

Conformal Collider Bounds for Interacting CFTs

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Work in Progress with Clay Córdova

Bootstrap 2026

August 4, 2026

Averaged null energy operator

- Averaged null energy (ANEC) operator:

$$\mathcal{E} \sim \int dx^+ T_{++} \quad ds^2 = -dx^+ dx^- + d\vec{x}_\perp^2$$

- Measures energy distribution at infinity in a “conformal collider”

- ANEC: $\mathcal{E} \geq 0$

[Hartman, Kundu, Tajdini '16]

[Faulkner, Leigh, Parrikar, Wang '16]

- OPE coefficients bounds (λ_{TTT} [Hofman, Maldacena '08], $\lambda_{TT\phi}$ [Córdova, Maldacena, Turiaci '17])

- Scaling dimension bounds [Córdova, Diab '17; Manenti, Stergiou, Vichi '19]

- Constraining RG flow (light-ray sum rule $\Rightarrow$ a -theorem/ c -theorem) [Hartman, Mathys '23, '24]

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This talk: generalization of this

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Conformal collider bound in 3d

- 3d CFT:

$$\langle TTT \rangle = n_B \langle TTT \rangle_B + n_F \langle TTT \rangle_F + n_{\text{odd}} \langle TTT \rangle_{\text{odd}}$$

Ward identity: $n_B + n_F = c_T / c_B$

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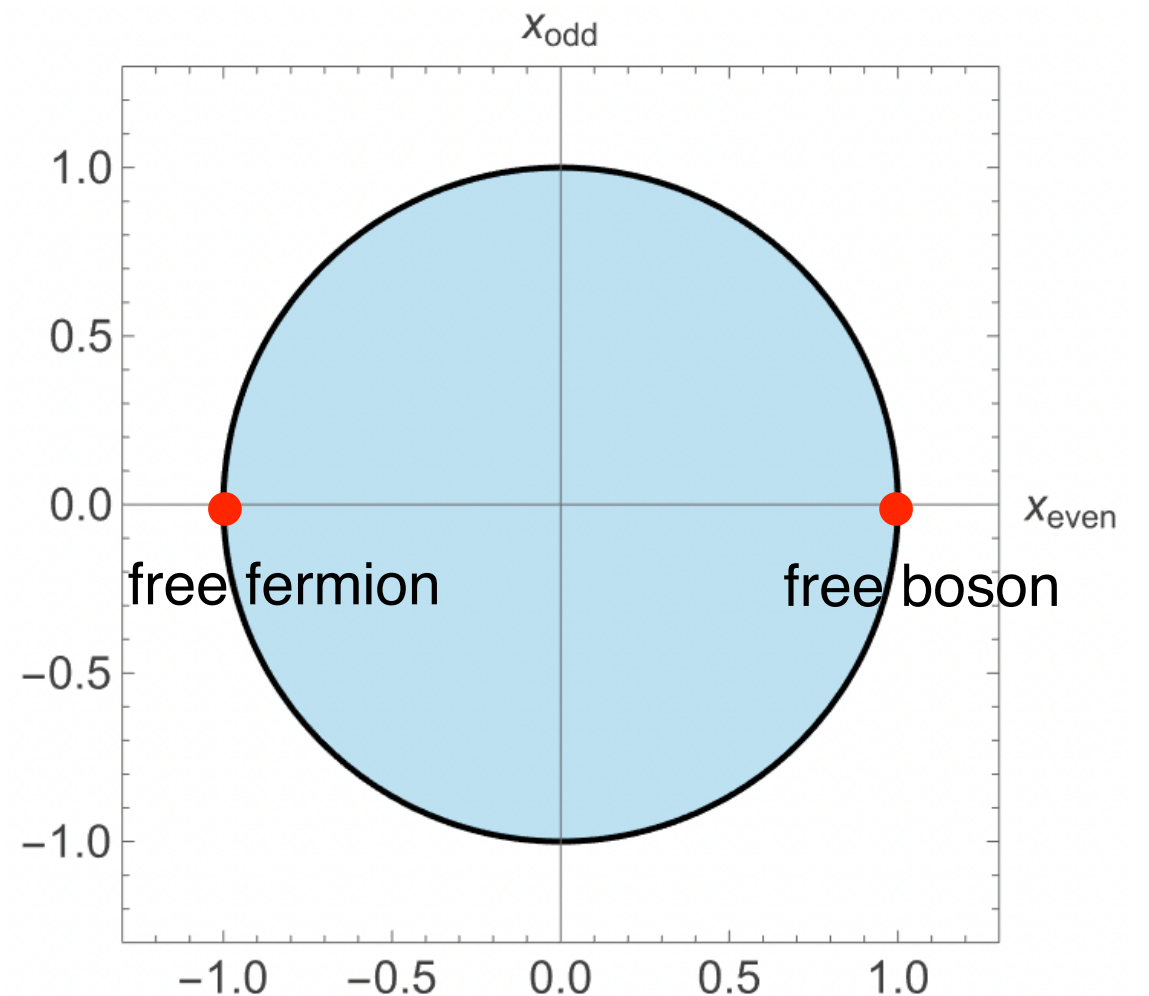
Ward identity: $n_B + n_F = c_T / c_B$

$$\langle T | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle \geq 0$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} n_B & n_{\text{odd}} \\ n_{\text{odd}} & n_F \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

$$x_{\text{even}} \equiv \frac{n_B - n_F}{c_T / c_B} \quad x_{\text{odd}} \equiv \frac{2n_{\text{odd}}}{c_T / c_B}$$

$$x_{\text{even}}^2 + x_{\text{odd}}^2 \leq 1$$



Conformal collider bound in 4d

- 4d CFT:

$$\langle TTT \rangle = n_B \langle TTT \rangle_B + n_F \langle TTT \rangle_F + n_V \langle TTT \rangle_V$$

Ward identity: $\frac{n_B + 6n_F + 12n_V}{120} = c \propto c_T$

$$\langle T | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle \geq 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad n_B \geq 0, \quad n_F \geq 0, \quad n_V \geq 0$$

$$\Rightarrow \quad \frac{1}{3} \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq \frac{31}{18}$$

Saturation of conformal collider bounds

- These bounds are all saturated by free theories:

$d = 3$: [\[Maldacena, Zhiboedov '12\]](#) [\[Chowdhury, David, Prakash '17\]](#)

$$n_B \sim \frac{\tilde{\lambda}^2}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} \quad n_F \sim \frac{1}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} \quad n_{\text{odd}} \sim \frac{\tilde{\lambda}}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2}$$

(can be realized as large N Chern-Simons matter theories)

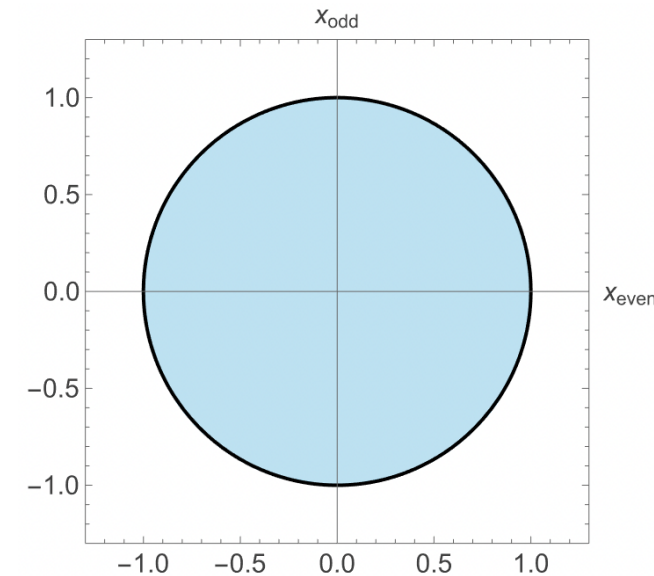
$\tilde{\lambda} \rightarrow \infty$: free boson $\tilde{\lambda} \rightarrow 0$: free fermion

$d = 4$: [\[Zhiboedov '13\]](#)

$$\frac{1}{3} \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq \frac{31}{18}$$

$\downarrow$ $\downarrow$

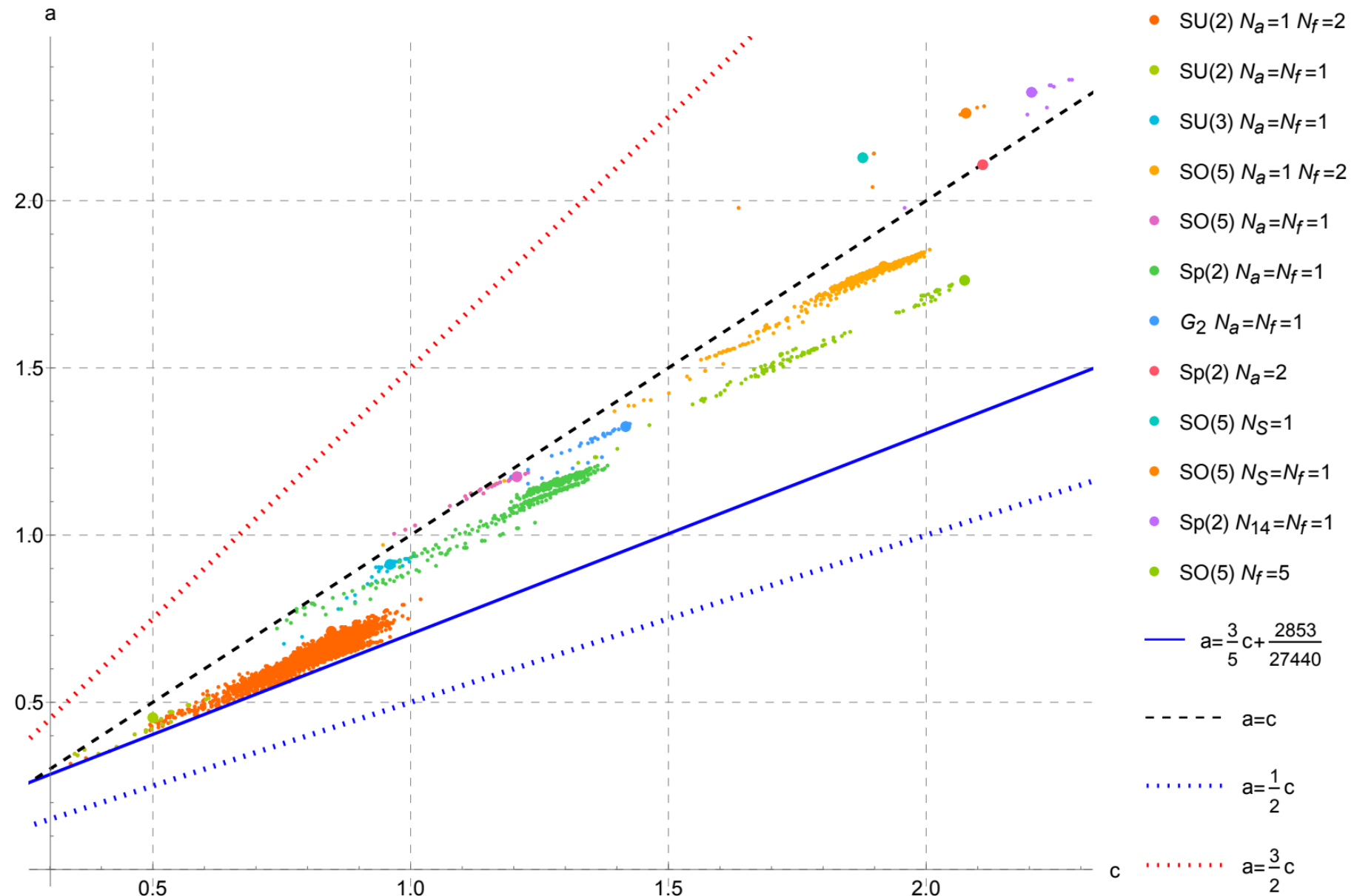
free scalar free vector



- Can one get stronger bounds for interacting CFTs?

a/c for 4d N=1 SCFTs

- Values of a and c for a large set of 4d N=1 SCFTs: [Cho, Maruyoshi, Nardoni, Song '24]



$$0.72 \lesssim \frac{a}{c} \lesssim 1.21$$

$$\mathcal{N} = 1 \text{ bound: } \frac{1}{2} \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq \frac{3}{2}$$

Higher-spin ANEC

- Consider the leading spin-4 operator O_4 . We will try using its twist τ_4 as a proxy for the interaction:

[Komargodski, Zhiboedov '12]

[Fitzpatrick, Kaplan, Poland, Simmons-Duffin '12]

$$d - 2 \leq \tau_4 \leq 2(d - 2) \rightarrow [TT] \text{ double-twist}$$

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- Spin-4 ANEC:

$$\mathcal{E}_4 \sim \int dx^+ \mathcal{O}_{4++++} \geq 0$$

[Hartman, Kundu, Tajdini '16]

[Kravchuk, Simmons-Duffin '18]

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- Can we replace e.g., the upper and lower bounds of a/c with functions of τ_4 ?

$$\frac{1}{3} \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq \frac{31}{18} \quad \Rightarrow \quad f_-(\tau_4) \stackrel{?}{\leq} \frac{a}{c} \stackrel{?}{\leq} f_+(\tau_4)$$

Setup

- Idea: impose ANEC and spin-4 ANEC in a mixed system of T and O_4 .

$$\begin{pmatrix} \langle T | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle T | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle & \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

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— $\lambda_{TT\mathcal{O}_4}$
— $\lambda_{\mathcal{O}_4 T \mathcal{O}_4}$

$$\begin{pmatrix} \boxed{\langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle} & \boxed{\langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle} \\ \boxed{\langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle} & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

Ward identity:

$$\sum_i c_i \lambda_{\mathcal{O}_4 T \mathcal{O}_4}^{(i)} \sim \Delta_4$$

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$$\begin{pmatrix} \boxed{\langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle} & \boxed{\langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle} \\ \boxed{\langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle} & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

Ward identity:

$$\sum_i c_i \lambda_{\mathcal{O}_4 T \mathcal{O}_4}^{(i)} \sim \Delta_4$$

$$\langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle = x_{4B} \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle_B + x_{4F} \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle_F + x_{4V} \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle_V \quad (d = 4)$$

$$x_{4B} \geq 0, \quad x_{4F} \geq 0, \quad x_{4V} \geq 0$$

Setup

$$\begin{pmatrix} \langle T|\mathcal{E}|T\rangle & \langle T|\mathcal{E}|\mathcal{O}_4\rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4|\mathcal{E}|T\rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4|\mathcal{E}|\mathcal{O}_4\rangle \end{pmatrix} \quad \begin{pmatrix} \langle T|\mathcal{E}_4|T\rangle & \langle T|\mathcal{E}_4|\mathcal{O}_4\rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4|\mathcal{E}_4|T\rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4|\mathcal{E}_4|\mathcal{O}_4\rangle \end{pmatrix}$$

[Meltzer '18]

$$\begin{aligned} n_B = 0 \Rightarrow \quad & x_{4B} = 0 \ \& \ \tau_4 = d - 2 \\ & \text{or} \\ & x_{4B} = x_{4F} = x_{4V} = 0 \end{aligned}$$

- Can't get stronger bound without extra conditions on λ_{TTO_4} .

Setup

$$\begin{pmatrix} \langle T | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle T | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \quad \begin{pmatrix} \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle & \langle T | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | T \rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E}_4 | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix}$$

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$$n_B = 0 \Rightarrow \begin{matrix} x_{4B} = 0 \ \& \ \tau_4 = d - 2 \\ \text{or} \\ x_{4B} = x_{4F} = x_{4V} = 0 \end{matrix}$$

- Can't get stronger bound without extra conditions on $\lambda_{T\mathcal{TO}_4}$.
- Our result:

~~$$f_-(\tau_4) \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq f_+(\tau_4)$$~~

$$f_-(\tau_4, \lambda_{T\mathcal{TO}_4}) \leq \frac{a}{c} \leq f_+(\tau_4, \lambda_{T\mathcal{TO}_4})$$

Computing positive matrices

- The positive matrices can be computed by starting with e.g., $\langle O(x_1)T(x_2)O(x_3) \rangle$, and then perform

- Null integral (light transform) $\int dx^+$

[Kologlu, Kravchuk, Simmons-Duffin, Zhiboedov '19]

[Mecaj, Mault, Walters, Xin '25]

- Fourier transform $\int d^d x e^{ip \cdot x} \Rightarrow \langle \mathcal{O}(p) \mathcal{E}(\infty, z) \mathcal{O}(p) \rangle$

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Stabilized by $SO(2)$!

- Gelfand-Tsetlin basis: each basis vector is associated with an $SO(2)$ irrep

[Gelfand, Tsetlin '50] [Kravchuk '17]

$$\mathcal{O} = \mathcal{O}_4 : \text{Res}_{SO(2)}^{SO(3,1)} \boxed{} \boxed{} \boxed{} \boxed{} = \bigoplus_{m=-4}^4 (5 - |m|) \mathbf{1}_m \Rightarrow M_m \quad m = 0, \dots, 4$$

$\searrow$
 $(5 - m) \times (5 - m)$

ANEC as an SDP

- Formulate the problem as an SDP:

$$d = 4 : \quad M_m^{(\mathcal{E})} \succeq 0 \quad M_m^{(\mathcal{E}_4)} \succeq 0 \quad m = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$$

$$\left(M_m^{(\mathcal{E})}\right)_{ij} = c_{ij} + \vec{v}_{ij} \cdot \vec{\lambda},$$

$$\vec{\lambda} = \left(\frac{n_B}{c_T}, \frac{n_F}{c_T}, \frac{x_{4B}}{\sqrt{c_T}}, \frac{x_{4F}}{\sqrt{c_T}}, \frac{x_{4V}}{\sqrt{c_T}}, \vec{\lambda}_{\mathcal{O}_4 T \mathcal{O}_4}, \vec{\lambda}_{\mathcal{O}_4 \mathcal{O}_4 \mathcal{O}_4}\right)$$

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- optimize a/c with some additional conditions on $\lambda_{T\mathcal{O}_4}$:

$$\text{e.g., } (x_{4B}, x_{4F}, x_{4V}) = (x_{4B}^*, x_{4F}^*, x_{4V}^*)$$

$$x_{4B} + x_{4F} + x_{4V} \geq x_4^*$$

- Our bounds are not sensitive to C_T :

$$M_{c_T, \lambda_{TTT}, \lambda_{TT\mathcal{O}_4}}^{(\mathcal{E})} = U_{c_T}^T M_{1, \frac{\lambda_{TTT}}{c_T}, \frac{\lambda_{TT\mathcal{O}_4}}{\sqrt{c_T}}}^{(\mathcal{E})} U_{c_T}$$

CFT with slightly broken higher-spin symmetry

- With some choice of the polarization, sometimes one can get analytic bounds:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \langle T | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle T | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \\ \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | T \rangle & \langle \mathcal{O}_4 | \mathcal{E} | \mathcal{O}_4 \rangle \end{pmatrix} \rightarrow \text{choose polarization such that all } \lambda_{\mathcal{O}_4 T \mathcal{O}_4} \text{ vanish}$$

$$\rightarrow \begin{pmatrix} \frac{1+x_{\text{even}}}{2} & \frac{ix_{\text{odd}}}{2} & f_1(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4B} + f_2(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4F} + \frac{i\tilde{x}_{4\text{odd}}}{2} \\ -\frac{ix_{\text{odd}}}{2} & \frac{1-x_{\text{even}}}{2} & f_2(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4B} + f_1(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4F} - \frac{i\tilde{x}_{4\text{odd}}}{2} \\ f_1(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4B} + f_2(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4F} - \frac{i\tilde{x}_{4\text{odd}}}{2} & f_2(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4B} + f_1(\tau_4)\tilde{x}_{4F} + \frac{i\tilde{x}_{4\text{odd}}}{2} & \frac{\Gamma(7+\tau_4)^2}{630(7+\tau_4)\Gamma(6+2\tau_4)} \end{pmatrix} \succeq 0$$

(similar bound in 4d)

CFT with slightly broken higher-spin symmetry

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(similar bound in 4d)

- Application: constraining 1/N corrections for CFTs with slightly broken higher spin symmetry

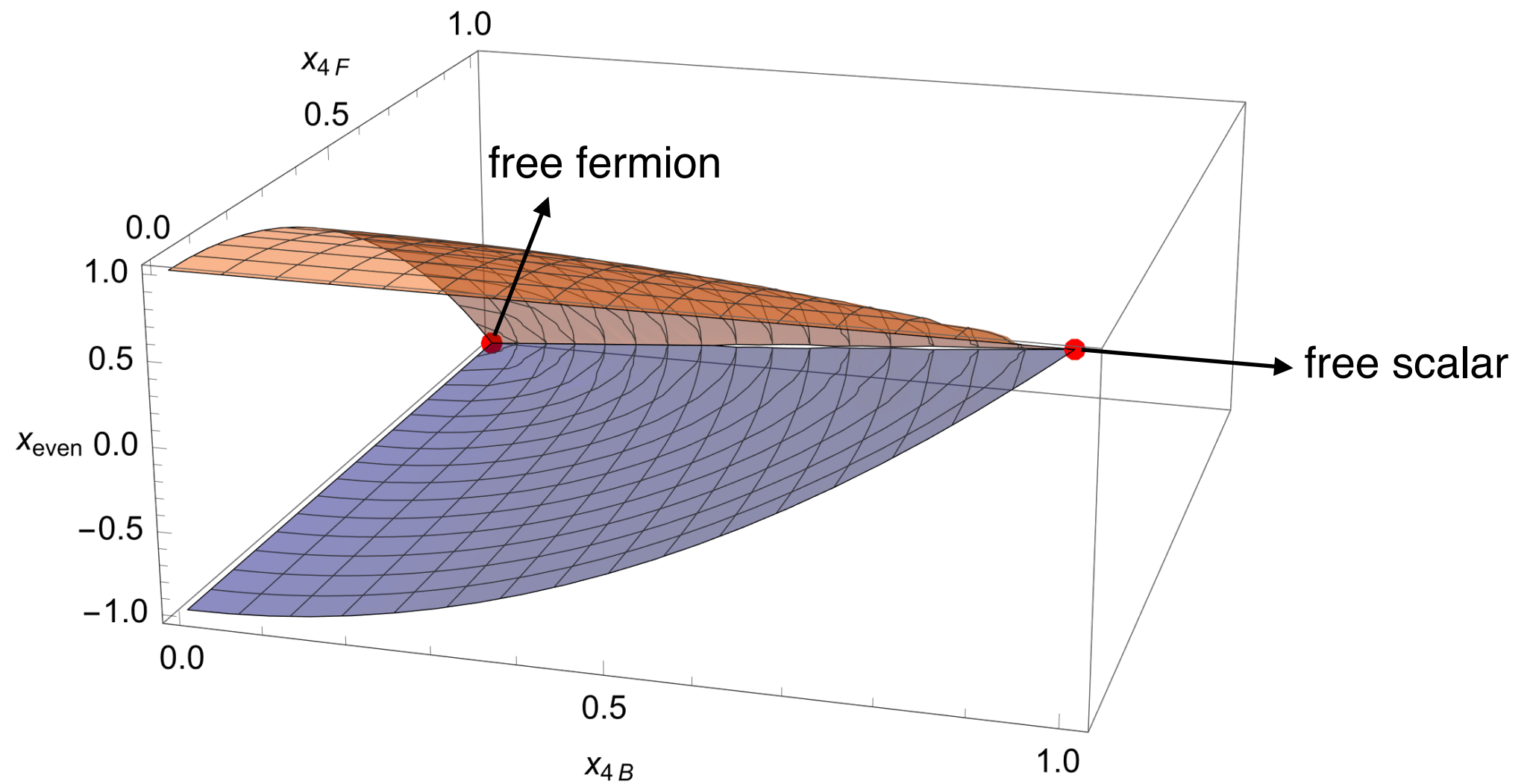
$$x_{\text{even}} = \frac{\tilde{\lambda}^2 - 1}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2}, \quad x_{\text{odd}} = \frac{2\tilde{\lambda}}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} + \alpha_{\text{odd}}\gamma_4, \quad \tau_4 - 1 = \gamma_4 \ll 1$$

$$\tilde{x}_{4B} = \frac{\tilde{\lambda}^2}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} + \alpha_{4B}\gamma_4, \quad \tilde{x}_{4F} = \frac{1}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} + \alpha_{4F}\gamma_4, \quad \tilde{x}_{4\text{odd}} = \frac{2\tilde{\lambda}}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} + \alpha_{4\text{odd}}\gamma_4.$$

$$\alpha_{4\text{odd}}\tilde{\lambda} \leq -\frac{6}{7}\frac{\tilde{\lambda}^2}{1 + \tilde{\lambda}^2} \quad \alpha_{\text{odd}}\tilde{\lambda} \leq 0, \quad \alpha_{4B} \leq -\frac{\alpha_{4\text{odd}}}{2\tilde{\lambda}} - \frac{3}{7}, \quad \alpha_{4F} \leq -\frac{\alpha_{4\text{odd}}\tilde{\lambda}}{2} - \frac{3}{7},$$

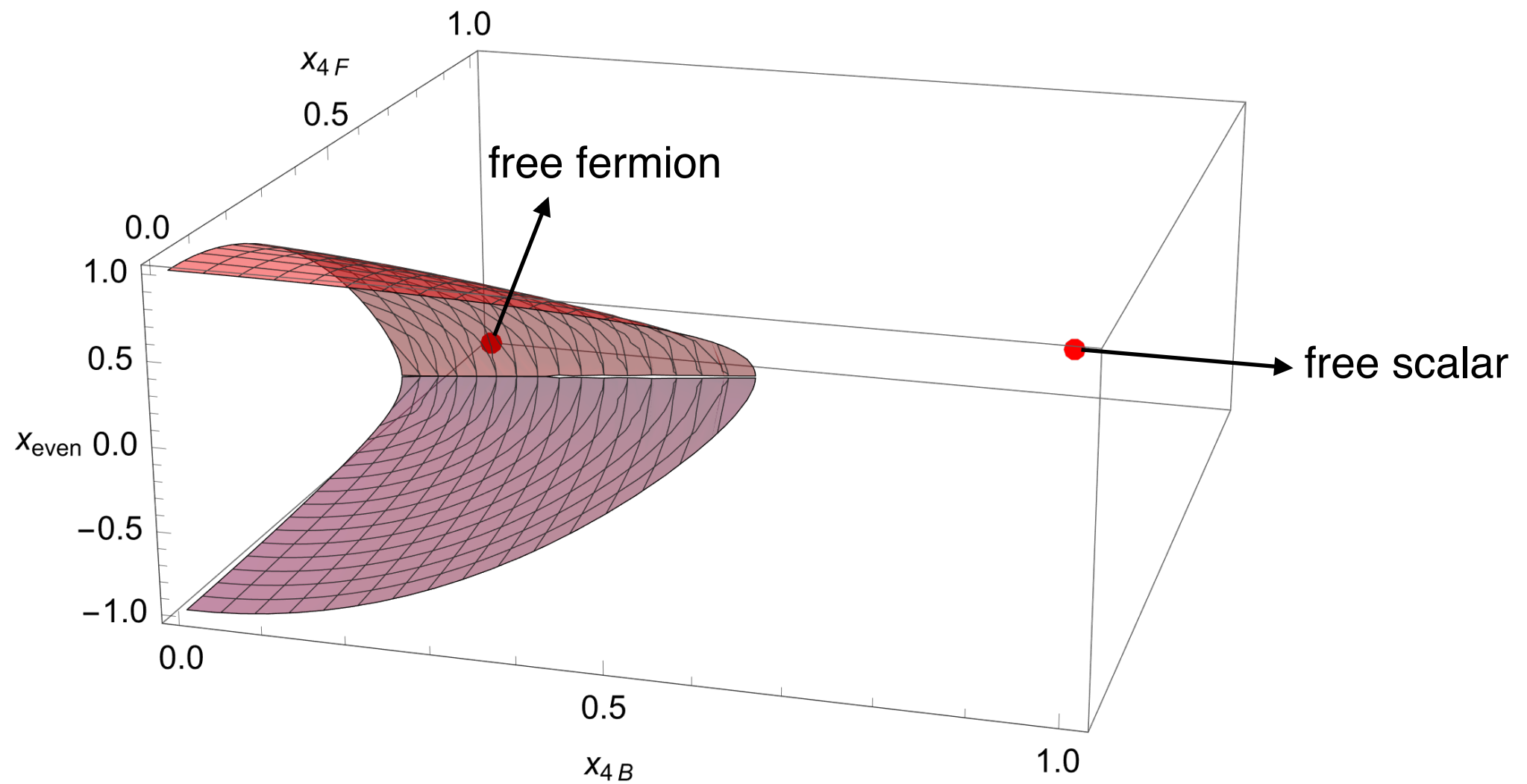
Bounds for parity-preserving 3d CFTs

$$\tau_4 = 1$$



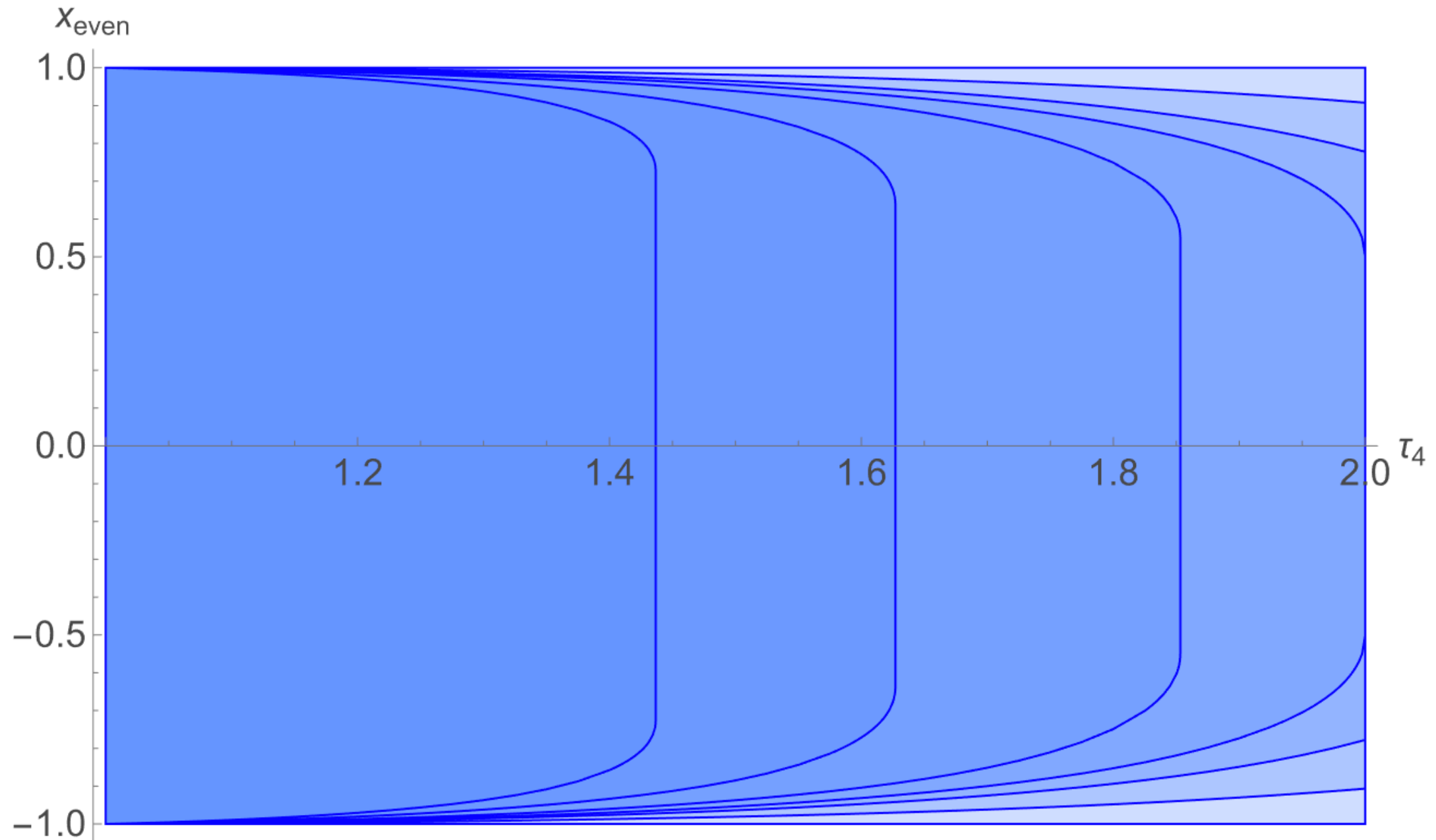
Bounds for parity-preserving 3d CFTs

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Bounds for parity-preserving 3d CFTs

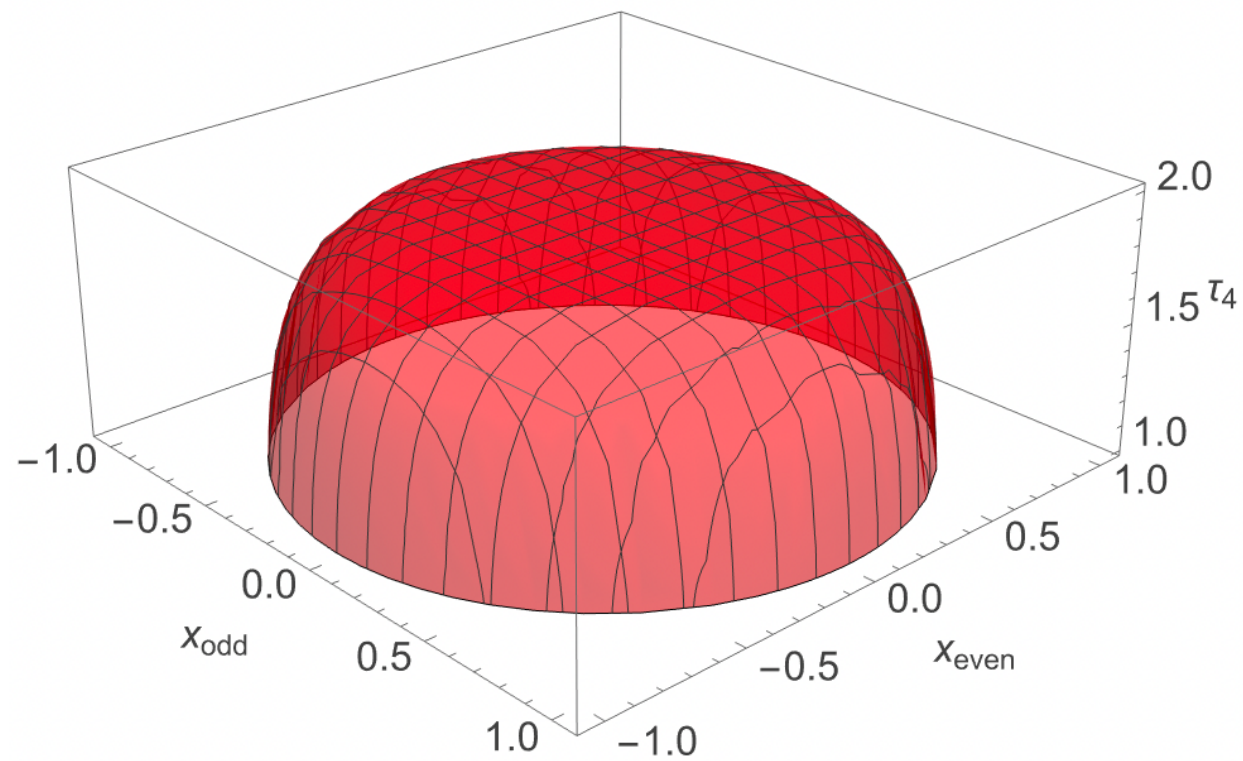
$$x_{4B} + x_{4F} \geq x_{4\text{gap}}$$



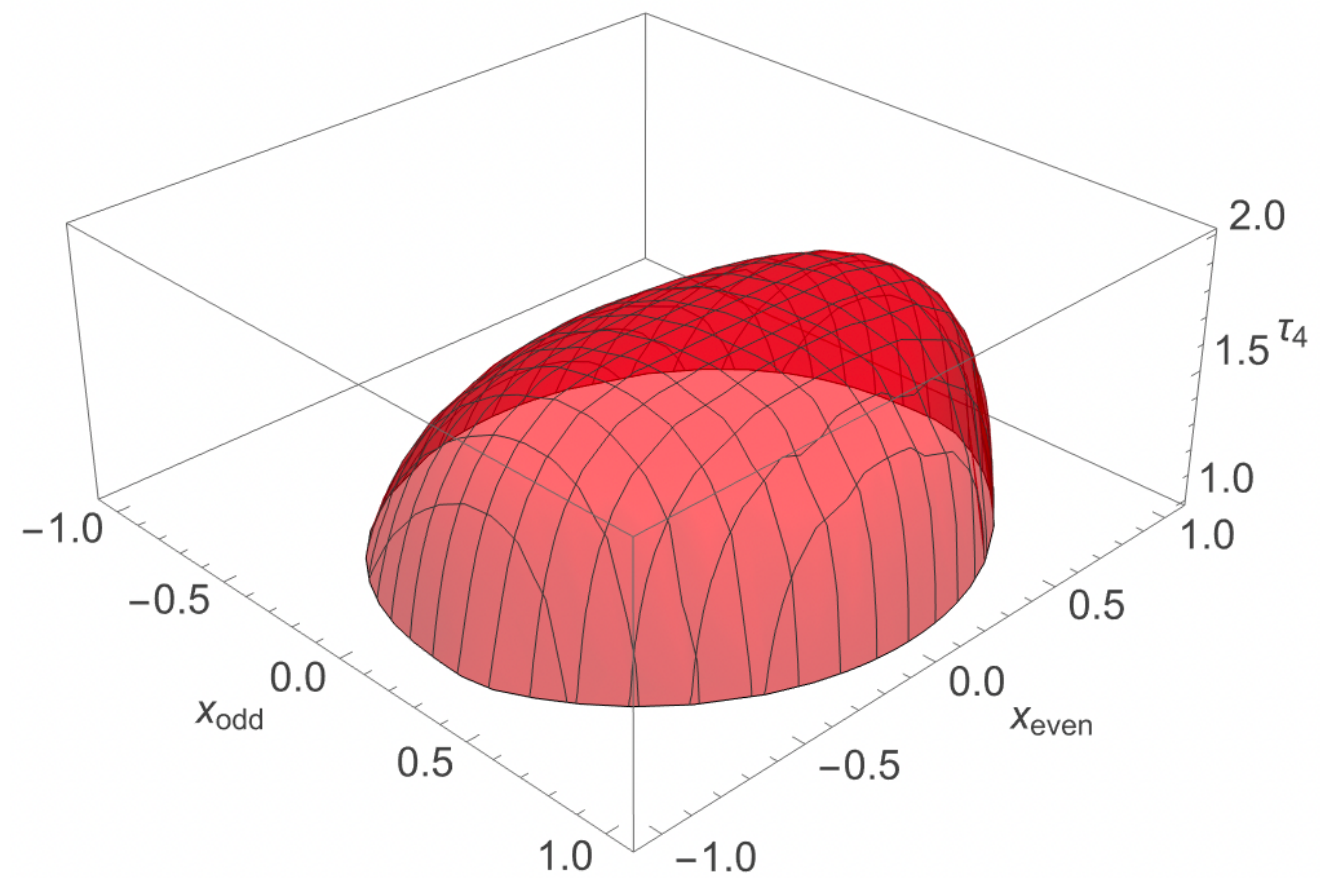
$$x_{4\text{gap}} = 0, 0.3, 0.4, 0.44, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7$$

Bounds for 3d CFTs

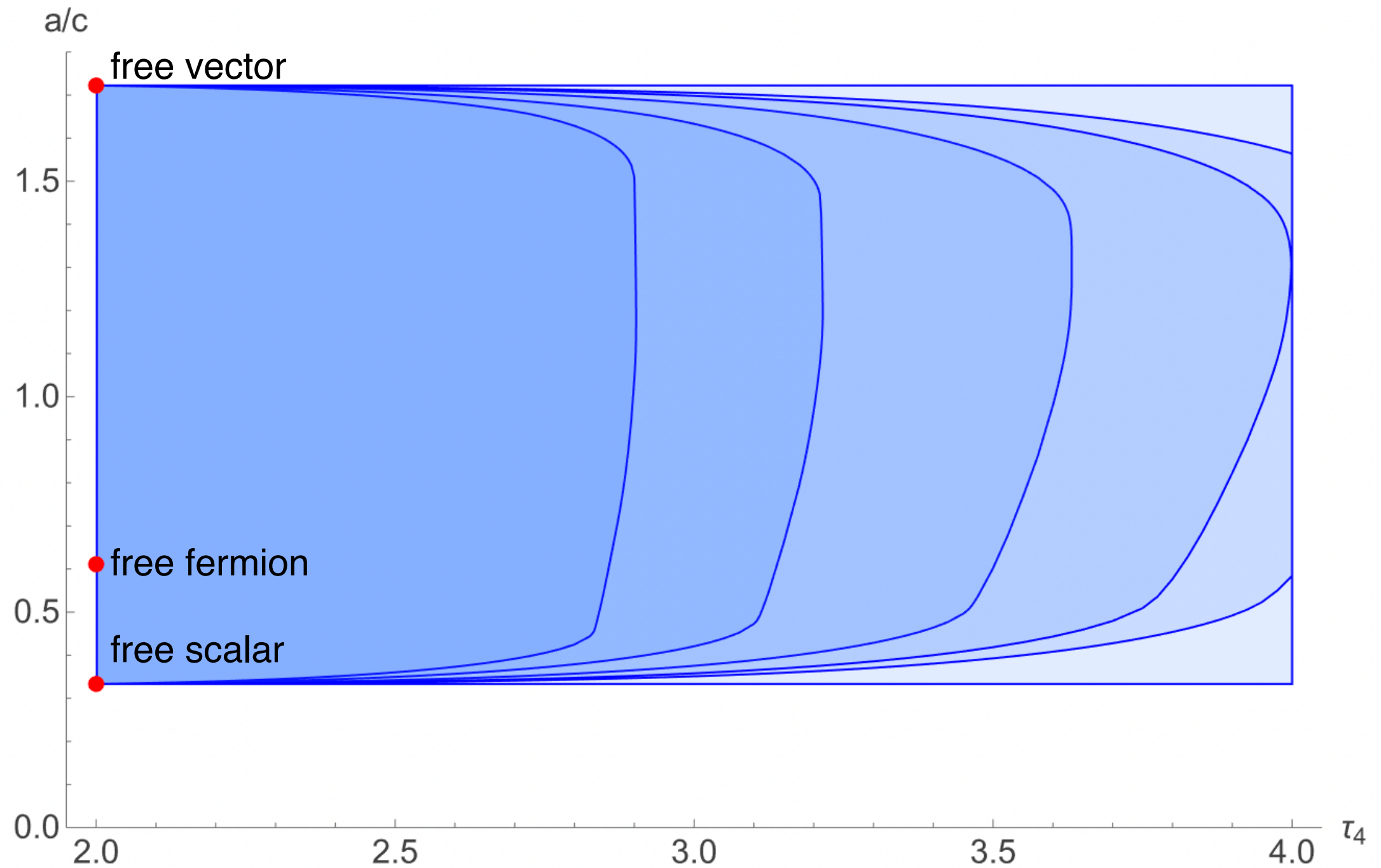
$$x_{4B} + x_{4F} \geq 0.5$$



$$x_{4B} + x_{4F} \geq 0.5, \quad x_{4\text{odd}} \geq 0.35$$



Bounds for 4d CFTs

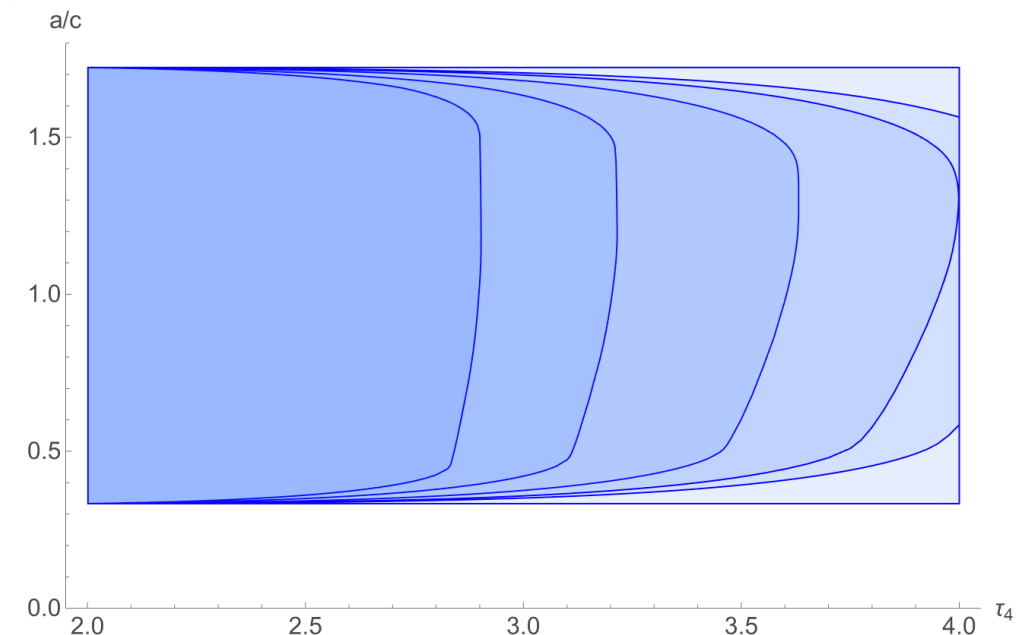


$$x_{4\text{gap}} = 0, 0.2, 0.234, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5$$

Summary and outlook

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- Impose ANEC and spin-4 ANEC in states created by a linear combination of T and O_4 .
- Stronger bounds on λ_{TTT} as functions of τ_4 and λ_{TTO_4}



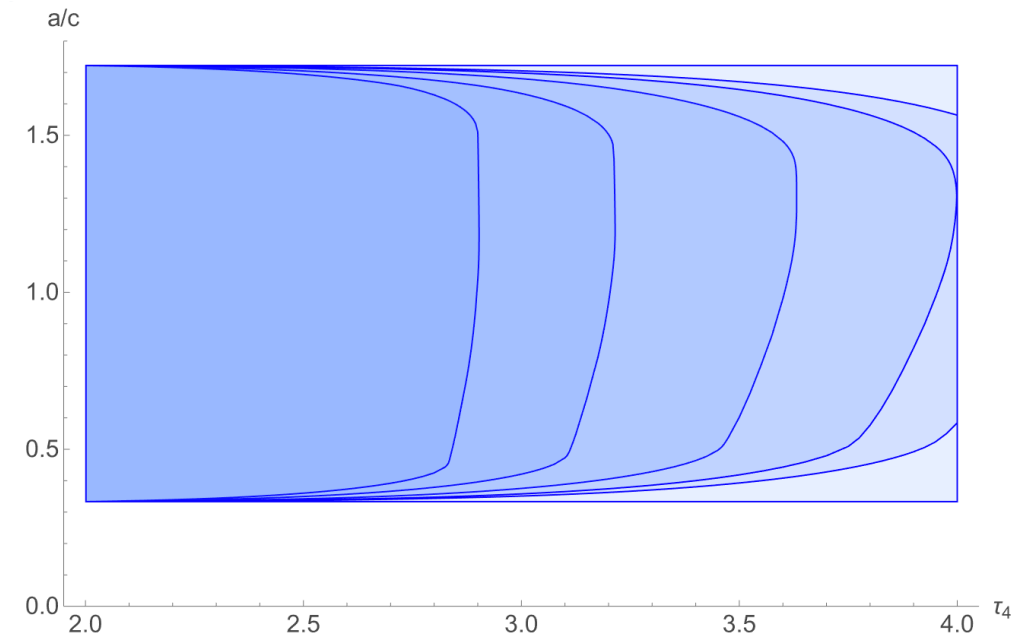
Outlook:

- Compare with 4-pt stress tensor bootstrap in 3d (replace x_{4gap} with Δ'_4 ?); Also in 4d?
- Constraints from higher-point functions of ANEC and higher-spin ANEC in stress tensor state (c_T dependence)
- Continuous-spin ANEC?

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Thank you!