A numerical examination of an evolving black string horizon

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We use the numerical solution describing the evolution of a perturbed black string presented in \[1\] to elucidate the intrinsic behavior of the horizon. It is found that by the end of the simulation, the affine parameter on the horizon has become very large and the expansion and shear of the horizon in turn very small. This suggests the possibility that the horizon might pinch off in infinite affine parameter.

I. INTRODUCTION

While in four-dimensional spacetimes black holes are stable, it has been shown by Gregory and Laflamme\[2\] that at least some of their higher dimensional analogs, in particular black strings, are linearly unstable. As opposed to the situation in four-dimensions, at the linear level perturbations of these black strings grow exponentially above some critical length of the string. Although this picture has been well understood through a variety of analysis \[2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7\], it is not yet known what an unstable black string evolves to. In \[2\], using the linear instability of the string coupled to entropy considerations, it was argued that an unstable black string would “pinch off” and form a set of black holes which would later merge. This scenario, at the classical level, must give rise to a violation of cosmic censorship. However, this possibility was made doubtful by more recent work of Horowitz and Maeda (HM) \[8\]. There, a theorem is proved using the properties of expansion, shear and affine parameter of the geodesic generators of the black string horizon. This theorem asserts that a pinch off in finite affine parameter could only occur if a singularity formed outside the horizon. Under the assumption that this, perhaps too drastic scenario, is unlikely, the only other option left open for the event horizon pinching-off is that it does so in infinite affine parameter. This possibility, although mathematically possible, was argued against by HM. Their argument is based on one main observation together with a plausibility argument. The observation is that although their theorem does indeed allow for a pinch-off in infinite time, the rate, with respect to affine parameter, at which circles at $r = \text{const}$ can decrease in size is extremely slow. HM then argue that if the system decays so slowly, its dynamics must go through a series of essentially static non-uniform strings, and it then might just stay at one of these solutions. Therefore, instead of the pinch-off scenario, HM conjectured that the black string would evolve into a black string that is static but not uniform in the $z$ direction: a static wiggly black string. Families of static wiggly black strings were found numerically by Wiseman \[8\], however, all the solutions of \[8\] had too large a mass to be the endpoint of the evolution of the unstable black string as conjectured in \[10\]. Note however the recent work by Sorkin \[7\] (and related discussions in \[11\]) where it is discussed how for large enough spherical dimensions the static solutions found do indeed have lower mass, and could in principle be those conjectured by \[8\].

In an attempt to resolve the issue of the fate of the linearly unstable black string, in \[1\] a numerical discretization of the Einstein equations in five-dimensions was presented. An SO(3) symmetry was assumed, effectively making the problem 2+1 dimensional, and hence one that could be solved on contemporary computer systems. This code was employed to study the evolution of slight perturbations of a static, uniform black string. The simulation tracked the behavior of the system well into the non-linear regime, though unfortunately it could not be extended far enough to elucidate the final fate of the string. Nevertheless, the numerical solution revealed significant and rich dynamics, illustrating, in particular, that the string evolves toward a shape resembling large spherical black holes connected by thin strings. In terms of areal radius, the ratio of the maximum to minimum radius was about 10 by the end of the simulation.

In this paper, we re-examine the data of \[1\], paying closer attention to the analysis of \[8\] and examine relevant features of the solution. In particular, we numerically find the expansion, shear and affine parameter of the black string horizon and discuss their behavior in connection to the conjecture of \[8\] where a scenario is ruled out as improbable, though as we argue here, it might very well be possible. The methods used are presented in section II, results in section III and conclusions in section IV.
II. METHODS

Our starting point is to consider a spacetime described by the metric provided by the numerical simulation of [1]. For simplicity we adopt the same gauge conditions used there (to avoid performing a numerical coordinate transformation, which in general would involve interpolating functions in space and time). The metric used in [1] takes the form

\[
\begin{align*}
    ds^2 &= (-\alpha^2 + \gamma_{AB} \beta^A \beta^B) dt^2 + 2 \gamma_{AB} \beta^A dx^B dt \\
    &+ \gamma_{AB} dx^A dx^B + \gamma_{ij} d\Omega^2
\end{align*}
\]

where \(x^A = (r, z)\) and \(d\Omega^2\) is the unit two-sphere metric. Our goal is to extract intrinsic properties of the event horizon and its generators. The horizon can be described by a surface \(r = R(t, z)\). To extract the sought-after information, the first step is to find the geodesic generators of the horizon. To this end, we construct the vector \(\nu^a\) normal to the horizon defined as \(\nu^a = (\nu_r, \nu_z) = (-\dot{R}, 1, -\dot{R}')\). Here an overdot denotes differentiation with respect to \(t\) and a prime denotes differentiation with respect to \(z\). Since \(k^a\) is null, it is tangent to the generators of the horizon; these are given by

\[
\frac{dz}{dt} = \alpha^2 \left( \frac{\gamma^{rz} - \gamma^{zz} R'}{\beta^r + \dot{R}} \right)
\]

Note however that these geodesics are not affinely parameterized. To obtain the affinely parameterized geodesics one can exploit the fact that their tangent vectors \(l^a\) obey the simple relation \(l^a = e^{-\nu} k^a\) where \(\nu\) is defined by

\[
\frac{d\nu}{dt} = \frac{\alpha^2 h}{\beta^r + \dot{R}}
\]

and \(h\) is given by

\[
h = \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left( \gamma^{rr} + \gamma^{zz} (R')^2 - 2 \gamma^{rz} R' - \alpha^{-2} (\dot{R} + \beta^r)^2 \right)
\]

Thus, the affine parameter \(\lambda\) of these geodesics is found by integrating

\[
\frac{d\lambda}{dt} = \frac{\alpha^2 e^{-\nu}}{\beta^r + \dot{R}}.
\]

Next we turn our attention to obtaining the expansion and shear of these affinely parametrized generators. Since the spacetime is spherically symmetric, these quantities are given by just two components of \(\nabla_a l_b\): Let \(x^a\) be a unit vector in the two-sphere direction and let \(y^a\) be a unit vector orthogonal to \(k^a\) and to the two-sphere directions. Define the quantities \(A\) and \(B\) by

\[
\begin{align*}
    A &= 2 x^a y^b \nabla_a l_b \\
    B &= -y^a y^b \nabla_a l_b
\end{align*}
\]

which measure the distortion along spherical and longitudinal directions respectively. Then, the expansion and squared shear are given in terms of \(A\) and \(B\) by

\[
\begin{align*}
    \theta &= A - B \\
    \sigma_{ab} &= \frac{1}{6} (A + 2B)^2.
\end{align*}
\]

The equations above determine the affinely parametrized generators of the horizon and its expansion and shear. As we will see later, due to the exponential behavior of these quantities, it will turn out to be convenient to consider the logarithm of the affine parameter \(s = \ln \lambda\) and rescaled quantities defined as follows

\[
(\tilde{\theta}, \tilde{\sigma}_{ab}, \tilde{A}, \tilde{B}) = \frac{1}{\lambda}(\theta, \sigma_{ab}, A, B)
\]

It then follows that

\[
\begin{align*}
    \tilde{\theta} &= \tilde{A} - \tilde{B} \\
    \tilde{\sigma}_{ab} &= \frac{1}{6} (\tilde{A} + 2\tilde{B})^2 \\
    \frac{ds}{dt} &= \alpha^2 e^{-\nu} (\beta^a + \dot{R})
\end{align*}
\]

The quantity \(\tilde{A}\) is found by

\[
\tilde{A} = e^{(s-\nu)} k^a \nabla_a (\ln \gamma_{ij})
\]

To find \(\tilde{B}\) we note that there is freedom to add a multiple of \(k^a\) to \(y^a\) and use that freedom to make \(y^a\) vanish. It then follows that the components of \(y^a\) are

\[
y^a = \left[ \gamma^{zz} + 2 \gamma^{rz} R' + \gamma^{rr} (R')^2 \right]^{-1/2}
\]

and \(y^r = y^z R'\), from which

\[
\tilde{B} = e^{(s-\nu)} \left( y^r R'' + k_b \Gamma_{ab}^b y^a y^c \right)
\]

Finally, we point out the following observation which will be crucial in the numerical evaluations to be carried out later. As we have seen above, \(\theta\) and \(\sigma_{ab}\) (and their scaled counterparts) can be calculated independently. However they are related by Raychaudhuri’s equation, which for the five-dimensional vacuum null case is

\[
\frac{d\theta}{d\lambda} + \frac{1}{2} \theta^2 + \sigma_{ab} \sigma_{ab} = 0,
\]

while the corresponding equation for the rescaled quantities is

\[
\frac{d\tilde{\theta}}{ds} - \tilde{\theta} + \frac{1}{2} \tilde{\theta}^2 + \tilde{\sigma}_{ab} \tilde{\sigma}_{ab} = 0.
\]

III. RESULTS

The simulations performed in [1] provide a (partial) description of the spacetime describing a slightly perturbed black string that evolves to a state where the
black string is quite deformed as judged by the apparent horizon. The surface that we use here as the event horizon is the boundary of the causal past of the region exterior to the apparent horizon at the latest time in the simulation (calculated using a generalization of the technique described in [1]), and it turns out that this surface is very well approximated by the apparent horizon for the entire length of the simulation. We initialize the affine parameter to 1 (hence \( s = 0 \)) at the beginning of the simulation. Among all generators, the one of particular interest is the one corresponding to the minimum radius, since it is there where any pinch off would occur. Due to the reflection symmetry of the initial data, the set of points on the horizon that at each time correspond to the minimal radius form a geodesic generator, and that generator stays at constant \( z \).

Figure 1 shows plots of \( s \) as a function of the simulation time coordinate \( t \) for the generator of minimum radius, from simulations with three different resolutions (to give some measure of the error in the results). Note that \( s \) has reached 50 near the end of the simulation. This corresponds to an affine parameter of about \( 10^{21} \). Thus, though the simulation has only taken a moderate amount of simulation time, it has gone for an enormous amount of affine parameter.

Figure 2 shows plots of \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \) vs \( s \) for the generator of minimum radius. Note that due to the rescaling this means that by the end of the simulation, the unrescaled expansion \( \theta \) and shear \( \sigma_{ab} \) are of order \( 10^{-22} \). Note too, that though the behavior of \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \) as a function of \( s \) is quite dynamic throughout the simulation, since \( d/d\lambda = \lambda^{-1}d/ds \) it follows that viewed as functions of \( \lambda \) even the rescaled expansion and shear would be regarded as slowly varying.

We now turn to the behavior of the rescaled quantities \( \tilde{\theta} \) and \( \tilde{\sigma}_{ab} \). We can calculate the shear by simply evaluating (12) along the generator of minimum radius: Figure 3 shows the result of this as a function of \( s \) for the three simulations. In principle we can also calculate \( \tilde{\theta} \) in a similar manner using (11), which says \( \tilde{\theta} \) is the difference between \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \). However, the problem with this is that \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \) are very close to one another in magnitude, as can be seen from Figure 2 and so the difference will be dominated by numerical error. In fact, from the plot of \( \tilde{A} \) in Figure 2 and the assumed second order convergence of the numerical scheme, one can estimate that the error in \( \tilde{A} \) (and similarly for \( \tilde{B} \), is on the order of 5% at intermediate times (near the minimum of \( \tilde{A} \)) and grows to as much as 40% at late times. Therefore at late times the difference \( \tilde{A} - \tilde{B} \) will be completely swamped by numerical error.

In order to alleviate this problem, we use Raychaudhuri’s equation to integrate \( \tilde{\theta} \). However, in the form of (13) there is in general no stable direction of integration due to the linear and quadratic terms in \( \tilde{\theta} \); in other words, numerical errors in \( \tilde{\theta} \) could cause a blow-up integrating in either direction in \( s \). Therefore, we eliminate the \( \tilde{\theta}^2 \) term using (11), and \( \tilde{\sigma}^{\alpha\beta}\tilde{\sigma}_{\alpha\beta} \) using (12), though we keep the linear term in \( \tilde{\theta} \) to give

\[
\frac{d\tilde{\theta}}{ds} - \tilde{\theta} + \frac{1}{2}A^2 + \tilde{B}^2 = 0. \tag{19}
\]

In this form there is a stable direction of integration from large to small \( s \), and the only ‘sources’ in \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \) are quadratic and of the same sign, hence we are not as susceptible to numerical errors arising from the difference of similar numbers. One potential difficulty is in specifying initial conditions for the integration, which we need to do at the end of the simulation where \( \tilde{\theta} \) obtained from (11) has the largest error. Fortunately the integration seems to be fairly insensitive to the initial condition in \( \tilde{\theta} \), as illustrated in Figure 2 where we show the results of integration of (19) starting from both \( \tilde{\theta} \) calculated using (11), and \( \tilde{\theta} = 0 \) (which is within the numerical margin of error at late times).

**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

We have found the behavior of the horizon of a black string in terms of the affine parameter, expansion and shear of the generators. The most significant aspects of our results are the extremely large values of the affine parameter, and correspondingly the extremely small values of the (unrescaled) expansion and shear. In hindsight, this result is not too surprising as it is well known that for a Schwarzschild black hole there is an exponential relation between the Killing time coordinate and the affine parameter of the horizon generators. Since the straight
black string is just the Schwarzschild spacetime crossed with a circle, and since the spacetime treated here is initially just a small perturbation of the straight string, it appears natural that very large values of the affine parameter are reached. The immediate conclusion is that in some sense the logarithm of the affine parameter is a more natural “dynamical time” than the affine parameter.

What do our results say about the final fate of the unstable black string? They certainly do not yet resolve the issue. The same three possible alternatives are still there: the string can (i) evolve to a static wiggly string, (ii) pinch off in finite affine parameter or (iii) pinch off in infinite affine parameter. It is clear both from [1] and from our work that the simulation has not gone far enough to read off the asymptotic behavior of the string. For that, a more robust simulation is needed. However, our work does shed extra light on the status of the alternatives, in particular that of alternative (iii). Recall that in [8] it was correctly pointed out that alternative (iii) requires very small (unrescaled) expansion and shear and very slow dependence on affine parameter. Our results here show that precisely this is the sort of behavior that occurs, at least in some regime of the evolution of the black string. Moreover, this behavior is still in a regime of non-trivial dynamics.

In fact, one might argue that alternative (iii) is the most plausible for lower spherical dimensions of the spacetime if the only non-uniform static solutions are those found in [2]. This fact would make alternative (i) unlikely as these solutions are too massive for spacetimes with dimension lower than 13. Additionally, option (ii) requires a singularity forming outside the horizon, and no hints of such behavior developing were seen in the simulations of [1]. Note that under alternative (iii) one might still have different scenarios. For instance, the ‘minimal’ circle might continue to shrink slowly with the trend observed at the late stages of the simulations of [1]. This requires the neighborhood of the string not to be describable as a linearly perturbed uniform string since the ratio of length/area is above the critical length. On the other hand, if this is indeed the case, then the string may pinch off through a cascading sequence of instabilities on ever smaller scales, which again could happen in finite asymptotic time though infinite affine time.

In a more quantitative vein, we can consider the possible asymptotic behavior of the (rescaled) expansion and shear. Let \( p \) and \( c \) be positive constants. Then it is
FIG. 4: $\tilde{\theta}$ vs. $s$ for the horizon generator of minimum radius, calculated by integrating (19). For the integrations shown on the top figure, the initial value of $\tilde{\theta}$ (which is at the largest $s$, as we integrate from large to small $s$) is 0, while on the bottom figure the initial $\tilde{\theta}$ was calculated using (11). We show curves calculated using two different sets of initial conditions to demonstrate that the integration is fairly insensitive to the initial value of $\tilde{\theta}$; hence, expect near the end of the simulation, the error in the integrated $\tilde{\theta}$ is comparable to that of $\tilde{\sigma}_{ab}$ shown in Figure 3—specifically around 10% near the maxima for the highest resolution simulation, assuming second order convergence.

consistent with equation (18) for both $\tilde{\theta}$ and $\tilde{\sigma}_{ab}$ to asymptotically approach $c^2s^{-2p}$. This would result from both $\tilde{A}$ and $\tilde{B}$ approaching $-cs^{-p}$ asymptotically, but their difference approaching $c^2s^{-2p}$. That this sort of behavior is possible was recognized in [8] but there it was thought that such behavior was somehow unnaturally slow and indicative of an approximately static solution. If $p \leq 1$ then this behavior results in pinch off in infinite affine parameter. If in addition, $p > 1/2$ then this pinch off occurs with finite $\int \theta ds$ as assumed in [8].

If such a power law is the asymptotic behavior of the unstable black string, then the simulations have not yet run for long enough to be sufficiently far into the asymptotic regime to try to calculate the exponents. Nonetheless, in Figures [8] and [9] the quantities $\tilde{\sigma}_{ab}$ and $\tilde{\sigma}_{ab}$ peak and then decrease. This decrease may be the beginning of a power law tail to be found in an improved black string simulation.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Rob Myers, Eric Poisson, Gary Horowitz, Toby Wiseman, Donald Marolf and Jorge Pullin for helpful discussions. We are especially grateful to Matt Choptuik, Inaki Olabarrieta, Roman Petryk and Hugo Villegas who, together with LL and FP, were involved in the project [11] that produced the data used here. Also, the authors would like to thank the Perimeter Institute for hospitality and to acknowledge discussions with the participants of the “New Horizons” workshop at the Perimeter Institute (April 2004) during which this project began. Research at the Perimeter Institute is supported in part by funds from NSERC of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. Additionally, DG and FP would like to thank the Horace Hearne Laboratory for Theoretical Physics for hospitality.

The original simulations that produced the numerical solutions analyzed in this paper were performed on (i) the vn.physics.ubc.ca cluster which was funded by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the BC Knowledge Development Fund; (ii) LosLobos at Albuquerque High Performance Computing Center; (iii) The high-performance computing facilities within LSU’s Center for Computation and Technology, which is funded through Louisiana legislative appropriations, and (iv) The MACI cluster at the University of Calgary, which is funded by the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge and Manitoba, and by C3.ca, the Netera Alliance, CANARIE, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, and the CFI.

This work was supported in part by grants from NSF: PHY-0244699 to Louisiana State University, and NSF PHY-0009568, NSF PHY-0244906 to Caltech. Additional funding came from Caltech’s Richard Chase Tolman Fund, NSERC and a Research Innovation Award of Research Corporation to LSU. L.L. is an Alfred P. Sloan Fellow.

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