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Introduction. For integers a and b, each greater than 1, let $T(a, b)$ be the free product of cyclic groups of orders a and b. Then $T(a, b)$ has presentation

$$\langle X, Y: X^a = Y^b = 1\rangle .$$

Suppose that $G \lhd T(a, b)$. If XYG has finite order in $T(a, b)/G$, then the order is the *level* of G, denoted by $n(G)$. We put $U = XY$. When G has finite index $\mu(G)$, then $n(G)$ is defined, and divides $\mu(G)$. In such a case, $t(G) = \mu(G)/n(G)$ is the *parabolic class number* of G. These definitions agree with the usual ones for $T(2, 3)$, the classical modular group.

For $T(2, 3)$, Newman [7] raised the question of whether there were infinitely many normal subgroups with a given parabolic class number. In [3], L. Greenberg showed that this was not possible by proving that, for $t > 1$,

$$\mu \leqq t^4 .$$

Here, as later, we write μ, t for $\mu(G)$, $t(G)$ when the group is clear from the context.

Mason [5] improved this to

$$(1) \qquad \mu \leqq t^3 .$$

This was also proved by Accola [1]. Implicit in his proof is a proof that (1) holds when a and b are distinct primes.

Here, we show that, when a and b are coprime, there is a constant $c(a, b)$ such that, for $t > 1$,

$$(2) \qquad \mu \leqq c(a, b)t^2(t - 1) .$$

The constant is 1 when a and b are distinct primes, e.g., for the modular group. There is no corresponding result when a and b are not coprime.

We give examples to show that we can have equality in (2), but only a finite number of times for given a and b. Finally, we obtain a better result for large t.

The referee has drawn our attention to a paper of Morris Newman, '2-generator groups and parabolic class numbers', Proc. Amer. Math. Soc., 31 (1972), 51–53, which contains the weaker result

$$\mu \leqq ab\, t^{a+1} .$$

1. Preliminary results.

PROPOSITION 1.1. *Suppose that K is a finite group, and that $H = \langle U \rangle$ is a cyclic subgroup with order $k < |K|$, and with $\bigcap_{V \in K} VHV^{-1} = \{1\}$. If $K = \langle X, U \rangle$, then $H \cap XHX^{-1} = \{1\}$, and the cosets $H, XH, UXH, \cdots, U^{k-1}XH$ are distinct.*

Proof. Let $E = H \cap XHX^{-1}$. As H is cyclic, so is E, and hence $E \lhd K$. Thus, $E = \{1\}$. The last clause follows at once.

We observe that, in the situation described in 1.1, K acts as a transitive permutation group on the cosets on H.

PROPOSITION 1.2. *Suppose that a and b are coprime, and that $G \lhd T(a, b)$ with index $\mu(G)$. Then there is a normal subgroup G^* of $T(a, b)$ with $G \leqq G^*$ and such that*

(i) *$t(G^*) = t(G)$, $=t$ say,*

(ii) *if $t > 1$, then $\mu(G^*) \leqq t(t-1)$,*

(iii) *G^*/G is central in $T(a, b)/G$.*

Proof. Let $D = \langle U, G \rangle$, then $|T(a, b): D| = t(G)$.

Let $G^* = \bigcap_{V \in T(a,b)} VDV^{-1}$, so that $G \leqq G^* \lhd T(a, b)$. As D/G is cyclic, $G^* = \langle U^k, G \rangle$, for a least positive integer k. As $D = \langle U, G^* \rangle$, $n(G^*) = k$, so (i) holds.

If $t > 1$, then D is proper. From 1.1 applied to $K = T(a, b)/G^*$ and $H = D/G^*$, it follows that $t \geqq k + 1$, so (ii) holds.

For $V \in T(a, b)$, let $[V]$ denote the corresponding element of $\mathrm{Aut}(G^*/G)$. Then $[X]^a = [Y]^b = 1$, and $[X][Y] = [U] = 1$, so (iii) holds. (Cf. Lemma 3 of [3].)

COROLLARY 1.3. *With the notation of 1.2,*

(i) *if X or $Y \in G$, then $t(G) = 1$,*

(ii) *if $t(G) = 1$, then $\mu(G) | ab$.*

Proof. We observe that $t(G) = 1$ if and only if $D = T(a, b)$.

If X or $Y \in G$, then $D = T(a, b)$, and (i) holds.

If $t(G) = 1$, then $G^* = T(a, b)$. By 1.2 (iii), $T(a, b)/G$ is abelian, so that (ii) holds.

For integers a and b with $1/a + 1/b < 1$, there is a Fuchsian group of the first kind isomorphic to $T(a, b)$. The details can be found in [4]. We write $T(a, b)$ for the Fuchsian group as well as for its abstract counterpart, taking the isomorphism so that U corresponds to a mapping $\omega \mapsto \omega + \alpha$, with $\alpha > 0$.

Also from [4], a subgroup of finite index in $T(a, b)$ has a presentation

$$\left\langle E_1, \cdots, E_r, P_1, \cdots, P_t, A_1, B_1, \cdots, A_g, B_g\colon E_i \text{ elliptic}, \prod_{i=1}^{r} E_i \prod_{j=1}^{t} P_j \prod_{s=1}^{g} [A_s, B_s] = 1 \right\rangle . \tag{3}$$

In this presentation, $P_1, \cdots, P_t$ are parabolic, i.e., each is $T(a, b)$-conjugate to a power of U. The *amplitude* of a parabolic element is the exponent of U. We can choose the presentation with each P_i operating anti-clockwise. This will be described as the standard presentation.

PROPOSITION 1.4. *In the standard presentation for a subgroup of $T(a, b)$, each parabolic generator has negative amplitude.*

The proof is exactly that given for Theorem 1 in [5].

2. **The inequality (2).** We write n' for the largest proper divisor of a positive integer n.

THEOREM 2.1. *Suppose that a and b are coprime, and that $G \lhd T(a, b)$ with index μ. If $t > 1$, then*

$$\mu \leqq a'b't^2(t-1) .$$

Proof. By 1.2, there is a subgroup G^* of index kt, with $k \leqq t - 1$, and with properties (i), (ii), and (iii).

By a standard argument on Fuchsian groups, a finite subgroup of G^* is $T(a, b)$-conjugate to a subgroup of $\langle X \rangle$ or of $\langle Y \rangle$. As G^* is normal, we can divide such subgroups into those of order e, with $e|a$, and those of order f, with $f|b$. As $t > 1$, 1.3 applies, so $e \leqq a'$ and $f \leqq b'$.

In the standard presentation of G^*, each elliptic generator has order e or f. Using 1.4 and the normality of G^*, each parabolic generator has amplitude $-k$. As G^*/G is central, the efth power of the relation in (3) yields

$$U^{-efkt} \equiv 1 \qquad (\text{mod. } G) .$$

Thus, $n(G)|efkt$. The result follows.

COROLLARY 2.2. *If a and b are distinct primes, and G is as in the theorem, then $\mu \leqq t^2(t-1)$.*

The inequality (2) is best possible, as the following examples show:

(a) in the notation of [7], $(\Gamma^2)'$ and $G_{3,4}$ are normal subgroups of $T(2, 3)$ and have, respectively, $\mu = 18, t = 3$ and $\mu = 48, t = 4$,

(b) in $T(3, 4)$, $G = \langle X, YXY^3, Y^2\rangle$ has index 2 and is isomorphic to the free product $C_2^* C_3^* C_3$. The product of the generators is $(XY)^2$, so $n(G) = 2$ and $t(G) = 1$. Thus, $G' \lhd T(3, 4)$ and has $\mu = 36, t = 3$. Example (b) is analogous to the first example in (a). As we shall see in § 4, there are no further examples for $T(2, 3)$.

3. **Non-coprime cases.** In this section, we suppose that a and b have g.c.d. $(a, b) = d$, with $d > 1$. We produce an infinite collection of subgroups of $T(a, b)$, each with parabolic class number d. Intersecting these with other normal subgroups, we see that there can be no inequality of the form $\mu \leqq f(t)$.

We begin by considering $T(d, d)$. Let $H = \langle XY, T(d, d)'\rangle$. Then the Reidemeister-Schreier method shows that H, which is normal in $T(d, d)$, has presentation

$$\left\langle A_r = Y^r XY^{1-r},\ r = 0, 1, \cdots, d-1 \colon \prod_{r=0}^{d-1} A_r = 1 \right\rangle .$$

Then H is free on the first $d - 1$ of these generators. Further, $T(d, d) = \langle Y, H\rangle$, so that $|T(d, d) \colon H| = d$. Finally, $A_0 = XY$, so that $n(H) = 1$ and $t(H) = d$.

As $d > 1$, Dirichlet's theorem states that there are an infinite number of primes congruent to 1 modulo d. For any such prime, there is an integer e with $\mathrm{ord}_p(e) = d$. We define $H(p, e)$ by

$$H(p, e) = H' \cdot \langle (A_0)^p,\ B_r = (A_{r-1})^{-e} A_r,\ r = 1, \cdots, d-2\rangle .$$

This is invariant under XY. Also, for $r = 0, \cdots, d-2$, $YA_rY^{-1} = A_{r+1}$, so that, for $r = 1, \cdots, d-3$, $YB_rY^{-1} = B_{r+1}$. Finally, $YB_{d-2}Y^{-1}$ can be expressed, modulo H', in terms of the B_r and $(A_0)^p$. Thus, $H(p, e)$ is normal. (The proof for $d = 2$ is simpler.)

Since $A_0 = XY$, $H(p, e)$ has level p. Also, $|H \colon H(p, e)| = p$ and $|T(d, d) \colon H| = d$, so that $t(H(p, e)) = d$.

To obtain subgroups of $T(a, b)$, we observe that, if N is the normal closure of $\langle X^d, Y^d\rangle$ in $T(a, b)$, then $T(d, d) \cong T(a, b)/N$. Then $T(a, b)$ has subgroups with level p and parabolic class number d for an infinite set of p.

4. **Frobenius factor groups.** Throughout this section, we shall assume that a and b are coprime, and that $t > 1$. We adopt the notation of 1.2, and of 1.1 with $K = T(a, b)/G$ and $H = D/G$, and write K^* and H^* for the corresponding groups with G replaced by G^*. We regard K (resp. K^*) as a transitive group on the cosets of H (resp. H^*). Our results describe the situation where there is equality in 1.2 (ii).

THEOREM 4.1. *If $k = t - 1$, then K^* is primitive.*

Proof. In this case, 1.1 shows that K^* is doubly transitive.

THEOREM 4.2. *Suppose that K^* is primitive. Then K^* is a Frobenius group with kernel $(K^*)'$, which is elementary abelian. Further, there is a prime p with $t = p^n \equiv 1 \pmod{k}$, and $n = \mathrm{ord}_k(p)$. Finally, $k \mid ab$.*

Proof. Note that $H^* \neq K^*$, since $t > 1$. Suppose that $V \in K^* - H^*$. As K^* is primitive, H^* is maximal, so that $K^* = \langle V, UG^* \rangle$. By 1.1, if $VH^* \neq WH^*$, then $VH^*V^{-1} \cap WH^*W^{-1} = \{1\}$. Thus, K^* is Frobenius with kernel N where $|N| = t$. By [10, p. 30], N is elementary abelian, so that $t = p^n$.

Let $M \lhd K^*$ with $M \leqq N$. If $1 < M < N$, then $H^* < H^* \cdot M < K^*$ which contradicts the maximality of H^*. Thus $M = \{1\}$ or N. As $K^*/N \cong H^*$, $(K^*)' \leqq N$, so that $(K^*)' = N$.

By the general theory of Frobenius groups, $k = |H^*|$ divides $p^n - 1 = |N| - 1$. As U acts irreducibly on N, [2, p. 212] shows that, if ω is a primitive k-th root of unity over $GF(p)$, then ω^{p^i}, $i = 1, \cdots n - 1$, are distinct. Hence $n = \mathrm{ord}_k(p)$.

For the last part, we observe that $k = |T(a, b) : (T(a, b))' \cdot G^*|$ which divides $|T(a, b) : (T(a, b))'| = ab$.

Combining 4.1 and 4.2, we obtain

COROLLARY 4.3. *If $k = t - 1$, then $(t - 1) | ab$. For fixed a and b, there are finitely many normal subgroups with equality in* (2).

COROLLARY 4.4. *If $1/2t \leqq k < t - 1$, K^* is imprimitive.*

Proof. This follows at once, since we cannot have $t \equiv 1 \pmod{k}$.

We note that, if $G \lhd T(2, 3)$ has genus 1 and $t > 4$, then $G^* = G$ and $k = 6$, see [7]. By [9, p. 181], if $6 | t - 1$, then K^* is Frobenius, so that K^* Frobenius does not imply K^* primitive. Further, for a prime $p > 3$, there is a primitive K^* with $k = 6, t = p^n$, where $n = \mathrm{ord}_3(p)$. These subgroups have $k < t/2$ in general.

Theorem 4.2 has a converse, as we shall now show. Let p be a prime and k an integer prime to p. Let $n = \mathrm{ord}_k(p)$, and write S for the cyclic subgroup of order k in $GF(p^n)^*$. Let $F = \{(x, y) : x \in S, y \in GF(p^n)\}$, and define multiplication on F by

$$(x, y) \cdot (u, v) = (xu, yu + v) .$$

PROPOSITION 4.5. *F is a primitive Frobenius group on p^n symbols. The kernel is F', which is elementary abelian, and the complement C is cyclic of order k.*

Proof. It is clear that F is Frobenius with kernel $N = \{(1, y): y \in GF(p^n)\}$ and complement $C = \{(x, 0): x \in S\}$.

If $1 < M < N$ with $M \lhd F$, then, by [9, p. 183], F/M is Frobenius with kernel N/M. Then $k = |C|$ divides $|N: M| - 1 = p^m - 1$, where $1 \leqq m < n$. This contradicts the definition of n. Hence, $N = F'$.

If $C < M < F$, then $|M| = p^r k$, where $1 \leqq r < n$. Then $|M \cap N| = p^r$ and, by [9, p. 183], M is Frobenius with kernel $M \cap N$. Hence, $k | (p^r - 1)$, again a contradiction. Thus, C is maximal and F is primitive on the cosets of C.

PROPOSITION 4.6. *With the above notation, suppose that $k = ef$, with $(e, f) = 1$. Then we have,*

(i) *if $e, f > 1$, then $F = \langle x, y \rangle$, with x of order e, y of order f.*

(ii) *if $e = 1$, then $F = \langle x, y \rangle$, with x of order p, y of order k.*

Proof. (i) As $e, f | k$, we can take $x \in C$, $y \in C^z$, with $z \in F - C$, with x of order e and y of order f. Let $M = \langle x, y \rangle$. As $[x, y] \in N - \{1\}$, then $|M| = p^r k$, where $1 \leqq r \leqq n$. By [9, p. 183], $k | (p^r - 1)$, so that $r = n$ and $M = F$.

(ii) We take $x \in N$, of order p and y a generator of C. The result follows as in (i).

Since the center of a Frobenius group is trivial,

LEMMA 4.7. *If $G \lhd T(a, b)$ with K Frobenius, then $G = G^*$.*

LEMMA 4.8. *Let $G \lhd T(a, b)$ with K a primitive Frobenius group with elementary p-abelian kernel and complement C cyclic of order k. Then,* (i) *C is conjugate to H, and*

(ii) *if $n(G)$ is prime to a, then $p | a$.*

Proof. By 4.7, $G = G^*$, so that $H = H^*$ and $K = K^*$. Let $M/G = N$ be the kernel of K, and let $|K| = p^n k$, so $(p, k) = 1$.

(i) Since $T(a, b)/M = C$, $n(M) = k$. Hence $(UG)^{kp} = 1$ in K. By [9, p. 182], either $(UG)^k = 1$ or $(UG)^p = 1$. It follows that $(UG)^k = 1$ and so $N \cap H = \{1\}$. Thus, H is a complement of N in K. By [9, p. 186], H is a conjugate of C.

(ii) Since $M \lhd T(a, b)$ and $|T(a, b): M| = k$, $X \in M$. Thus, $X^p \in G$ and, if $(a, p) = 1$, then $X \in G$ which would imply that K is abelian. Thus, $p | a$.

THEOREM 4.9. *Given $k > 1$, a divisor of ab, and p prime to k (with $p \mid a$ if $(k, a) = 1$, $p \mid b$ if $(k, b) = 1$), there is a subgroup $G \lhd T(a, b)$ with K^* primitive Frobenius of order $p^n k$, where $n = \operatorname{ord}_k(p)$.*

Proof. Let $k = ef$, where $e \mid a$ and $f \mid b$, so that $(e, f) = 1$. The result follows from 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8.

Thus, when $ab + 1$ is p^n with p prime, there is a subgroup of maximal index with equality in 1.2 (ii). However, there is no corresponding subgroup with equality in (2), as we now show.

THEOREM 4.10. *$(T(a, b))''$ has level ab.*

Proof. It is clear that $(T(a, b))'$ is free, has level ab and parabolic class number 1. The standard presentation shows that $U^{ab} \in (T(a, b))''$. Since the level is a multiple of ab, the result follows.

This is proved for $a = 2$ and $b = 3$ in [8].

THEOREM 4.11. *If $k = t - 1 = ab$, then $G = G^*$.*

Proof. Assume that $k = t - 1 = ab$, but that $G \neq G^*$. By 4.1 and 4.2, K^* is Frobenius with kernel of index $k = ab$. Also, $t = p^n$, p prime. Let M/G^* be the kernel. Then $|T(a, b) \colon M| = ab$. As $T(a, b)/M$ is cyclic, $M = T(a, b)'$. Thus, G^* is free, so that the proof of 2.1 shows that $|G^* \colon G| = p^s$, with $s \geqq 1$. By 1.2 (iii), there is a subgroup $L \lhd T(a, b)$ with $G \leqq L \leqq G^*$ and $|G^* \colon L| = p$.

Let $A = T(a, b)/M$ and $P = M/L$. By 4.10, $M' \cdot L = G^*$, so $P' = G^*/L$. Now, $P' \leqq Z(P)$, and, since $T(a, b)/M$ acts irreducibly on M/G^*, $P' = Z(P)$. The Frattini subgroup $\Phi(P)$ of P is the smallest normal subgroup with elementary abelian factor, [2, p. 174]. Thus, $P' = Z(P) = \Phi(P)$, so that P is an extra-special p-group, [2, p. 183].

Let $A = \langle \alpha \rangle$, with α regarded as an element of order d of $\operatorname{Aut}(P)$. Then, in $\operatorname{Aut}(P/P')$, $\alpha^d = 1$. Considering the action of A on M/G^*, α has order $p^n - 1$ as an element of $\operatorname{Aut}(P/P')$. Thus, $d = p^n - 1$.

By [2, p. 213], $p^n - 1 \mid p^r + 1$, with $r \leqq n/2$. Thus, $p^n = 4$, so that $ab = 3$. As $(a, b) = 1$, this is impossible. Hence $G = G^*$.

COROLLARY 4.12. *If $G \lhd T(2, 3)$ gives equality in (2), then $t = 3$ or 4.*

Proof. By 4.3, 4.1 and, 4.2, $t=3$, 4 or 7. By 4.11, $t=7$ implies $G = G^*$ and so gives strict inequality. For $t = 3, 4$, see end of § 2.

5. Imprimitive factor groups. By 4.4, K^* will be imprimitive when $1/2t \leqq k < t-1$. For this range, we have one general result.

THEOREM 5.1. *If $k \geqq t/2$, then $K^* = \langle V, UG^* \rangle$, with $V^2 = 1$.*

PROOF. By 1.1, the stabilizer of H^* has an orbit $T = \{XH^*, \cdots, U^{k-1}XH^*\}$ of length k. By [10, p. 44], there is a paired orbit T' of the same length k. As $k \geqq t/2$, $T = T'$.

By [10, p. 45], there is an element $V \in K^*$ with $VXH^* = H^*$ and $VH^* = XH^*$. Then $VX = U^r$ and $X^{-1}V = U^s$, for some r, s. Thus, $K^* = \langle V, H^* \rangle$, and $V^2 = X^{-1}V^2X = U^{r+s}$. As $H^* \cap XH^*X^{-1} = \{1\}$, $V^2 = 1$.

COROLLARY 5.2. *If kt is odd, then $k < t/2$.*

For $T(2, 3)$, there are subgroups with $k > t/2$. For example, the subgroups $\Omega(2, m)$, defined in [6], have $\Omega(2, m)^* = \Omega(2, m)$, so that $t(\Omega(2, m)) = 3m$, $k(\Omega(2, m)) = 2m$.

If we restrict k further, the imprimitivity can be described more precisely. For convenience, we put $h = t - k$.

THEOREM 5.3. *If $k \neq t-1$, then $k \leqq h^2$.*

Proof. If $k \neq t-1$, then $h > 1$, and we may suppose that we have $k > \max\{h, (h-1)^2\}$.

Consider the action of U on the cosets of H^*. It fixes H^*, and permutes the U^iXH^* cyclically. We choose $V_1, \cdots, V_h$ so that

$$K^* = V_1H^* \cup V_2H^* \cup \cdots \cup V_hH^* \cup XH^* \cup UXH^* \cup \cdots \cup U^{k-1}XH^* ,$$

where we may assume that $V_1 = 1$.

Clearly, $V_2H^*, \cdots, V_hH^*$ belong to cycles of length at most $h-1$. Thus, for $i = 2, \cdots, h$,

$$H^* \cap V_iH^*(V_i)^{-1} = \langle U^{s(i)}G^* \rangle ,$$

with $0 < s(i) \leqq h-1$. If $2 \leqq i, j \leqq h$, then

$$U^{s(i)}U^{s(j)}G^* \in V_iH^*V_i^{-1} \cap V_jH^*V_j^{-1} .$$

Since $s(i)s(j) \leqq (h-1)^2 < k$, the intersection is nontrivial. It can be shown similarly that, for $1 \leqq i \leqq h$ and $0 \leqq j \leqq k-1$,

$$V_iH^*V_i^{-1} \cap (U^jX)H^*(U^jX)^{-1} = \{1\} .$$

Let $[H^*] = \{V_iH^*: i = 1, \cdots, h\}$ and let $W \in K^*$. Suppose that, for some i and j, $V_iH^* = WV_jH^*$. Then, for any r, $V_iH^*V_i^{-1}$ and

$WV_r\boldsymbol{H}^*(WV_r)^{-1}$ have nontrivial intersection. Hence $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ is a block and so $h|k$. We put $m = k/h$.

Let $\boldsymbol{K}_0$ be the subgroup which fixes blocks setwise. If $V \in \boldsymbol{K}_0$ fixes two cosets belonging to different blocks, we may suppose that $V\boldsymbol{H}^* = \boldsymbol{H}^*$, so $V = U^q\boldsymbol{G}^*$ for some q. Since V also fixes a coset of the form $U^rX\boldsymbol{H}^*$, 1.1 shows that $V = 1$. Thus, no two elements of $\boldsymbol{K}_0$ have the same effect on $\boldsymbol{H}^*$ and on $X\boldsymbol{H}^*$, so that

$$|\boldsymbol{K}_0| \leqq h^2 . \tag{4}$$

The blocks are $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ and $\{U^{i+jm}X\boldsymbol{H}^*: j = 0, \cdots, h-1\}$ for $i = 0, \cdots, m-1$. Thus, $U^m\boldsymbol{H}^*, \cdots, U^{m(h-1)}\boldsymbol{H}^*$ fix the blocks. None of these fixes a coset $U^rX\boldsymbol{H}^*$. Taking conjugates, we obtain a similar set for each block, i.e., fixing one element of the block, but none in any other block. All of these are distinct and nontrivial, so

$$|\boldsymbol{K}_0| \geqq 1 + (h-1)t/h . \tag{5}$$

Combining (4) and (5), we get the result.

From 5.3 and 4.3, we obtain

COROLLARY 5.4. *If $t > ab + 1$, then $\mu \leqq a'b't^2(t - t^{1/2})$.*

LEMMA 5.5. *In the notation of* 5.3, *if $k > \max(h, (h-1)^2)$, then* $|\boldsymbol{K}_0| = h^2$.

Proof. With $m = k/h$ as in 5.3, $A = U^m\boldsymbol{G}^*$, $B = XU^mX^{-1}\boldsymbol{G}^*$ fix $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$, $[X\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ respectively, and each has order h. Suppose that we have $A^rB^s = A^iB^j$, with $0 \leqq r, s, i, j < h$, then $A^{i-r} = B^{s-j}$. Then, since A fixes $\boldsymbol{H}^*$ and B fixes $X\boldsymbol{H}^*$ and only the identity fixes both, we must have $r = i$ and $j = s$. Hence, $\boldsymbol{K}_0 = \{A^rB^s: 0 \leqq r, s < h\}$.

LEMMA 5.6. *If $k = h^2 > 1$, then h is prime.*

Proof. If A, as in 5.5, does not fix $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ elementwise, then it has a conjugate distinct from A which fixes some $V_i\boldsymbol{H}^*$ not fixed by A. From the description of $\boldsymbol{K}_0$ in 5.5, this conjugate is a power of A. Considering the effect on $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$, this must be A^e, with $(e, h) > 1$. As $(e, h) > 1$, A^e does not act as a cycle on $[X\boldsymbol{H}^*]$. This is a contradiction since a conjugate of A would have this effect.

Thus, A fixes $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ elementwise and has the effect of an h-cycle on the other blocks. As $k = h^2$, there are $h + 1(>2)$ blocks. We label the blocks so that $[\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ is block zero, $[X\boldsymbol{H}^*]$ block one, and so on. Then we have

$$A = c_0c_1 \cdots c_h ,$$

where c_0 is 1 and c_i an h-cycle on block i, $i = 1, \cdots, h$. Similarly,

$$B = d_0 d_1 \cdots d_h \,,$$

where d_1 is 1 and d_j an h-cycle on block j, $j = 0$ and $j = 2, \cdots, h$.

Suppose that C is a conjugate of A fixing cosets in block two. Then, for some r, s, $C = A^r B^s$. As C acts as an h-cycle on block zero, $(d_0)^s$ is an h-cycle, so that $(s, h) = 1$. Similarly, $(r, h) = 1$. Considering the effect on block two, we must have $(c_2)^r(d_2)^s = 1$, so that $d_2 = (c_2)^{w(2)}$, with $(w(2), h) = 1$. For the other blocks, we have corresponding integers $w(3), \cdots, w(h)$. Since no element fixes cosets in two blocks, the $w(i)$ are distinct modulo h. As there are $h - 1$ of them, h is prime.

LEMMA 5.7. *With the notation of* 5.5, *if* G_0 *is the subgroup of* $T(a, b)$ *corresponding to* K_0, *then* $(G_0)^* = G_0$ *and* $k(G_0) = k/h$.

Proof. By definition, $(G_0)^*$ is generated over G_0 by U^s, where s is the least positive integer with $X^{-1}U^sXU^{-s} \in G_0$. The corresponding element of K_0 sends H^* to V_iH^* for some i. Thus, $U^sXH^* = XV_iH^*$. As $XV_iH^* \in [XH^*]$, U^sG^* fixes $[XH^*]$ and $[H^*]$. Thus, $U^s \in G_0$, so that $(G_0)^* = G_0$. From the proof of 5.5, $k(G_0) = n(G_0) = k/h$.

LEMMA 5.8. *If* $k = h^2$, *then* $h|ab$ *and* $h + 1$ *is a prime power.*

Proof. With G_0 as in 5.7, $|T(a, b): G_0| = kt/h^2$, and $k(G_0) = k/h$, so $t(G_0) = h + 1 (= 1 + k(G_0))$. As in § 4, $T(a, b)/G_0$ is Frobenius and $(k/h)|ab$, and $h + 1$ is a prime power.

THEOREM 5.9. *If* $k = h^2 > 1$, *then* $h = 2$ (*with* $K^* \cong S_4$).

Proof. From the previous results, K^*/K_0 is Frobenius of order $h(h + 1)$, $K_0 \cong C_h \times C_h$, h is prime and $h + 1$ a prime power.

If $V \in K^*$ centralizes K_0, then $AVH^* = VAH^* = VH^*$, where A is as in 5.5. Since A fixes cosets in $[H^*]$ only, V fixes $[H^*]$. On considering conjugates of A, V fixes each block setwise, and so belongs to K_0. Hence, there is a monomorphism $K^*/K_0 \rightarrow \mathrm{Aut}(K_0) \cong \mathrm{GL}(2, h)$. Thus, $\mathrm{GL}(2, h)$ has a subgroup which is Frobenius of order $h(h + 1)$. Its kernel N is elementary abelian of order $h + 1$.

If $h > 2$, then $h + 1 = 2^s$, and $N \cap \mathrm{SL}(2, h)$ is elementary-abelian of order at least 2^{s-1}. The only element of order 2 in $\mathrm{SL}(2, h)$ is $-I$, but this is central in $\mathrm{GL}(2, h)$. Hence, $s = 1$, which is impossible.

Thus, $h = 2$, and K^* the semidirect product of $C_2 \times C_2$ by $\mathrm{GL}(2, 2)$, i.e., $K^* \cong S_4$. It is clear that this will occur if and only if one of a and b is even and the other divisible by 3, see 4.8 and

4.9. For the modular group, $\Gamma/\Gamma(4) \cong S_4$.

It follows that we must have strict inequality in 5.3, at least when $t > 6$.

6. A final remark. Our results can be restated as results on finite groups, e.g.,

THEOREM 6.1. *If K is a noncyclic (a, b, k)-group, with $(a, b) = 1$, then,*

$$|K| \geqq \frac{1}{2}k + k^{3/2}/(a'b')^{1/2} .$$

If, in addition, K is simple, then

$$|K| \geqq k^2 + k .$$

The second part is trivial when we observe that, in an obvious notation, $K = K^*$ whenever the former is simple.

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