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**Kevin Lamb\***, 3601 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95211, and **Patrick Weed**. *A Distance for Circular Heegaard Splittings.*

For a knot  $K \subset S^3$ , its exterior  $E(K) = S^3 \setminus \eta(K)$  has a singular foliation by Seifert surfaces of  $K$  derived from a circle-valued Morse function  $f: E(K) \rightarrow S^1$ . When  $f$  is self-indexing and has no critical points of index 0 or 3, the regular levels that separate the index-1 and index-2 critical points decompose  $E(K)$  into a pair of compression bodies. We call such a decomposition a *circular Heegaard splitting* of  $E(K)$ . We define the notion of *circular distance* (similar to Hempel distance) for this class of Heegaard splitting and show that it can be bounded under certain circumstances. Specifically, if the circular distance of a circular Heegaard splitting is too large: (1)  $E(K)$  can't contain low-genus incompressible surfaces, and (2) a minimal-genus Seifert surface for  $K$  is unique up to isotopy.

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