

Research Statement

My research interests are in computations in equivariant stable homotopy theory. The study of homotopy theory originates in algebraic topology, with the investigation of homotopy invariants such as (co)homology groups or homotopy groups. By passing from topological spaces to spectra, one can further study *stable* invariants, and in the presence of a group action, one can study *equivariant* invariants as well. Equivariant stable homotopy theory has proven widely useful in recent years, with applications in showing the non-existence of elements of Kervaire invariant one [HHR16]; in computing algebraic K-theory and variants [NS17] [BMS19]; and in studying chromatic homotopy theory, derived algebraic geometry, and representation theory.

In my research, I apply the computational methods of homotopy theory to answer questions about the **modular representation theory** of finite groups G over a field k of characteristic p , where p divides the order of G . One particular problem of interest is in computing the **group of endo-trivial modules** - the kG -modules M such that the endomorphism module decomposes as $\text{End}_k(M) \cong k \oplus P$, where k is the trivial kG -module, and P is a projective kG -module. Endo-trivial modules are ubiquitous in representation theory, for example in understanding simple modules for p -solvable groups, or in studying Morita or derived equivalences in block theory.

Modular representation theory was revolutionized by a focus on an invariant denoted $\text{StMod}(kG)$, the **stable module category of G** . Notably, $\text{StMod}(kG)$ has a homotopy-theoretic interpretation as a stable symmetric-monoidal ∞ -category. Correspondingly, the group of endo-trivial modules is interpreted as the **Picard group** $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$, which consists of objects in $\text{StMod}(kG)$ that are invertible with respect to the tensor product. Picard groups are an interesting and tractable invariant, and were studied in stable homotopy theory first by Hopkins [HMS92]. In chromatic homotopy theory, the study of Picard groups is a deep and active field of research [HS99], [KS04], [GHMR12], [HMS17].

$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$ was originally computed by work of Carlson-Thévenaz [CT05], using group cohomology and the theory of support varieties. However, in joint work with van de Meer, I provide new, homotopical proofs for their results for cyclic p -groups and (generalized) quaternion groups using the descent ideas and techniques of Mathew-Stojanoska [MS16]. Rather than study the Picard group $\text{Pic}(\mathcal{C})$, I instead study the **Picard space** $\mathcal{P}ic(\mathcal{C})$, which recovers $\text{Pic}(\mathcal{C}) \cong \pi_0(\mathcal{P}ic(\mathcal{C}))$. Moreover, I show that **Galois descent** holds for these groups, which allows me to use tools from equivariant stable homotopy theory, namely the **homotopy fixed point spectral sequence** (HFPS), to calculate $\pi_*(\mathcal{P}ic(\text{StMod}(kG)))$. This gives a new proof of the following theorems:

Theorem (van de Meer-W., cf Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00]). *Let p be any prime, and let $n \geq 2$.*

$$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kC_{p^n})) \cong \mathbb{Z}/2$$

Theorem (van de Meer-W., cf Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00]). *Let $p = 2$, and let ω denote a cube root of unity.*

$$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ_8)) \cong \begin{cases} \mathbb{Z}/4 & \text{if } \omega \notin k \\ \mathbb{Z}/4 \oplus \mathbb{Z}/2 & \text{if } \omega \in k \end{cases}$$

Theorem (van de Meer-W., cf Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00]). *Let $p = 2$, and let $n \geq 4$.*

$$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ_{2^n})) \cong \mathbb{Z}/4 \oplus \mathbb{Z}/2$$

Notably, these proofs exploit the homotopical structure of $\text{StMod}(kG)$ in a novel way to compute the Picard group *a priori*, without first constructing endo-trivial modules. Moreover, it directly shows how $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$ is determined by the group cohomology $H^*(G; k)$, and it provides a conceptual explanation for why the cube root of unity ω is significant in the case $G \cong Q_8$. Finally, this computation is a special case of a broadly useful technique: there is a homotopy limit decomposition $\text{StMod}(kG) \simeq \text{holim}_{G/H \in \mathcal{O}_{\mathcal{A}}(G)^{op}} \text{StMod}(kH)$ [Mat16], which reduces the difficult problem of understanding $\text{StMod}(kG)$ to understanding how simpler categories $\text{StMod}(kH)$ assemble together.

In future work, I propose to extend my computations in two directions. First, I believe my methods will allow me to compute $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$ for other classes of groups, namely extraspecial and almost-extraspecial p -groups. This result would involve understanding *descent with respect to elementary abelian subgroups*, which would be of independent interest. Moreover, this would be a major advance in the homotopical approach to computing endo-trivial modules for general finite groups G , as the proof of Carlson-Thévenaz [CT05] reduces to these special classes of groups. Second, I propose to use these descent methods to compute the currently unknown Picard groups for variants of $\text{StMod}(kG)$ coming from tensor-triangular geometry [Bal10] [BIK08b]. This would produce new and interesting objects in modular representation theory.

Background

Picard Groups

Let $(\mathcal{C}, \otimes, \mathbf{1})$ be a symmetric monoidal category. The **Picard group** of \mathcal{C} is the group of isomorphism classes of objects $x \in \mathcal{C}$ such that x is invertible with respect to the symmetric monoidal product \otimes in \mathcal{C} . That is, there exists an object $y \in \mathcal{C}$ such that $x \otimes y \simeq \mathbf{1}$. For example, if R is a PID, then $(\text{Mod}(R), \otimes, R)$ is a symmetric monoidal category with $\text{Pic}(\text{Mod}(R))$ trivial. A more interesting example is the category of spectra $(\text{Sp}, \wedge, \mathbb{S})$, which has $\text{Pic}(\text{Sp}) \cong \mathbb{Z}$. Equivalently, any invertible spectrum is equivalent to a suspension of the sphere spectrum \mathbb{S} .

We are most interested in Picard groups in homotopy theory, so let $(\mathcal{C}, \otimes, \mathbf{1})$ be a symmetric monoidal ∞ -category. The **Picard space** $\text{Pic}(\mathcal{C})$ is the ∞ -groupoid of invertible objects in \mathcal{C} and equivalences between them. For example, if R is a commutative ring spectrum (in the sense of brave new algebra), then $(\text{Mod}(R), \otimes, R)$ is a stable symmetric monoidal ∞ -category. The homotopy groups of $\text{Pic}(R)$ are well-understood:

$$\pi_*(\text{Pic}(R)) \cong \begin{cases} \text{Pic}(R) & * = 0 \\ (\pi_0(R))^\times & * = 1 \\ \pi_{*-1}(GL_1(R)) \cong \pi_{*-1}(R) & * \geq 2 \end{cases}$$

The Picard space generalizes the construction of the Picard group, and it is easier to compute, as it commutes with limits and filtered colimits [MS16]. In particular, it is compatible with descent methods.

Galois Descent and the Stable Module Category

For a finite group G and a field k of characteristic $p > 0$, where p divides the order of G , one can form the stable module category $\text{StMod}(kG)$ as the localization of the category of kG -modules with respect to the module homomorphisms that factor through projective kG -modules. This is a stable symmetric-monoidal ∞ -category, and so $\text{StMod}(kG)$ can be characterized as the category of modules over a "ring spectrum with several objects" [SS03]. If G is a p -group, then $\text{StMod}(kG)$ has a single compact generator, and so there is an equivalence of symmetric monoidal ∞ -categories

Richard Wong • Department of Mathematics, UT Austin

✉ rwongmath@gmail.com

🌐 ma.utexas.edu/users/richard.wong

[SS03] [Mat15b]

$$\text{StMod}(kG) \cong \text{Mod}(k^{tG})$$

where k^{tG} is a commutative ring spectrum called the Tate construction of G . Observe that k^{tG} is related to group cohomology $H^*(G; k)$ through a variant known as **Tate cohomology**: $\widehat{H}^*(G; k) \cong \pi_{-*}(k^{tG})$.

This gives insight to how one might use Galois descent [MS16] [GL16]. In stable homotopy theory, the program of *brave new algebra* seeks to generalize notions in ring theory to ring *spectra*. In particular, a map $f : R \rightarrow S$ of commutative ring spectra is called a G -**Galois extension** [Rog08] if there is an action of G on S such that the natural maps $i : R \rightarrow S^{hG}$ and $h : S \otimes_R S \rightarrow F(G_+, S)$ are weak equivalences. A Galois extension is **faithful** if S is faithful as an R -module. That is, if M is an R -module such that $S \otimes_R M$ is contractible, then M is contractible. Given a faithful Galois extension $f : R \rightarrow S$, we have Galois descent for $\text{Mod}(R)$. That is, there is an equivalence of ∞ -categories $\text{Mod}(R) \cong \text{Mod}(S)^{hG}$ [MS16]. As a corollary, there is an equivalence of spaces

$$\text{Pic}(R) \cong \tau_{\geq 0}(\text{Pic}(S)^{hG})$$

Therefore, in the setting of Galois descent, one can use the HFPSS to compute Picard groups.

Current Research

Quaternion Groups

One might hope that for a normal subgroup $K \trianglelefteq G$, the induced map of ring spectra $k^{tG} \rightarrow k^{tK}$ is a faithful G/K -Galois extension. In work with van de Meer, I show that this holds for $G = Q_{2^n}$ (generalized) quaternion, with normal subgroup the center $H \cong \mathbb{Z}/2$. This allows us to use Galois descent to compute $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ))$. We also use these techniques for $G = C_{p^n}$ a cyclic p -group.

In general, to show that a G -Galois extension $R \rightarrow S$ is faithful, it is equivalent to show that the Tate construction S^{tG} is contractible [Rog08]. Therefore, one can use the **Tate spectral sequence** to compute the homotopy groups of the Tate construction S^{tG} and deduce whether or not a particular Galois extension is faithful. In the case of quaternion groups, we have:

Proposition 1.1 (van de Meer-W.). *Let Q be a quaternion group, with center $H \cong \mathbb{Z}/2$. Then $k^{tQ} \rightarrow k^{tH}$ is a faithful Q/H -Galois extension.*

As a consequence, we obtain the homotopy fixed point spectral sequence:

$$H^s(Q/H; \pi_t(\text{Pic}(k^{tH}))) \Rightarrow \pi_{t-s}(\text{Pic}(k^{tH})^{hQ/H})$$

which converges to $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ))$ for $t - s = 0$. Since we understand $\pi_*(\text{Pic}(k^{t\mathbb{Z}/2}))$, we know most of the relevant differentials in this spectral sequence. The main difficulty is in computing the differentials originating from the $t - s = 0$ column. An analysis of these differentials shows that the kernel depends precisely on the existence of the cube root of unity ω in the $G \cong Q_8$ case.

Theorem 1.2 (van de Meer-W., cf Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00]). *Let ω denote a cube root of unity.*

$$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ_8)) \cong \begin{cases} \mathbb{Z}/4 & \text{if } \omega \notin k \\ \mathbb{Z}/4 \oplus \mathbb{Z}/2 & \text{if } \omega \in k \end{cases}$$

Theorem 1.3 (van de Meer-W., cf Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00]). *Let $n \geq 4$.*

$$\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kQ_{2^n})) \cong \mathbb{Z}/4 \oplus \mathbb{Z}/2$$

Richard Wong • Department of Mathematics, UT Austin

✉ rwongmath@gmail.com 🌐 ma.utexas.edu/users/richard.wong

Directions for Future Research

I propose three directions for future research. The first is to extend these computations to different classes of groups, and to study the more general Dade group of endo-permutation modules. The second is to study Picard groups for interesting variants of $\text{StMod}(kG)$. In particular, the work of Benson-Iyengar-Krause [BIK08a] [BIK08b] computed the thick and localizing tensor-ideal subcategories of $\text{StMod}(kG)$. In analogy to the computations of Picard groups in chromatic homotopy theory, one expects that the Picard groups of these subcategories to have deep representation-theoretic content. Finally, the third direction is to apply my computational techniques to other areas in (equivariant) stable homotopy theory.

Generalizations

I propose two major ways to generalize these computations:

1. I propose to extend my computations to other classes of groups using descent with respect to families of elementary abelian subgroups of G [MNN15]. In general, one has a descendable object $\mathcal{A} \in \text{Mod}(k^tG)$ [CT00] [Mat16] with the associated **descent spectral sequence**. Furthermore, we have a homotopy limit decomposition

$$\text{StMod}(kG) \simeq \text{holim}_{G/H \in \mathcal{O}_{\mathcal{A}}(G)^{op}} \text{StMod}(kH)$$

where $\mathcal{O}_{\mathcal{A}}(G)^{op}$ is determined by the family of elementary abelian subgroups of G . This is a generalization of Galois descent, where the descendable object is $k^{tH} \in \text{Mod}(k^tG)$, we have an equivalence $\text{StMod}(kG) \simeq (\text{StMod}(kH))^{hG/H}$, and the associated descent spectral sequence is exactly the HFPSS.

- (a) I propose to compute $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$ for $G = D_{2^n}$ and $G = SD_{2^n}$, the dihedral and semi-dihedral groups. I have work in progress with van de Meer in understanding $\mathcal{O}_{\mathcal{A}}(G)^{op}$ for these families. Furthermore, the work of Carlson-Thévenaz [CT00] showed that for G semi-dihedral, there are torsion elements in the Picard group. Just as in the quaternion case, I expect the homotopy-theoretic approach to provide insight into these torsion elements.

I further propose to compute the Picard groups for extraspecial and almost-extraspecial p -groups. The subgroup structure of these groups is well understood, and so I expect good control over $\mathcal{O}_{\mathcal{A}}(G)^{op}$ and descent. This would be a major advancement in a purely homotopical approach to the computation of Picard groups for arbitrary p -groups, as the classical work of Carlson-Thévenaz [CT05] reduces to these special cases.

- (b) The cyclic groups and generalized quaternion groups are the only p -groups with periodic cohomology. The non- p -groups with periodic cohomology have been classified by work of Suzuki-Zassenhaus. I propose to calculate the Picard groups for these finite groups with periodic cohomology using descent with respect to elementary abelian subgroups.

2. In modular representation theory, for P a p -group, one is interested also in the **Dade group** $D(P)$, that is, the group of **endo-permutation modules** - the kP -modules M where $\text{End}_k(M) \cong k \oplus kY$, where Y is a P -set [Dad78]. These endo-permutation modules are crucial in representation theory as sources of simple modules for p -solvable groups, and in understanding Morita or derived equivalences. Note that endo-trivial modules are endo-permutation modules, so the study of $D(P)$ is closely related to the study of $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kP))$ [CT00].

I propose to categorify the Dade group, by constructing a Dade *space* and studying it via descent methods. The Dade group can be understood in terms of Bouc functors [BT00], which are closely

Richard Wong • Department of Mathematics, UT Austin

✉ rwongmath@gmail.com 🌐 ma.utexas.edu/users/richard.wong

related to Mackey functors in equivariant stable homotopy theory. The Dade group can also be defined in terms of Dade algebras, which are split central simple algebras with a P -invariant basis and at least one P -fixed point. Therefore, the study of Dade groups is also closely related to the study of Brauer groups.

Brauer groups have been similarly categorified into Brauer spaces, and have been studied via descent methods [BRS12] [AG14] [GL16]. Computing the Brauer group of $\text{StMod}(kP)$ is also an interesting open problem, and my prior computations of $\text{Pic}(\text{StMod}(kG))$ should provide some insight into the Brauer group of $\text{StMod}(kG)$.

■ Picard Groups of Thick Subcategories

The ideas of nilpotence and descent are intimately related to the study of stable symmetric monoidal ∞ -categories. For example, the Nilpotence theorem [DHS88] classified the thick tensor-ideal subcategories of the category of compact spectra Sp^{fin} . These subcategories are precisely detected by the Morava K-theories $K(n, p)$, and are thus intimately related to chromatic homotopy theory.

For an arbitrary stable symmetric monoidal ∞ -category \mathcal{C} , one studies **tensor-triangular geometry** [Bal10]. That is, the classification of thick tensor-ideal subcategories \mathcal{X} of the compact objects in \mathcal{C} . \mathcal{X} is said to be **tensor-ideal** if $X \otimes Y \in \mathcal{X}$ implies either $X \in \mathcal{X}$ or $Y \in \mathcal{X}$. A full subcategory $\mathcal{X} \subset \mathcal{C}$ is **thick** if \mathcal{X} is closed under finite limits and colimits, and also closed under retracts. One can also study the localizing tensor-ideal subcategories of \mathcal{C} , where a **localizing** subcategory is a thick subcategory that is closed under arbitrary colimits.

Much like in algebraic geometry, these thick tensor-ideal subcategories can be assembled with an interesting topology, known as the **Balmer spectrum**. Much work has been done for the derived category [NB92], modules over ring spectra [Mat15a] and equivariant stable homotopy theory [BS17], [BHN⁺19]. In particular, work of Benson-Iyengar-Krause [BIK08b] classified the thick (tensor-ideal) subcategories for the stable module category $\text{StMod}(kG)$, which is determined by group cohomology $H^*(G; k)$. Specifically, they correspond to specialization-closed subsets of the variety $\text{Proj}(H^*(G; k))$.

I propose to study these thick (tensor-ideal) subcategories of $\text{StMod}(kG)$ by computing their Picard groups. The simplest non-trivial case is where $k = \mathbb{F}_2$ and $G = \mathbb{Z}/2 \times \mathbb{Z}/2$. Here, the thick (tensor-ideal) subcategories correspond to homogenous prime ideals of $H^*((\mathbb{Z}/2)^2; \mathbb{F}_2) \cong \mathbb{F}_2[x_1, x_2]$. The associated (co)localization functors have nice properties, and are given explicitly by work of Benson-Iyengar-Krause [BIK08b]. I currently have work in progress understanding these functors in terms of $\text{Mod}(k^{t(\mathbb{Z}/2)^2})$, using the local cohomology spectral sequence [BHV18]. I expect that using descent methods will prove effective in computing these local Picard groups.

■ Further Computations

The prior two proposed directions above are natural extensions of my research. However, the methods and computational tools that I propose to use, namely the ideas of nilpotence and descent, as well as the HFPSS, the Tate spectral sequence, and the descent spectral sequence, are broadly applicable to a number of problems in (equivariant) stable homotopy theory, such as trace methods in algebraic K -theory [BHM93] [NS17] [BMS19], or in chromatic homotopy theory via the action of the Morava stabilizer group [GH04] [GHMR12] [BGH17] [BG18]. Therefore, my research interests are compatible with faculty in areas related or adjacent to stable homotopy theory.

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Richard Wong • Department of Mathematics, UT Austin

✉ rwongmath@gmail.com 🌐 ma.utexas.edu/users/richard.wong

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