithms (Feldman et al., 2018) provably cannot break it.

Finally, we remark that Goldreich's PRG and, more generally, hardness of refuting random CSPs have been used in a number of works showing hardness for various supervised learning problems (Daniely & Vardi, 2021; Daniely et al., 2014; Daniely, 2016; Daniely & Shalev-Shwartz, 2016; Applebaum et al., 2006; Applebaum & Raykov, 2016). We consider a very different setting, and our techniques are very different from the aforementioned papers.

## 2 Technical Preliminaries

**Notation** Denote by $U_n$ the uniform distribution over $\{\pm 1\}^n$, by $\gamma_n$ the standard $n$-dimensional Gaussian measure, and by $I_n$ the uniform measure on $[0,1]^n$. Given distribution $\mathcal{D}$ over $\mathbb{R}^m$ and measurable function $G : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^d$, let $G(\mathcal{D})$ denote the distribution over $\mathbb{R}^d$ given by the *push-forward* of $\mathcal{D}$ under $G$—to sample from the pushforward $G(\mathcal{D})$, sample $x$ from $\mathcal{D}$ and output $G(x)$. Given $\sigma : \mathbb{R} \to \mathbb{R}$ and vector $v \in \mathbb{R}^d$, denote by $\sigma(v) \in \mathbb{R}^d$ the result of applying $\sigma$ entrywise to $v$. To avoid dealing with issues of real-valued computation, let $\mathbb{R}_\tau \subset \mathbb{R}$ be the set of multiples of $2^{-\tau}$ bounded in magnitude by $2^\tau$.

### 2.1 GANs and Pseudorandom Generators

In this section we review basic notions about generative models and pseudorandom generators.

**Definition 1** (ReLU Networks)**.** *Let $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,d}$ denote the family of ReLU networks $F : \mathbb{R}^d \to \mathbb{R}$ of depth $L$ and size $S$. Formally, $F \in \mathcal{C}_{L,S,d}$ if there exist weight matrices $\mathbf{W}_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_1 \times d}, \mathbf{W}_2 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_2 \times k_1}, \ldots, \mathbf{W}_L \in \mathbb{R}^{1 \times k_{L-1}}$ and biases $b_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_1}, b_2 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_2} \ldots, b_L \in \mathbb{R}$ such that*

$$F(x) \triangleq \mathbf{W}_L \phi\left(\mathbf{W}_{L-1}\phi\left(\cdots \phi(\mathbf{W}_1 x + b_1)\cdots\right) + b_{L-1}\right) + b_L,$$

*and* $\sum_{i=1}^{L-1} k_i = S$*, where* $\phi(z) \triangleq \max(0, z)$ *is the ReLU activation. Additionally, we let* $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,d}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ *be the subset of such networks which are additionally* $\Lambda$*-Lipschitz and whose weight matrices and biases have entries in* $\mathbb{R}_\tau$*– we will refer to* $\tau$ *as the* bit complexity *of the network.*

The following allows us to control the complexity of compositions of ReLU networks:

**Lemma 2.1.** *Let* $J : \mathbb{R}^s \to \mathbb{R}^r$ *be a function each of whose output coordinates is computed by some network in* $\mathcal{C}_{L_1,S_1,s}^{\tau_1,\Lambda_1}$*, and let* $f \in \mathcal{C}_{L_2,S_2,r}^{\tau_2,\Lambda_2}$*. Then* $f \circ J \in \mathcal{C}_{L,S,s}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ *for* $\tau = \max(\tau_1, \tau_2)$*,* $\Lambda = \Lambda_1\Lambda_2\sqrt{r}$*,* $L = L_1 + L_2$*, and* $S = (S_1 + 1)r + S_2$*. Furthermore, for the network in* $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,s}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ *realizing* $f \circ J$*, the bias and weight vector entries in the output layer lie in* $\mathbb{R}_{\tau_2}$*.*

Next, we formalize the probability metric we will work with.

**Definition 2** (IPM)**.** *Given a family* $\mathcal{F}$ *of functions, define the* $\mathcal{F}$-integral probability metric ($\mathcal{F}$-IPM) *between two distributions* $p, q$ *by*

$$W_{\mathcal{F}}(p, q) = \sup_{f \in \mathcal{F}} \left| \mathop{\mathbb{E}}_{y \sim p}[f(y)] - \mathop{\mathbb{E}}_{x \sim q}[f(y)] \right|.$$

*When* $\mathcal{F}$ *consists of the family of* 1*-Lipschitz functions, this is the standard* Wasserstein-1 *metric, which we denote by* $W_1$*.*

In the context of GANs, we will focus on discriminators given by ReLU networks of polynomial size, depth, Lipschitzness, and bit complexity:

**Definition 3** (Discriminator Class)**.** *Let* $\mathcal{F}^*$ *denote the set of all sequences of discriminators* $f_d : \mathbb{R}^d \to \mathbb{R}$*, indexed by* $d \in \mathbb{N}$*, such that the size, depth, Lipschitzness, and bit complexity of* $f_d$ *grow at most polynomially in* $d$*.*

We now formalize the definition of GANs, which closely parallels the definition of PRGs.

**Definition 4** (GANs/Pseudorandom generators)**.** *Let* $\epsilon : \mathbb{N} \to [0, 1]$ *be an arbitrary function, and let* $\{d(m)\}_{m \in \mathbb{N}}$ *be some sequence of positive integers. Given a sequence of* seed distributions $\{\mathcal{D}_m\}_m$ *over* $\mathbb{R}^m$*, a sequence of* target distributions $\{\mathcal{D}^*_{d(m)}\}$ *over* $\mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$*, a family* $\mathcal{F}$ *of* discriminators $f : \mathbb{R}^{d(m)} \to \mathbb{R}$*, and a sequence of* generators $G_m : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$*, we say that* $\{G_m\}$ $\epsilon$-fools $\mathcal{F}$ relative to $\{\mathcal{D}^*_{d(m)}\}$ with seed $\{\mathcal{D}_m\}$ *if for all sufficiently large* $m$*,*

$$\left|\mathbb{E}[f(G_m(\mathcal{D}_m))] - \mathbb{E}[f(\mathcal{D}_{d(m)})]\right| \leq \epsilon(m) \quad \forall f \in \mathcal{F}, f : \mathbb{R}^{d(m)} \to \mathbb{R}. \tag{1}$$

*Note that in the notation of Definition 2, (1) is equivalent to* $W_{\mathcal{F}}(G_m(\mathcal{D}_m), \mathcal{D}^*_{d(m)}) \leq \epsilon(m)$*.*[2]

*In this definition, if the discriminators and generators were instead Boolean functions, we would refer to* $\{G_m\}$ *as* pseudorandom generators.

*Remark* 2.2. It will often be cumbersome to refer to sequences of target/seed distributions and discriminators/generators as in Definitions 3 and 4, so occasionally we will refer to a single choice of $m$ and $d$ even though we implicitly mean that $m$ and $d$ are parameters that increase towards infinity. In this vein, we will often say that a single network $f$ is in $\mathcal{F}^*$, though we really mean that $f$ belongs to a sequence of networks which lies in $\mathcal{F}^*$. And for distributions $p, q$ which implicitly belong to sequences $\{p_d\}, \{q_d\}$, when we refer to bounds on $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(p, q)$ we really mean that for any sequence of discriminators $f_d \in \mathcal{F}^*$, $|\mathbb{E}[f_d(p_d)] - \mathbb{E}[f_d(q_d)]|$ is bounded.

### 2.2 Local Pseudorandom Generators

It is widely believed that there exist so-called *local pseudorandom generators* capable of fooling all polynomial-sized Boolean circuits and all of whose output coordinates are functions of a constant number of input bits (Applebaum et al., 2006). One prominent candidate is Goldreich's PRG:

**Definition 5** (Goldreich's PRG, (Goldreich, 2011))**.** *Let* $H$ *be a uniformly random* $k$*-uniform hypergraph on* $m$ *vertices with* $d$ *hyperedges, which we denote by* $H \sim \mathcal{H}_{m,d,k}$*. Given a* $k$*-ary predicate* $P : \{\pm 1\}^k \to \{\pm 1\}$*, let* $G_{P,H} : \{\pm 1\}^m \to \{\pm 1\}^d$ *denote the function whose* $\ell$*-th output bit is given by evaluating* $P$ *on the bits of the input indexed by the* $\ell$*-th hyperedge of* $H$*.*

[2]Here we are slightly abusing notation as $\mathcal{F}$ contains functions which have domain not equal to $\mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$, and we ignore these functions in the supremum.

The following is by now a standard assumption in cryptography (see (Applebaum, 2016) for a survey and detailed discussion), namely that the incredibly simple functions in Definition 5 suffice to give pseudorandom generators fooling all Boolean circuits of polynomial size (see supplement for background on Boolean circuits):

**Assumption 1.** *For any $c > 1$, there exists $k \in \mathbb{N}$ and $k$-ary predicate $P$ such that for $m$ sufficiently large, with probability $1 - o_m(1)$ over $H \sim \mathcal{H}_{m,m^c,k}$, $G = G_{P,H}$ $\mathsf{negl}(m)$-fools all circuits in $\mathsf{P/poly}$ relative to $U_{m^c}$ with seed $U_m$ for some negligible function $\mathsf{negl} : \mathbb{N} \to [0,1]$.*[3]

### 2.3 Non-Atomic Distributions

Recall that the main result of this paper is to construct generators that look indistinguishable from natural target distributions $\mathcal{D}^*$ according to any poly-sized neural network, but which are far from $\mathcal{D}^*$ in Wasserstein. In this section we describe in greater detail the properties that these $\mathcal{D}^*$ satisfy.

**Definition 6.** *A distribution $\mu$ over $\mathbb{R}^d$ is $(N, \beta)$-diverse if for any discrete distribution $\nu$ on $\mathbb{R}^d$ supported on at most $N$ points, $W_1(\mu, \nu) \geq \beta$.*

The main fact we use about $(N, \beta)$-diverse distributions is that they cannot be approximated by pushforwards of $U_{\log_2 N}$.

**Lemma 2.3.** *For any $0 < \beta < 1$, if $\mathcal{D}^*$ is a $(2^m, \beta)$-diverse distribution over $\mathbb{R}^d$, then for any function $G : \{\pm 1\}^m \to \mathbb{R}^d$, $W_1(G(U_m), \mathcal{D}^*) \geq \beta$.*

It is easy to show that distributions like uniform distributions over well-separated discrete point sets of size $N' > N$, as well as the uniform distribution over $[0,1]^d$ for $d$ satisfying $d \geq \Omega(m)^{2/d}$, are diverse (see Lemma A.13 and Lemma A.15 in the supplement). Another notable example is the class of random expansive neural networks with leaky ReLU activations:

**Lemma 2.4** (Random expansive leaky ReLU networks)**.** *For $k_0, \ldots, k_L \in \mathbb{N}$ satisfying $k_i \geq 1.1k_{i-1}$ for all $i \in [L]$, let $\mathbf{W}_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_1 \times k_0}, \mathbf{W}_2 \in \mathbb{R}^{k_2 \times k_1}, \ldots, \mathbf{W}_L \in \mathbb{R}^{k_L \times k_{L-1}}$ be random weight matrices, where every entry of $\mathbf{W}_i$ is an independent draw from $\mathcal{N}(0, 1/k_i)$. For the function $F : \mathbb{R}^{k_0} \to \mathbb{R}^{k_L}$ given by*

$$F(x) \triangleq \mathbf{W}_L \psi_\lambda \left( \mathbf{W}_{L-1} \psi_\lambda \left( \cdots \psi_\lambda(\mathbf{W}_1 x) \cdots \right) \right),$$

*where $\psi_\lambda(z) = \psi_\lambda(z) = z/2 + (1/2 - \lambda)|z|$ is the leaky ReLU activation, we have that $F(I_{k_0})$ is $(2^m, \beta)$-diverse for $m = (k_0/2)\log(k_0/2) - k_L/1.1 - 1$ and $\beta = \Theta(\lambda)^L$.*

*For example, if $\lambda, L = \Theta(1)$, then $F(I_{k_0})$ is $(2^{\Omega(k_0 \log k_0)}, \Omega(1))$-diverse for $k_0$ sufficiently large.*

It is easy to see that the networks in Lemma 2.4 can be implemented as ReLU networks, so our main theorem applies to target distributions given by pushing the uniform distribution over the continuous cube through a random expansive leaky ReLU network of constant depth.

## 3 Fooling ReLU Network Discriminators Does Not Suffice

In this section we will show that even though a generative model looks indistinguishable from some target distribution $\mathcal{D}^*$ according to any ReLU network in $\mathcal{F}^*$, it can be quite far from $\mathcal{D}^*$ in Wasserstein. We begin by describing a simple version of this result over discrete domains in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2 we extend this to target distributions over continuous domains, but where the generator still takes in a discrete-valued seed. Finally, in Section 3.3 we give a simple reduction that extends these results to give generators that take in a continuous-valued random seed, culminating in the following main result:

**Theorem 3.1.** *Let $\{H_m\}_m$ be a sequence of generators $H_m : \mathbb{R}^{r(m)} \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$ for $r(m), d(m) \leq \mathrm{poly}(m)$ whose output coordinates are computable by networks in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau'(m),\Lambda'(m)}_{L'(m),S'(m),r(m)}$ for $\tau'(m), \Lambda'(m) \leq \mathrm{poly}(m)$. Suppose that $H_m(I_{r(m)})$ is $(2^m, \Omega(1))$-diverse.*

*Fix any $\epsilon : \mathbb{N} \to [0,1]$ satisfying $\epsilon(m) \geq \max(\mathsf{negl}(m), \exp(-O(m))$. Under Assumption 1, there is a sequence of generators $G_m : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$ such that for all $m$ sufficiently large:*

[3] Roughly speaking, a function is negligible if it decreases faster than inverse polynomially, see supplement.

1. *Every output coordinate of $G_m$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,m}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ for*

$$\begin{aligned}\tau &= \max(O(\log(\Lambda'(m)\cdot m\cdot d(m)/\epsilon(m))), \tau'(m), O(1))\\ \Lambda &= O(\Lambda'(m)^2\mathrm{poly}(m)/\epsilon(m))\\ L &= L'(m)+O(1)\\ S &= O(r(m)\log(1/\epsilon(m)))+3m+S'(m).\end{aligned}$$

2. $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(G_m(\gamma_m), H_m(I_{r(m)})) \le \epsilon(m)\cdot \mathrm{poly}(m)$.

3. $W_1(G_m(\gamma_m), H_m(I_{r(m)})) \ge \Omega(1)$.

Note that a natural choice of parameters for $H_m$ would be

$$\tau'(m) \le O(\log m),\ \ \Lambda'(m), S'(m), 1/\epsilon(m) \le \mathrm{poly}(m),\ \ L'(m)\le O(1).$$

In this case, $G_m$'s output coordinates are computable by *constant-depth ReLU networks* with polynomial size and Lipschitzness and logarithmic bit complexity $\tau$.

### 3.1 Stretching Bits to Bits

As a warmup, in this subsection we prove the following special case of Theorem 3.1 when the target distribution and seed distribution are discrete.

**Theorem 3.2.** *Under Assumption 1, for any constant $c > 1$, there is a sequence of generators $G_m : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$ for $d(m) \ge m^c$ such that for all $m$,*

1. *Every output coordinate of $G_m$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,m}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ for $\tau, \Lambda, L, S = O_c(1)$.*

2. $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(G_m(U_m), U_{d(m)}) \le \mathsf{negl}(m)$.

3. $W_1(G_m(U_m), U_{d(m)}) \ge \Omega(1)$.

We emphasize that in this discrete setting, our quantitative guarantees are even stronger: *all parameters $\tau, \Lambda, L, S$ of the generator are constant*, and no polynomial-sized ReLU network can distinguish between $G_m(U_m)$ and $U_{d(m)}$ with even *non-negligible* advantage.

As discussed in the introduction, a basic but important building block in the proof of Theorem 3.2 is the connection between Goldreich's PRG and generative models computed by neural networks of constant depth/size/Lipschitzness. We begin by elaborating on this connection and showing that any predicate $\{\pm 1\}^k \to \{\pm 1\}$ can be implemented as a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,d}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ where $\tau, \Lambda, L, S = O_k(1)$. As a consequence of known constructions for implementing Boolean functions with ReLU networks (see e.g. Lemma A.2 of (Chen et al., 2020b)), we can show:

**Corollary 3.3.** *For any $k \in \mathbb{N}$, any predicate $\{\pm 1\}^k \to \{\pm 1\}$, and any $k$-uniform hypergraph $H$ on $m$ vertices with $d$ hyperedges, the coordinates of the output of $G_{P,H}$ are computed by networks in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,m}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ for $\tau = O(k), \Lambda = \exp(O(k)), L = k, S = O(2^k k)$.*

Before we use this to prove Theorem 3.2, we need a few technical ingredients to formalize the fact that a discriminator given by a ReLU network of polynomially bounded complexity yields a discriminator computable by a polynomial-sized Boolean circuit. The idea is that if $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}$ is large so that there exists some ReLU network discriminator, then because the input to the discriminator is sufficiently well concentrated, some affine threshold of the ReLU network can distinguish between the two distributions (Lemma 3.4 and 3.5).

**Lemma 3.4.** *If $Z$ is $\sigma^2$-sub-Gaussian and mean zero, then for any interval $I = [a, b]$ with $a \le 0 \le b$, we have $|\mathbb{E}[Z\cdot \mathbb{1}[Z \notin I]]| \le O(b-a+\sigma)\cdot \exp(-\min(-a,b)^2/2\sigma^2)$.*

**Lemma 3.5.** *Given independent $X$ and $Y$ such that $\mathbb{E}[Y]-\mathbb{E}[X] = \alpha$ and for which $X-\mathbb{E}[X]$ and $Y-\mathbb{E}[Y]$ are $\sigma^2$-sub-Gaussian, there exists a threshold $t \in [\mathbb{E}[X] - O(\sigma\sqrt{\log(\sigma/|\alpha|)}), \mathbb{E}[Y] + O(\sigma\sqrt{\log(\sigma/|\alpha|)})]$ for which $|\,\mathbb{P}[X > t] - \mathbb{P}[Y > t]| \ge \min\left(1/2, \widetilde{\Omega}(|\alpha|/\sigma)\right)$.*

We can now sketch the proof of Theorem 3.2, deferring a formal argument to the supplement.

*Proof sketch of Theorem 3.2.* The parameter $m$ will be clear from context in the following discussion, so for convenience we will refer to $d(m)$ and $G_m$ as $d$ and $G$. Let $k, P, G, \mathsf{negl}(\cdot)$ be such that the outcome of Assumption 1 holds. By Corollary 3.3, every output coordinate of $G$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau,\Lambda}_{L,S,m}$ for $\tau = O(k), \Lambda = \exp(O(k)), L = k, S = O(2^k k)$.

The fact that $W_1(G(U_m), U_d) > 1/3$ follows from the fact that $G(U_m)$ is uniform over $2^m$ points on the hypercube (with multiplicity), and $U_d$ is $(2^m, 1/3)$-diverse.

It remains to check that $G$ fools $\mathcal{F}^*$ relative to $U_d$. Suppose to the contrary that there exists some $f : \mathbb{R}^d \to \mathbb{R}$ in $\mathcal{F}^*$ for which $|\mathbb{E}[f(G(U_m))] - \mathbb{E}[f(U_d)]| > n^{-a}$ for some constant $a > 0$. Note that for any threshold $t \in \mathbb{R}_\tau$, there is a Turing machine $\mathcal{M}_\tau : \{\pm 1\}^d \to \{\pm 1\}$ that computes $y \mapsto \mathrm{sgn}(f(y) - t)$ using $\tau$ bits of advice. By applying Lemma 3.5 to random variables $X = f(G(U_m))$ and $Y = f(U_d)$, we get that there exists a threshold $t \in \mathbb{R}_{\mathrm{poly}(d)}$ for which $|\mathbb{E}[\mathcal{M}_\tau(G(U_m))] - \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{M}_\tau(U_d)]|$, contradicting Assumption 1. □

### 3.2 From Binary Outputs to Continuous Outputs

In this section we show how to extend Theorem 3.2 to handle $\mathcal{D}^*$ given by a generative model with seed drawn from the uniform distribution on $[0, 1]$:

**Theorem 3.6.** *Let $\{H_m\}_m$ be a sequence of generators $H_m : \mathbb{R}^{r(m)} \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$ for $r(m), d(m) \le \mathrm{poly}(m)$ whose output coordinates are computable by networks in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau'(m),\Lambda'(m)}_{L'(m),S'(m),r(m)}$ for $\tau'(m), \Lambda'(m) \le \mathrm{poly}(m)$. Suppose that $H_m(I_{r(m)})$ is $(2^m, \Omega(1))$-diverse.*

*Fix any $\epsilon : \mathbb{N} \to [0, 1]$ satisfying $\epsilon(m) \ge \max(\mathsf{negl}(m), \exp(-O(m))$. Under Assumption 1, there is a sequence of generators $G_m : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^{d(m)}$ such that for all $m$ sufficiently large:*

1. *Every output coordinate of $G_m$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau,\Lambda}_{L,S,m}$ for*
$$\begin{aligned}\tau &= \max(O(\log(1/\epsilon(m))), \tau'(m), O(1))\\ \Lambda &= O(\Lambda'(m)) \cdot \mathrm{poly}(m)\\ L &= L'(m) + O(1)\\ S &= O(r(m) \cdot \log(1/\epsilon(m))) + S'(m).\end{aligned}$$
2. $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(G_m(U_m), H_m(I_{r(m)})) \le \epsilon(m) \cdot \mathrm{poly}(m)$.
3. $W_1(G_m(U_m), H_m(I_{r(m)})) \ge \Omega(1)$.

Theorem 3.6 retains many of the nice properties of Theorem 3.2, e.g. it can tolerate distinguishing advantage $\epsilon(m)$ which is negligible, though at the cost of logarithmic dependence on $1/\epsilon(m)$ in the bit complexity $\tau$. And as with Theorem 3.1, if the networks $H_m$ are of constant depth, the resulting generators $G_m$ are also of constant depth.

To prove Theorem 3.6, we begin by showing that for any pair of distributions which are close under the $W_{\mathcal{F}}$ metric for some family of neural networks $\mathcal{F}$, their pushforwards under a simple generative model will still be close under the $W_{\mathcal{F}'}$ metric for some slightly weaker family of networks $\mathcal{F}'$.

**Lemma 3.7.** *Fix parameters $\Lambda, \Lambda' > 1$. Let $\mathcal{F} = \mathcal{C}^{\tau,\Lambda}_{L,S,s}$. If $W_{\mathcal{F}}(p, q) \le \epsilon$ for some distributions $p, q$ on $\mathbb{R}^s$, then for any $J : \mathbb{R}^s \to \mathbb{R}^r$ each of whose output coordinates is computed by a function in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau,\Lambda'}_{L',S',s}$ for some $L' < L$ and $S' \le \frac{S-r-1}{r}$, we have*
$$W_{\mathcal{F}'}(J(p), J(q)) \le 2\epsilon\Lambda'\sqrt{r}$$
*for $\mathcal{F}' = \mathcal{C}^{\tau',\Lambda}_{L-L',S'',r}$ where $\tau' = \tau - \lceil \log_2 \Lambda\sqrt{r} \rceil$ and $S'' = S - r(S' + 1)$.*

Using this, we can show that if a distribution is close in $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}$ to the uniform distribution over $\{\pm 1\}^s$, then a certain simple pushforward of the former will be close to the uniform distribution over $[0, 1]^r$ for $r$ slightly smaller than $s$. The starting point is the following elementary fact:

**Fact 3.8.** *For any $0 < \epsilon < 1$ and $n \ge \log_2(1/\epsilon)$, let $h : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ be the linear function given by $h(x) = \langle w, x + \mathbf{1}\rangle$ for $w = \left(1/4, 1/8, \ldots, (1/2)^{n+1}\right)$ and $\mathbf{1}$ the all-1's vector. Then $W_1(h(U_n), I_1) \le \epsilon$.*

By leveraging Fact 3.8 and Lemma 3.7, we can get an approximation to the uniform distribution over $[0,1]$ from the uniform distribution over $\{\pm 1\}$:

**Lemma 3.9.** *Suppose $\epsilon > 0$ satisfies $\log(1/\epsilon) \leq \mathrm{poly}(s)$. If a distribution $\widetilde{\mathcal{D}}$ over $\mathbb{R}^s$ satisfies $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(\widetilde{\mathcal{D}}, U_s) \leq \epsilon$, then for $r \triangleq s/\lceil \log(1/\epsilon) \rceil$,[4] there is a function $J : \mathbb{R}^s \to \mathbb{R}^r$ each of whose output coordinates is computed by a function in $\mathcal{C}_{1,0,s}^{O(\log(1/\epsilon)),O(1)}$ such that $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(J(\widetilde{\mathcal{D}}), I_r) \leq \epsilon \cdot \mathrm{poly}(r)$.*

By further combining Lemma 3.7 and Lemma 3.9, we can extend the latter from the uniform distribution on $[0,1]^r$ to simple pushforwards thereof.

**Lemma 3.10.** *Under the hypotheses of Lemma 3.9, for any $d \leq \mathrm{poly}(s)$ and any function $H : \mathbb{R}^r \to \mathbb{R}^d$ each of whose output coordinates is computed by a function in $\mathcal{C}_{L',S',r}^{\tau',\Lambda'}$ for $\tau' \leq \mathrm{poly}(s)$, there is a function $J' : \mathbb{R}^s \to \mathbb{R}^d$ each of whose output coordinates is computed by a function in $\mathcal{C}_{L'+1,r+S',s}^{\max(O(\log(1/\epsilon)),\tau'),O(\Lambda'\sqrt{d})}$ such that $W_{\mathcal{F}^*}(J'(\widetilde{\mathcal{D}}), H(I_r)) \leq \epsilon\Lambda' \cdot \mathrm{poly}(s)$.*

We can now sketch the proof of Theorem 3.6, deferring the full argument to the supplement.

*Proof of Theorem 3.6.* It is easy to verify condition 3 before we even define $G$ because $G(U_m)$ is a uniform distribution on $2^m$ points (with multiplicity) and $H(I_r)$ is $(2^m, \Omega(1))$-diverse.

Let $s = r \cdot \lceil \log(1/\epsilon) \rceil$. As we are assuming $\epsilon \geq \exp(-O(m))$, $s \leq r \cdot m = m^c$ for some constant $c > 1$. Take $G'$ to be the generator $G : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^s$ constructed in Theorem 3.2. By applying Lemma 3.10 to $\widetilde{\mathcal{D}} = G'(U_m)$, we get a function $J' : \mathbb{R}^s \to \mathbb{R}^d$ each of whose output coordinates is computed by a function in $\mathcal{C}_{L'+1,r+S',s}^{\max(O(\log(1/\epsilon)),\tau'),O(\Lambda'\sqrt{d})}$ such that $W_{F_d}(J'(G'(U_m)), H(I_r)) \leq \epsilon\Lambda' \cdot \mathrm{poly}(m) \leq \epsilon \cdot \mathrm{poly}(m)$, so we get condition 2 of the theorem for $G \triangleq J' \circ G'$. Finally, by Lemma 2.1, every output coordinate of $G$ can be realized by a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,m}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ for $\tau = \max(O(\log(1/\epsilon)), \tau', O(1))$, $\Lambda = O(\Lambda'\sqrt{ds}) = O(\Lambda') \cdot \mathrm{poly}(m)$, $L = L' + O(1)$, and $S = O(s) + r + S' = O(s) + S'$ (where we used the fact that $r = s/\lceil \log(1/\epsilon) \rceil < s$). This establishes condition 1 of the theorem. □

### 3.3 From Binary Inputs to Continuous Inputs

In this section we give a simple reduction showing how to extend Theorem 3.6 to $G$ which takes as input a random seed from $\gamma_m$ instead of from $U_m$, allowing us to prove the main Theorem 3.1.

We will need the following elementary construction.

**Lemma 3.11.** *For any $\xi$ for which $1/\xi \in \mathbb{R}_\tau$, the piecewise linear function $h_\xi$ which outputs $-1$ for inputs $x \leq -\xi$, $1$ for $x \geq \xi$, and $x/\xi$ otherwise, lies in $\mathcal{C}_{2,2,1}^{\tau,1/\xi}$.*

The function $h_\xi$ will allow us to approximately convert from $\gamma_m$ to $U_m$.

**Lemma 3.12.** *Let $G_0 : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^d$ be a function each of whose output coordinates is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L'',S'',m''}^{\tau'',\Lambda''}$. For any $\epsilon > 0$, let $\xi' \triangleq \epsilon / \left(\Lambda'' \sqrt{(2/\pi)m^3 d}\right)$, and define $\xi$ to be the multiplicative inverse of $\lceil 1/\xi' \rceil$.*

*The function $G : \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}^d$ given by $G(x) = G_0(h_\xi(x))$, where $h_\xi(x)$ denotes entrywise application of $h_\xi$ defined in Lemma 3.11, satisfies that 1) each of the output coordinates of $G$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}_{L,S,m}^{\tau,\Lambda}$ for the parameters $\tau = \max(\tau'', O(\log(\Lambda'' md/\epsilon)))$, $\Lambda = O(\Lambda''^2 m^2 \sqrt{d}/\epsilon)$, $L = L'' + 2$, and $S = 3m + S''$, and 2) $W_1(G_0(U_m), G(\gamma_m)) \leq \epsilon$.*

*Remark* 3.13. Note the only fact we use about $\gamma_m$ in the proof of Lemma 3.12 is that outside of an event with probability $O(m\xi)$, $h_\xi(\gamma_m)$ is uniform over $\{\pm 1\}^m$. In particular, the same would hold for any product measure each of whose coordinates is symmetric and anticoncentrated around zero. For instance, up to a constant factor in $\xi'$, Lemma 3.12 also holds with $\gamma_m$ replaced by $I_m$.

We are now ready to prove Theorem 3.1:

[4] We will assume for simplicity that this is an integer, though it is not hard to handle the case where $\lceil \log(1/\epsilon) \rceil$ does not divide $s$.

*Proof of Theorem 3.1.* Substitute the generator constructed in Theorem 3.6, call it $G_0$, into Lemma 3.12; let $G$ be the generator resulting from the lemma. Recall from Theorem 3.6 that each output coordinate of $G_0$ lies in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau'',\Lambda''}_{L'',S'',m}$ for $\tau'' = \max(O(\log(1/\epsilon)), \tau', O(1))$, $\Lambda'' = O(\Lambda' \mathrm{poly}(m))$, $L'' = L' + O(1)$, $S'' = O(r\log(1/\epsilon)) + S'$. So by Lemma 3.12, every output coordinate of $G$ is computable by a network in $\mathcal{C}^{\tau,\Lambda}_{L,S,m}$ for $\tau = \max(\tau'', O(\log(\Lambda' md/\epsilon))) = \max(O(\log(\Lambda md/\epsilon)), \tau', O(1))$, $\Lambda = O(\Lambda''^2 m^2 \sqrt{d}/\epsilon) = O(\Lambda'^2 \mathrm{poly}(m)/\epsilon)$, $L = L'' + 2 = L' + O(1)$, and $S = 3m + S'' = O(r\log(1/\epsilon)) + 3m + S''$. □

## 4 Experimental Results

To empirically demonstrate the existence of a constant depth generator that can fool polynomially-bounded discriminators, we evaluated the generator $G$ given by Goldreich's PRG (Goldreich, 2011) with input dimension $m = 50$, output dimension $d = 200$, and predicate $P : \{\pm 1\}^5 \to \{\pm 1\}$ given by the popular TSA predicate, namely $P(x_1, \ldots, x_5) = x_1 \cdot x_2 \cdot x_3 \cdot (x_4 \wedge x_5)$. This is the smallest predicate under which Goldreich's candidate construction is believed to be secure.

The target distribution $\mathcal{D}^*$ is the uniform distribution $U_{200}$ over $\{\pm 1\}^{200}$. According to Theorem 3.2, $W_1(G(U_m), U_d) \geq \Omega(1)$. We trained four different discriminators given respectively by $1, 2, 3, 4$ hidden-layer ReLU networks, where each hidden layer is fully connected with dimensions $200 \times 200$, to discriminate the output of the generator $G(U_m)$ from the target distribution $U_d$. We used the Adam optimizer with step size $0.001$ over the DCGAN training objective, with batch-size $128$. As we can see in Figure 1, the loss $\mathbb{E}[-\log(D(X))] + \mathbb{E}[-\log(1 - D(G(z)))] - 2\log(2)$ stays consistently above zero, indicating that the discriminator can not discriminate the true distribution from the generator output.

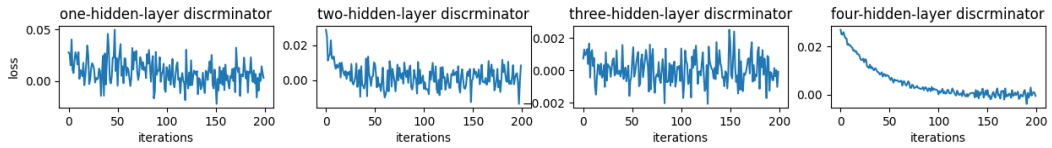


Figure 1: Discriminator can not distinguish the output of the generator from the true distribution, although the Wasserstein distance is large. Here, the loss is given by $\mathbb{E}[-\log(D(X))] + \mathbb{E}[-\log(1 - D(G(z)))] - 2\log(2)$

## 5 Conclusions

In light of the obstructions presented in this paper, what are natural next steps for the theory of GANs? Here, we offer a couple of thoughts and possible future directions.

One limitation of our lower bound is that it holds for a specific generator. Of course, it is quite unlikely that we will ever encounter such a generator through natural GAN training. One way to circumvent our lower bound is to argue that the training dynamics of the generator may have some regularization effect which allows us to avoid these troublesome generators, and which allows GANs to learn distributions in polynomial time.

Another orthogonal perspective is that our construction suggests that perhaps statistical learning is too strong of a goal. If our GAN is indeed indistinguishable to the target distribution to all polynomial time algorithms, then not only should the output of the GAN be sufficient for humans, but it should also be sufficient for all downstream applications, which presumably run in polynomial time. This raises the intriguing possibility that the correct metric for measuring closeness between distances in the context of GANs should inherently involve some computational component (e.g. in the sense of Dwork et al. (2021)) as opposed to the purely statistical metrics generally considered in the literature.

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