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A NOTE ON HOWELL DESIGNS OF ODD SIDE

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A Howell design H(s,2n), with $n \le s \le 2n-1$, is a square array of side s, where cells are either empty or contain an unordered pair of elements chosen from a set X of size 2n such that

- (1) each member of $\, X \,$ occurs exactly once in each row and column of the array,
- (2) each pair of elements of X occurs in at most one cell of the array.

Although much progress has been made in the construction of Howell designs, the existence question has not been settled. The purpose of this note is to report some results we have obtained by computer. Combining our results with previous results we obtain the following.

THEOREM 1. If s < 1000 is odd, $n \neq s - 1$ and $(s,2n) \neq (5,6)$, then there exists an H(s,2n).

The exception (5,6) listed above does not exist [4]. The reader is referred to [4,5] for results concerning H(s,2s-2).

We employ a method described by Anderson [1,2] to construct Howell designs from strong starters.

A strong starter in an additive abelian group G of order 2t+1 is a set S = $\{\{s_i, t_i\}: 1 \le i \le t\}$ such that

- (1) $\{s_i, t_i: 1 \le i \le t\} = G\setminus\{0\},$
- (2) $\{\pm(s_i t_i): 1 \le i \le t\} = G\setminus\{0\},$ and
- (3) $s_i + t_i \neq s_j + t_j$ if $i \neq j$ with $s_i + t_i \neq 0$ for all i.

Given a strong starter S, define a digraph Δ_S as follows. Let Δ_S have vertices V_S and edges E_S , where $V_S = \{-s_i - t_i : 1 \le i \le t\}$ and $E_S = \{(-s_i - t_i, -2u) : u = s_i \text{ or } t_i \text{ and } -2u \in V_S\}$.

It is easy to see that Δ_S is contrafunctional (each vertex has in degree one), so that each weak component has exactly one directed cycle. Let Δ_S have weak components C_i, \ldots, C_ℓ . Let $c_i = |V(C_i)|$, $1 \le i \le \ell$, and let d_i be the length of the unique directed cycle of C_i , $1 \le i \le \ell$. The following is implicit in [2].

LEMMA 2. Let S be a strong starter of odd order s and Δ_S the associated digraph. If $e=1+\sum_{i=1}^{k}2e_i$, where $0\leq e_i\leq c_i-d_i$ or $e_i=c_i$, for $1\leq i\leq k$, then there esists an H(s, s+e) (note s+e is even).

It can be easily checked that Δ_S contains no directed cycles of length less than three. Thus no H(s, 2s-2) or H(s, 2s-4) can be constructed by this method, and if Δ_S contains large cycles several other possibilities will be missed. Except for the class H(s, 2s-2), the difficulty will be remedied by the following result of Hung and Mendelsohn [4]. We state their result only for Howell designs of odd side.

LEMMA 3. If s is odd and any one of the following conditions holds, then there exists an H(s, 2s-2k).

- (1) k > 10 and $s \ge 2k^2 6k + 10$;
- (2) k = 0 or $3 \le k \le 10$, and $s \ge 2k + 1$;
- (3) k = 2 and $s \ge 7$.

The condition (3) is caused by the non-existence of H(5,6).

Thus cycles in a $\,\Delta_{_{\hbox{\scriptsize S}}}\,$ do not cause problems, provided they are not too large or too numerous. We make use of the following.

LEMMA 4. Let $0 \le d_i \le c_i$ for $1 \le i \le l$, and let $d = \Sigma d_i$, $c = \Sigma c_i$. If $c \ge 2d$, and $0 \le f \le c\text{-max}\{d_i\}$, then we can write $f = \Sigma e_i$, $0 \le e_i \le c_i - d_i$ or $e_i = c_i$, for $1 \le i \le l$.

Proof. Induction on ℓ . If $\ell=1$ the result is clear. For arbitrary positive ℓ , assume the result for $\ell-1$. If necessary, permute the set $\{1,2,\ldots,\ell\}$ so that $c-c_{\ell}\geq 2(d-d_{\ell})$ (this can be done, since $c\geq 2d$). Let $d_0=\max\{d_i\colon 1\leq i\leq \ell\}$ and let $d_0'=\max\{d_i\colon 1\leq i\leq \ell-1\}$.

Let $f \le c - d_0$. If $f \le c - c_\ell - d_0$, then $f = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell-1} e_i$ with the e_i 's as required, by induction. If $c - c_\ell - d_0' \le f \le c - d_0' - d_\ell$, then $f = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell} e_i$ with $0 \le e_i \le c_i - d_i$ and $\sum_{i=1}^{\ell-1} e_i = c - c_\ell - d_0'$ (induction).

If $c_{\ell} \leq f \leq c - d_{0}'$, then $f - c_{\ell} = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell-1} e_{i}$ by induction, so $f = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell-1} e_{i} + c_{\ell}$. If $c - c_{\ell} \leq f \leq c - d_{\ell}$, then $f = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell-1} c_{i} + e_{\ell}$ with $0 \leq e_{\ell} \leq c_{\ell} - d_{\ell}$. Now $d_{0} = \max\{d_{0}', d_{\ell}\}$ so both $c - d_{0}'$ and $c - d_{\ell}$ are at least $c - d_{0}$. Thus it suffices to check that $c - d_{0}' - d_{\ell} \geq \min\{c_{\ell}, c - c_{\ell}\}$. If not, then $2(c - d_{0}' - d_{\ell}) < c$, so $2(d_{0}' + d_{\ell}) > c$. But $d \geq d_{0}' + d_{\ell}$ and $2d \leq c$, so we have a contradiction. This establishes the result. \Box

Let
$$f(k) = \begin{cases} 2k^2 - 6k + 10 & \text{if } k > 10, \\ 2k + 1 & \text{if } k = 0 \text{ or } 3 \le k \le 10, \\ 7 & \text{if } k = 2. \end{cases}$$

We obtain the following.

LEMMA 5. Suppose there exists a strong starter S of order s, with digraph Δ_S having largest cycle d_0 , and $c \ge 2d$.

If $f(d_0) \le s$, then there exists an H(s,2n) if $n \le s \le 2n-1$ and $n \ne s-1$.

Proof. Let 2n = 2s - 2k. Then $k \neq 1$. If $k < d_0$ then H(s,2n) exists by Lemma 3, since $s \geq f(d_0)$ and f is a non-decreasing function. If $k \geq d_0$, we can write $\frac{s-1}{2} - k = \sum_{i=1}^{k} e_i$ with $0 \leq e_i \leq c_i - d_i$ or $e_i = c_i$, for $1 \leq i \leq k$, by Lemma 4. Then $e = 2n - s = s - 2k = 1 + \sum_{i=1}^{k} 2e_i$, and Lemma 2 implies the result.

By computer we have constructed strong starters of all odd orders s with $53 \le s \le 999$ satisfying the hypotheses of Lemma 5. A description of our algorithm is given in [3].

By means of this strong starter construction and other methods it had already been established that Howell designs H(s,2n), with s odd, $s \le 51$, $n \ne s - 1$, and $(s,2n) \ne (5,6)$ exist. For more details see [1,4].

Thus Theorem 1 is obtained. Due to space limitations, we cannot list all the strong starters here. We do however, list strong starters of orders 53-99, and 999 below, together with the directed cycles of the associated digraph. A complete listing is on file at the Ohio State University Mathematics Library.

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STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 53
33, 34 46, 44 10, 7 43, 39 24, 19 11, 17 8, 1 47, 2 15, 6 13, 23 49, 38 30, 18 5, 45 36, 22 27, 42 28, 12 31, 48 3, 21 32, 51 9, 29 20, 41 4, 35 37, 14 40, 16 25, 50 26, 52
                                                   CYCLES IN DIGRAPH
14 16 3 31 25 2 28 24 45
                                          STRONG STARTER OF DEDER 55
49, 50 39, 37 42, 45 15, 19 8, 3 27, 33 47, 54 21, 29 31, 22 52, 7 45, 46, 18, 38 1, 24 5, 36 9, 34 43, 14 17, 44
18 39 44 50 15 33
                                            STRUNG STARTER OF ORDER 57
51, 52 49, 47 37, 40 39, 43 27, 22 21, 15 26, 33 25, 17 6, 54 34, 44 19, 8 38, 50 11, 24 48, 5 16, 1 14, 30 13, 53 10, 28 12, 31 35, 55 9, 45 20, 42 7, 41 23, 50 4, 36 29, 3 32, 2 18, 46
                                                  CYCLES IN DIGRAPH
50 23 15 21
                                           STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 59
35, 36 23, 21 8, 5 51, 55 11, 6 43, 49 34, 27 28, 20 57, 48 14, 24 22, 33 38, 50 40, 53 17, 3 45, 30 58, 15 52, 10 13, 54 25, 44 7, 46 39, 18 41, 4 32, 9 26, 2 37, 12 42, 16 29, 56 47, 19 31, 1
                                                  CYCLES IN DIGRAPH
47 42 30 49 46
15 4 13
56 27 1 33 51 14
                                           STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 61
56, 57 41, 39 40, 49 54, 50 33, 38 6, 12 27, 20 24, 16 13, 22 9, 60 23, 34 28, 40 21, 8 29, 43 47, 1 19, 3 59, 15 55, 37 17, 36 25, 45 11, 51 14, 53 4, 42 7, 44 10, 35 26, 55 5, 32 30, 58 2, 31 18, 48
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9 44 42 54 4 48 30 27 8
                                           STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 63
41, 42 14, 12 49, 46 56, 52 23, 28 61, 4 20, 13 47, 55 3, 57 29, 39 5, 16 22, 34 37, 50 38, 24 26, 11 43, 27 18, 1 53, 35 7, 51 45, 2 59, 17 9, 31 25, 48 58, 19 40, 15 32, 6 33, 60 36, 8 44, 10 21, 54
                                                   CYCLES IN DIGRAPH
 9 56 38
                                            STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 65
6, 5 26, 24 63, 60 16, 20 58, 53 43, 49 32, 39 4, 12 2, 11 25, 35 55, 44 64, 52 28, 15 59, 8 37, 22 18, 34 14, 31 51, 33 48, 29 51, 13 62, 40 42, 19 45, 21 1, 41 46, 7 23, 50 38, 10 27, 56 17, 47
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 5 39 60
                                            STRONG STAKTER UF DEDER 67
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                                                  CYCLES IN DIGRAPH
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STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 69 63, 64 61, 59 15, 18 51, 55 32, 27 14, 8 4, 11 9, 1 31, 40 28, 38 43, 54 24, 12 49, 62 3, 17 21, 36 57, 41 13, 30 53, 35 16, 66 67, 47 56, 25 39, 47 29, 65 33, 68 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 11 44 24 40 27 18 58 67 59 20 STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 71 48, 47 44, 42 59, 62 69, 65 2, 68 27, 21 29, 22 12, 4 16, 7 61, 51 35, 46 28, 40 43, 56 37, 23 39, 54 24, 8 30, 13 1, 19 5, 57 50, 70 67, 17 55, 6 41, 18 58, 11 45, 20 10, 36 26, 53 60, 32 38, 9 63, 33 34, 3 25, 64 14, 52 15, 49 31, 66 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 47 55 39 48 21 53 24 STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 73 18, 19 35, 33 61, 64 66, 62 54, 49 22, 16 36, 29 47, 39 6, 17 40, 50 2, 13 46, 34 72, 12 11, 70 38, 53 4, 20 24, 7 32, 14 44, 63 5, 58 52, 31 9, 60 26, 3 51, 27 42, 67 71, 45 10, 56 15, 43 57, 28 68, 25 6, 48 69, 37 1, 41 55, 21 65, 30 23, 59 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 5 66 56 STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 75 24, 20 49, 54 12, 6 27, 34 45, 37 66, 57 7, 17 52, 38 69, 9 72, 13 18, 35 47, 65 23, 4 56, 36 61, 10 58, 8 28, 2 44, 71 68, 40 31, 60 50, 5 30, 64 46, 11 39, 3 63, 25 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 21 14 42 STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 77 75, 76 51, 49 14, 17 64, 68 24, 19 3, 9 54, 47 27, 35 53, 44 38, 48 25, 36 40, 28 29, 16 71, 57 70, 8 26, 10 50, 67 72, 13 20, 1 42, 62 18, 74 4, 59 23, 46 32, 56 6, 58 63, 12 34, 61 41, 69 60, 31 45, 15 21, 52 39, 7 55, 11 65, 22 2, 37 30, 66 33, 73 45, 5 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 57 41 62 54 37 56 STRUNG STARTER OF ORDER 23, 22 42, 40 14, 11 74, 78 12, 7 30, 24 25, 32 20, 28 56, 47 75, 65 73, 62 36, 50 39, 52 49, 63 4, 68 51, 67 10, 27 66, 48 16, 35 41, 61 6, 64 76, 19 58, 2 70, 15 54, 34 55, 29 72, 45 46, 18 71, 21 33, 3 6, 5 37, 69 31, 77 60, 26 53, 9 8, 44 43, 1 54, 13 17, 57 CYCLES IN DIGRAPH 25 42 19 STRONG STARTER OF ORDER 81 11, 16 48, 42 36, 43 30, 22 12, 3 17, 7 10, 25 15, 31 27, 44 13, 76 4, 66 33, 53 52, 77 56, 1 14, 68 79, 51 64, 35 67, 37 74, 39 73, 28 24, 61 45, 2 21, 63 29, 69

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CYCLES IN DIGRAPH

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197 187 682 887 849 664 67 370 112 264 422 118 532 584 544 938 910 885 37 497 983 692 796 626 589 955 438 701 190 185 102 337 818 836 995 582 561 228 786

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