CONSTRUCTION OF SOME SETS OF MUTUALLY 
ORTHOGONAL LATIN SQUARES

E. T. PARKER

H. F. MacNeish [1] demonstrated constructively the existence of a set of \( t \) mutually orthogonal latin squares of each order \( n \), where \( t \) is one less than the smallest factor of the prime-power decomposition of \( n \). The construction was generalized somewhat and put on an algebraic foundation by H. B. Mann [2; 3, p. 105]. MacNeish [1] conjectured that \( t \) is the maximum number for each \( n \). Had this conjecture been established, answers to two major questions would have been corollaries. These are: (1) the famous conjecture of Euler, dating from 1782, that there exists no pair of orthogonal latin squares of order \( \equiv 2 \pmod{4} \); (2) the conjecture that all finite projective planes are of prime-power orders—for an affine plane of order \( n \) is equivalent to a set of \( n - 1 \) mutually orthogonal latin squares of order \( n \).

The purpose of this paper is to develop a construction yielding some new sets of mutually orthogonal latin squares. The general result is Theorem 1. For a few orders (possibly infinitely many distributed sparsely among the positive integers), Theorem 2 establishes the existence of sets of more than \( t \) mutually orthogonal latin squares; thus MacNeish's conjecture is disproved. Theorem 1 likely yields more than \( t \) for orders other than those covered by Theorem 2, but the author has found no example.

The following lemma is familiar to some, but is apparently not in the literature.

**Lemma.** A set of \( k - 2 \) mutually orthogonal latin squares of order \( n \) is equivalent to a set of \( n^2 \) ordered \( k \)-tuples, \((a_{i1}, a_{i2}, \ldots, a_{ik}), i = 1, \ldots, n^2\), with elements \( a_{ij} \) the numbers \( 1, \ldots, n \), and such that for each pair \( u, v \) of distinct numbers from \( 1, \ldots, k \) and each pair \( x, y \) of numbers from \( 1, \ldots, n \), the relations \( a_{iu} = x \) and \( a_{iv} = y \) both hold for some \( i \) (\( i = 1, \ldots, n^2 \)).

**Proof.** There being exactly \( n^2 \) ordered \( k \)-tuples in the set, \( a_{iu} = x \) and \( a_{iv} = y \) are satisfied for a unique \( i \). Associate the \( n^2 \) \( k \)-tuples with cells of \( k - 2 \) \( n \times n \) matrices, \( a_{i1} \) and \( a_{i2} \) chosen as the row and column indices respectively, and \( a_{ij}, j = 3, \ldots, k \), the digit in this cell of the \((j - 2)\)nd matrix. The conditions on the \( k \)-tuples imply that the \( k - 2 \) matrices are mutually orthogonal latin squares. For when \( u \)
and \( u \) and \( v \) are 1 and 2, each cell of the matrices is accounted for. When \( u = 1 \) and \( v > 2 \), each row of the \((v - 2)\)nd matrix contains each digit—only once, of course. Similarly when \( u = 2 \) and \( v > 2 \), the same holds on columns. For \( u > 2 \) and \( v > 2 \), each ordered pair of digits occurs (once) in some cell of the \((u - 2)\)nd and \((v - 2)\)nd matrices. The converse construction of the set of ordered \( k \)-tuples from the set of mutually orthogonal latin squares is carried out similarly. Since the conditions on the ordered \( k \)-tuples are symmetric on the positions, any distinct pair \( u, v \) from 1, \( \cdots \), \( k \) may be chosen as row and column indices.

The general result is

**Theorem 1.** If there exists a balanced incomplete block design (see [3] for definitions) with \( \lambda = 1 \) and \( k \) the order of a projective plane, then there exists a set of \( k - 2 \) mutually orthogonal latin squares of order \( v \).

**Proof.** A projective plane of order \( k \) can be represented by a doubly transitive set \( S \) of permutations of degree \( k \) with the property that for \( p \) and \( q \) distinct permutations of \( S \), \( pq^{-1} \) fixes at most one of the \( k \) letters [4]. The class of systems \( S \) includes all doubly transitive finite groups, in which only the identity fixes two letters; such groups exist if and only if \( k \) is a prime-power [5]. Whether there exists an \( S \) of any degree \( k \) not a prime-power is equivalent to the unsettled question of existence of a projective plane of order \( k \).

Select an ordering of the \( k \) digits in each block of the design. Retaining the digits, permute the positions by all elements of a system \( S \), thereby generating \( k(k - 1) \) ordered \( k \)-tuples from each block. To the class of ordered \( k \)-tuples already formed, adjoin \((1, 1, \cdots, 1), (2, 2, \cdots, 2), \cdots, (v, v, \cdots, v)\), each of length \( k \). A set of ordered \( k \)-tuples fulfilling the conditions of the lemma has been constructed.

The above construction is not at all unique; some choices of \( v \) and \( k \) can be expected to yield a large number of nonisomorphic sets of \( k - 2 \) mutually orthogonal latin squares. First, a balanced incomplete design is not in general determined within isomorphism by its parameters. Also, for \( k \) the order of a projective plane, there exist nonisomorphic systems \( S \); blocks need not be operated upon by the same \( S \). For the Desarguesian plane of prime-power order \( k \), \( S \) can be any coset of the doubly transitive group of degree \( k \) in which the subgroup fixing a letter is cyclic. Known non-Desarguesian planes determine systems \( S \) which are not groups or cosets of groups.

Theorem 1 is specialized and strengthened slightly to yield

**Theorem 2.** If \( m \) is a Mersenne prime \( > 3 \), or \( m + 1 \) is a Fermat
prime > 3, then there exists a set of $m$ mutually orthogonal latin squares of order $m^2 + m + 1$. (For all orders included in Theorem 2, the construction of MacNeish produces only $t = 2$ orthogonal latin squares.)

Proof. The hypothesis implies that both $m$ and $m+1$ are prime-powers. There exists a projective plane of order $m$; that is, a balanced incomplete block design with $\lambda = 1, v = m^2 + m + 1$, and $k = m + 1$. Also, there exists a projective plane of order $k = m + 1$. The hypothesis of Theorem 1 is fulfilled, so that a set of $k - 2 = m - 1$ mutually orthogonal latin squares of order $v$ may be constructed.

For each prime-power $m$, there exists a Desarguesian plane possessing a collineation which is cyclic on all $v$ points [6]. Thus the set of $v^2$ $k$-tuples may be constructed so that if $(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_k)$ is in the set, then $(x_1 + 1, x_2 + 1, \ldots, x_k + 1)$ is also, the addition being modulo $v$. This means that if cell $(x_1, x_2)$ of latin square $j - 2$ contains digit $x_j$, then cell $(x_1 + 1, x_2 + 1)$ of the same square contains digit $x_j + 1$—again modulo $v$. Thus, in this restricted situation, there is one more latin square orthogonal to all $m - 1$ previously constructed, namely a cyclic square whose $(x_1, x_2)$ cell contains $x_2 - x_1 + 1$ (mod $v$).

In all cases covered by Theorem 2, $m \equiv 1 \pmod{3}$. In turn $v = m^2 + m + 1 \equiv 3 \pmod{9}$, so that $t = 2$ in MacNeish’s construction.

An unfavorable aspect of Theorem 2 is that all orders $v$ of mutually orthogonal latin squares are among those for which Bruck and Ryser [7] have demonstrated nonexistence of projective planes.

Theorem 1 cannot yield the first counter-example to Euler’s conjecture of nonexistence of pairs of orthogonal latin squares of orders $\equiv 2 \pmod{4}$. When the order $v$ of the squares is even, the relation $v - 1 = r(k - 1)$ on parameters (with $\lambda = 1$) of balanced incomplete block designs implies that $r$ is odd and that $k$ is even. In turn, the relation $vr = bk$ yields the information that $k$ is divisible by two to no higher power than is $v$. When $v$ is divisible by two to the first power only, $k$ (necessarily even) is also twice an odd integer. $k = 2$ yields no latin squares. Thus a counter-example based on Theorem 1 would require construction in advance of a projective plane of order $\equiv 2 \pmod{4}$, and $>2$, and a fortiori of a counter-example to Euler’s conjecture.

The first case where Theorem 2 applies is $m = 4$, yielding a set of four mutually orthogonal latin squares of order $4^2 + 4 + 1 = 21$. One is the cyclic square, with digit 1 on the principal diagonal. As pointed out in the proof of Theorem 2, the other three latin squares are generated by the rule: if cell $(x_1, x_2)$ contains digit $x_j$, then cell $(x_1 + 1, x_2 + 1)$ contains $x_j + 1$, all $x$’s modulo 21. A set of first rows of the three latin squares is given by the following ordered lists:
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1, 7, 13, 5, 12, 8, 19, 21, 2, 4, 14, 10, 17, 20, 11, 3, 16, 6, 9, 15, 18;
1, 19, 17, 12, 10, 21, 9, 18, 7, 5, 20, 4, 16, 15, 14, 13, 3, 8, 2, 11, 6;
1, 9, 16, 10, 4, 18, 2, 6, 19, 12, 15, 5, 3, 11, 20, 17, 13, 21, 7, 14, 8.

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REFERENCES


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