Clifford structures and spinor bundles

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Abstract

It is shown that every bundle $\Sigma \to M$ of complex, irreducible and faithful modules over the Clifford bundle of an even-dimensional Riemannian space $(M, g)$ with local model $(V, h)$ is associated with a cpin ("Clifford") structure on $M$, this being an extension of the $\text{SO}(h)$-bundle of orthonormal frames on $M$ to the Clifford group $\text{Cpin}(h) = (\mathbb{C}^\times \times \text{Spin}(h))/\mathbb{Z}_2$. An explicit construction is given of the total space of the $\text{Cpin}(h)$-bundle defining such a structure. A canonical line bundle on a cpin manifold, associated with the spinor norm homomorphism, is identified with a subbundle of $\text{Hom}(\Sigma, \Sigma^*)$. The cpin structure restricts to a spin structure if this line bundle is trivial.

1 Introduction

Spinor fields on Riemannian manifolds can be introduced in at least two ways. Let $(V, h)$ be the local model of a Riemannian manifold $(M, g)$. If such a manifold has a spin structure ("if $M$ is spin"),

$$
\begin{align*}
\text{Spin}(h) & \to Q_h \\
& \downarrow \text{Ad} \\
\text{SO}(h) & \to P \\
& \text{Ad} \\
& \equiv M,
\end{align*}
$$

then given a spinor representation of $\text{Spin}(h)$ in a vector space $S$, one defines spinor fields as sections of the associated vector bundle $(Q_h \times S)/\text{Spin}(h) \to M$. Another definition [1] focuses on the vector bundle itself: it assumes the existence of a bundle $\Sigma \to M$ of modules over the bundle $\text{Cl}(g)$ of Clifford algebras on $M$. The latter definition is more general in the sense that the fibres of $\Sigma$ need not be isomorphic to a spinor space, carrying an irreducible representation of the Clifford algebra; for example, one can take for $\Sigma$ the bundle $\Lambda T^*M$ of exterior algebras. One easily sees that a bundle associated by a spinor representation with a spin structure is a bundle of modules over $\text{Cl}(g)$ (see, e.g., Prop. 3.8 in [2]), but the converse is not true, even if $\text{Cl}(g_x) \to \text{End} \Sigma_x$ is the spinor representation for every $x \in M$ (Example 2 in Section 4 of this paper).

In this paper, we compare in some detail these two definitions and show that a bundle $\Sigma$ of irreducible modules over $\text{Cl}(g)$ is associated with a cpin structure on $M$, this being an extension

$$
\begin{align*}
\text{Cpin}(h) & \to Q \\
& \downarrow \text{Ad} \\
\text{SO}(h) & \to P \\
& \equiv M.
\end{align*}
$$

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of the $SO(h)$-bundle of orthonormal frames $P$ to the (special) Clifford group $[3]$

$$\text{Cpin}(h) = (\mathbb{C}^* \times \text{Spin}(h))/\mathbb{Z}_2.$$

In particular, if $(M, g)$ is proper Riemannian, then the form $h$ is definite and
\[\text{Spin}^C(h) = (U_1 \times \text{Spin}(h))/\mathbb{Z}_2\] is the maximal compact subgroup of $\text{Cpin}(h)$: in this case every irreducible module over $\text{Cl}(g)$ is associated with a spin$^C$-structure on $M$; cf. Appendix D in $[2]$.

## 2 Notation and preliminaries

We use a notation and terminology which are largely standard in differential geometry and spinor analysis $[2, 4]$. If $S$ and $S'$ are finite-dimensional complex vector spaces, then $\text{Hom}(S, S')$ is the vector space of all complex-linear maps of $S$ into $S'$ and $\text{End} S = \text{Hom}(S, S)$ is an algebra over $\mathbb{C}$. We write $S^* = \text{Hom}(S, \mathbb{C})$; if $f \in \text{Hom}(S, S')$, then $f^* \in \text{Hom}(S', S^*)$ is defined by $\langle s, f^*(t') \rangle$ for every $s \in S$ and $t' \in S'^*$. A similar notation is used for real vector spaces.

A quadratic space is defined as a pair $(V, h)$, where $V$ is a real vector space of dimension $m$ and $h : V \to \mathbb{R}$ is a positive-definite quadratic form. We denote by $\bar{h}$ the symmetric linear isomorphism of $V$ onto $V^*$, associated with $h$. The real Clifford algebra $\text{Cl}(h)$ corresponding to $(V, h)$ contains $\mathbb{R} \oplus V$ as a vector subspace and $v^2 = h(v)$ for every $v \in V$. The isometry $v \mapsto -v$ extends to an involution $\alpha$ of the algebra defining its $\mathbb{Z}_2$-grading: $\text{Cl}(h) = \text{Cl}^0(h) \oplus \text{Cl}^1(h)$.

All manifolds and their maps are assumed to be smooth. If $\pi : E \to M$ is a fibre bundle over a manifold $M$, then $E_x = \pi^{-1}(x) \subset E$ is the fibre over $x \in M$; in particular, $T_x M \subset TM$ is the tangent vector space to $M$ at $x$.

## 3 Spin spaces and the Clifford group

For simplicity, we restrict ourselves in this paper to even-dimensional spaces and proper Riemannian manifolds. It is not difficult to generalize our considerations to odd-dimensional spaces and to pseudo-Riemannian manifolds. If the dimension $m$ of $V$ is even, $m = 2n$, then $\text{Cl}(h)$ is central simple and has one, up to complex equivalence, spinor representation in a complex, $2n$-dimensional vector space $S$ (of spinors).

We define a spin space to be a triple $(S, V, h)$, where $S$ is a complex vector space of dimension $2^n$ and $h : V \to \mathbb{R}$ is a positive-definite quadratic form on the real, $2n$-dimensional vector subspace $V$ of $\text{End} S$ such that, for every $v \in V$, one has $v^2 = h(v) \text{id}_S$. Given a spin space $(S, V, h)$, one can identify $\text{Cl}(h)$ with the subalgebra of $\text{End} S$ generated over the reals, by $V \subset \text{End} S$. Over the complex numbers, the subspace $V$ generates $\mathbb{C} \otimes \text{Cl}(h) = \text{End} S$; declaring the elements of $V$ to be odd, one obtains a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-grading of the latter algebra, $\text{End} S = \text{End}^0 S \oplus \text{End}^1 S$. An isomorphism of spin spaces $(S, V, h)$ and $(S', V', h')$ is defined as an isomorphism $\ell : S \to S'$ of complex vector spaces such that $\ell V \ell^{-1} = V'$.

**Proposition 1** To every isometry $i$ of $(V, h)$ onto $(V', h')$ there corresponds a complex line

$$L(i) = \{\ell \in \text{Hom}(S, S') \mid i(v) \ell = \ell v \text{ for every } v \in V\}.$$ 

Its non-zero elements are isomorphisms of $(S, V, h)$ onto $(S', V', h')$.

**Proof:** Indeed, the isometry $i$ extends to an isomorphism of algebras, $\text{Cl}(h) \to \text{Cl}(h')$ and thus yields a faithful and irreducible representation of $\text{Cl}(h)$ in $S'$; every isomorphism $\ell$ intertwining the representations of $\text{Cl}(h)$ in $S$ and $S'$ belongs to $L(i)$. If $\ell, \ell' \in L(i)$ and $\ell \neq 0$, then $\ell^{-1} \ell'$ is in the commutant of $V \subset \text{End} S$; therefore, it is a multiple of the identity.

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The (special) Clifford group\(^1\) \(\text{Cpin}(h)\) is defined here as the group of all even automorphisms of the spin space \((S.V; h)\).

\[
\text{Cpin}(h) = \{ a \in \text{End}^0 S \mid a \text{ is invertible and } aV a^{-1} = V \} \subset \mathbb{C} \otimes \text{Cl}^0(h).
\]

The spin group \(\text{Spin}(h)\) is the subgroup of \(\text{Cpin}(h)\) consisting of the Clifford products of elements of all sequences of an even number of unit vectors; \(\text{Spin}(h) \subset \text{Cl}^0(h)\). Let \(\mathbb{C}^\times = \mathbb{C} \setminus \{0\}\) be the multiplicative group of complex numbers. There is a surjective homomorphism of groups, \(\mathbb{C}^\times \times \text{Spin}(h) \to \text{Cpin}(h)\), given by \((\mu, a) \mapsto \mu a\); since its kernel is isomorphic to \(\mathbb{Z}_2\), one has the isomorphism (3).

The adjoint representation of the Clifford group in \(V\) gives rise to the exact sequence

\[
1 \to \mathbb{C}^\times \to \text{Cpin}(h) \xrightarrow{\Delta} \text{SO}(h) \to 1.
\]

4 Clifford structures, bundles and modules

Consider now an oriented \(2n\)-dimensional manifold \(M\) with a metric tensor field \(g\), having an oriented quadratic space \((V; h)\) as a local model; the quadratic spaces \((T_x M, g_x)\) and \((V; h)\) are isometric for every \(x \in M\). One defines the \(\text{SO}(h)\)-bundle \(P \to M\) of orthonormal frames of coherent orientation on \(M\) by putting

\[
P = \{ p : V \to T_x M \mid p \text{ is an orientation preserving isometry, } x \in M \}.
\]

A “Clifford” or cpin structure on \(M\) is given by the maps (2) where \(\pi \circ \chi : Q \to M\) is a \(\text{Cpin}(h)\)-bundle and \(\chi(q) = \chi(q) \circ \text{Ad}(a)\) holds for every \(q \in Q\) and \(a \in \text{Cpin}(h)\). Since \(\text{Spin}(h)\) is a subgroup of \(\text{Cpin}(h)\), if \(M\) has a spin structure, then it has a cpin structure, but not conversely: there are spin\(^\mathbb{C}\)-manifolds that are not spin. If \((M, g)\) is almost Hermitean, i.e. if it has an orthogonal almost complex structure, then it has a spin\(^\mathbb{C}\) structure and, therefore, a cpin structure.

With every Riemannian manifold \((M, g)\) there is associated the Clifford bundle \(\text{Cl}(g) \to M\). Its total space is defined as

\[
\text{Cl}(g) = \bigcup_{x \in M} \text{Cl}(g_x)
\]

with a natural manifold structure. A bundle of Clifford modules over \(\text{Cl}(g)\) is a vector bundle \(\Sigma \to M\) together with a Clifford morphism defined here as a linear injective bundle map

\[
f : TM \to \text{End} \Sigma
\]

having the Clifford property: for every \(v \in T_x M\) one has \(f(v)^2 = g_x(v) \text{id}_\Sigma\) \[2, 6\]. We identify \(TM\) with its image in \(\text{End} \Sigma\). It follows from the universality of Clifford algebras that \(f\) extends to a “representation morphism”, i.e. to a bundle map \(F : \text{Cl}(g) \to \text{End} \Sigma\) such that \(F_x \overset{\text{def}}{=} F|\text{Cl}(g_x)\) is a representation

\[
(4) \quad F_x : \text{Cl}(g_x) \to \text{End} \Sigma_x
\]

for every \(x \in M\). In other words, the vector space \(\Sigma_x\) is a left module over the algebra \(\text{Cl}(g_x)\). The following examples are well-known:

Example 1. The bundle of exterior algebras on \(M\). Put \(\Sigma = \wedge T^* M\) and define \(f\) by \(f(v)\sigma = v_x \sigma + g_x(v) \wedge \sigma\) for \(v \in T_x M\) and \(\sigma \in \Sigma_x\).

Example 2. Let \((M, g)\) be an almost Hermitean space and let \(J\) be the associated orthogonal almost complex structure. Define \(N = \{ n \in \mathbb{C} \otimes TM \mid J(n) = \sqrt{-1} n \}\)

\(^1\)This name was introduced by Chevalley [3]. R. Lipschitz was the first to consider groups associated with Clifford algebras; see [5] and the references given there.
and put $\Sigma = \wedge N$. The map $f$ given, for every $n \in N$ and $\sigma \in \Sigma$, by $f(n + \bar{n})\sigma = \sqrt{2}(\bar{q}(\bar{n})\sigma + n \wedge \sigma)$ is a Clifford morphism.

Example 3. Bundles of spinors. Let (2) be a spin structure on $M$ and let $\Sigma = (Q \times S)/\text{Cpin}(h)$ be the associated bundle of spinors. Every element of $\Sigma$ is of the form $[q,s]$, where $q \in Q$, $s \in S$ and $[q,s] = [(q',s')]$ iff there is $a \in \text{Cpin}(h)$ such that $q' = qa$ and $s' = a^{-1}s$. In this case, the Clifford morphism is given by $f(v)[(q,s)] = [(q, (\chi(q))^{-1}v)s]$, where $v \in T_xM$, $q \in Q_x$ and $s \in S$; note that $\chi(q) : V \to T_xM$ is an isometry; one easily checks that the above definition is correct.

5 Spinor bundles

The main result of this paper is the proof of the converse of the statement appearing in Example 3. We say that a bundle of Clifford modules $\Sigma \to M$ over $\text{C}(g)$ is a spinor bundle if the representation (4) is a spinor representation for every $x \in M$. For example, the bundle of Clifford modules described in Example 2 is a spinor bundle.

Proposition 2 Every spinor bundle $\Sigma \to M$ on an even-dimensional Riemannian manifold $(M, g)$ with local model $(V, h)$ is isomorphic to the vector bundle $(Q \times S)/\text{Cpin}(h) \to M$ associated with a spin structure (2) on that manifold.

Proof. Given a spinor bundle $\Sigma \to M$, one constructs the total space $Q$ of the spin structure by taking as the fibre $Q_x$ the set of all isomorphisms of the spin space $(S, V, h)$ onto the spin space $(\Sigma_x, T_xM, g_x)$. The map $\gamma : Q_x \to P_x$ is given by $\gamma(q) : V \to T_xM$. $\chi(q)v = qvq^{-1}$. If $q$ and $q' \in Q_x$, then $q^{-1}q' \in \text{Cpin}(h)$: the group $\text{Cpin}(h)$ acts freely and transitively on $Q_x$ and $\chi(qa) = \chi(q) \circ \text{Ad}(a)$. It remains to check that the associated bundle of spinors $(Q \times S)/\text{Cpin}(h) \to M$ is isomorphic to $\Sigma \to M$: such an isomorphism is given by $[(q,s) \mapsto q(s)]$, where $q \in Q$ and $s \in S$.

6 A line bundle associated with spinor bundles

The reflection $v \mapsto \alpha(v) = -v$ is an isometry of $(V, h)$ onto itself: if $(S, V, h)$ is a spin space and the dimension of $V$ is $2n$, then the line $L(\alpha)$, defined in Section 3, is spanned by $e_{2n+1} = e_1 \ldots e_{2n} \in \text{GL}(S)$, where $(e_1, \ldots, e_{2n})$ is an orthonormal frame in $(V, h)$. If $v \in V \subset \text{End}S$, then $v^* \in \text{End}S^*$ and $(v^*)^2 = (v^*)^\dagger = h(v) \text{id}_S$. Therefore, defining

$$V^* = \{ v^* : v \in V \}$$

and

$$h^* (v^*) = h(v),$$

we obtain a spin space $(S^*, V^*, h^*)$ isomorphic to $(S, V, h)$. The map $\beta : V \to V^*$ given by $\beta(v) = (-1)^n v^*$ is an isometry; therefore, there is the line $L = \text{L}(\beta) \subset \text{Hom}(S, S^*)$; its elements are either symmetric or skew: if $\ell \in L$, then $\ell^* = (-1)^n e_\tau \ell^{-1}$. (The factor $(-1)^n$ in the definition of $\beta$ is chosen so that $e_\tau^* = (-1)^n e_\tau (\tau = 1, \ldots, 2n)$ holds only for $\tau = 1, \ldots, 2n$, but also for $\tau = 2n \mp 1$; see §101 in [7]).

The group $\text{Cpin}(h)$ has a one-dimensional representation in $L$ and acts transitively on the space $L^* = L \setminus \{0\}$: the element $a \in \text{Cpin}(h)$ sends $t \in L$ to $a \tau(a) t = N(a)\ell$, where $N : \text{Cpin}(h) \to C^\times$ is the spinor norm homomorphism. The group $\text{Spin}(h)$ is now seen to coincide with the kernel of $N$. Consider now a manifold with a spin structure (2). The representation of $\text{Cpin}(h)$ in $L$ defines the complex line bundle

$$(5) \quad A = (Q \times X)/\text{Cpin}(h) \to M.$$

Proposition 3 Let $(M, g)$ be a Riemannian spin manifold with a local model $(V, h)$. This manifold is spin if, and only if, the line bundle (5) is trivial.
Proof. Assume first that (5) is trivial. A nowhere vanishing section of this bundle corresponds to a map \( \lambda : Q \to L^s \) such that \( \lambda(qa) = N(a^{-1})\lambda(q) \), where \( q \in Q \) and \( a \in \text{Cpin}(h) \). Let \( \iota_0 \in L^s \). The set \( Q_0 = \{ q \in Q \mid \lambda(q) = \iota_0 \} \) is the total space of a spin structure on \( M \). Conversely, given a reduction \( Q_0 \) of \( Q \) to \( \text{Spin}(h) \), one constructs a nowhere vanishing section of (5) by defining the equivariant map \( \lambda \) so that \( \lambda(q) = \iota_0 \) for every \( q \in Q_0 \).

The group \( \text{Cpin}(h) \) can be interpreted as the conformal spin group [8, 9]. Defining \( \text{CO}(h) = (\mathbb{C}^\infty \times \text{SO}(h))/\mathbb{Z}_2 \), one has the exact sequence

\[
1 \to \mathbb{Z}_2 \to \text{Cpin}(h) \xrightarrow{{\rho}} \text{CO}(h) \to 1,
\]

where \( \rho \) is given by \( \rho(a)v = N(a)ava^{-1} \) for \( a \in \text{Cpin}(h) \) and \( v \in V \).

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