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AN ASSOCIATIVE BLOCK DESIGN ABD(8,5)*

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To Maja, on the occasion of her seventeenth birthday.

Abstract. An associative block design is a certain balanced partition of a hypercube into smaller hypercubes. We construct such a design, thus settling the smallest open case.

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An ABD\((k, w)\) is a \(b \times k\) matrix (where \(b = 2^w\)) with entries from \(\{0, 1, *\}\) such that (i) the stars form a 1-design: each row has \(k-w\) stars and each column \(b(k-w)/k\) stars, and (ii) the rows represent disjoint subsets of \(\{0, 1\}^k\). Here a row represents the set of binary vectors of length \(k\) obtained by replacing its stars in all possible ways by 0s and 1s.

This concept was introduced in 1974 by Rivest [4, 5, 6] in order to find a hash function with good worst-case behavior with respect to partial-match queries. For example, the eight rows

\[
\begin{align*}
00*0 & \quad 11*1 \\
100* & \quad 011* \\
*100 & \quad *011 \\
1*10 & \quad 0*01
\end{align*}
\]

form an ABD(4, 3).

In order to save space, let us extend our alphabet with the minus sign, where a row containing \(r\) minus signs stands for the \(2^r\) rows obtained by replacing these minus signs in all possible ways by 0s and 1s. Then the only other ABD(4, 3) is the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
*000 \\
*111 \\
-*10 \\
-0*1 \\
-10*
\end{align*}
\]

The theory is as follows (see [1, 2, 3, 6]).

**Proposition 0.1.** (i) ([6]) An ABD\((k, w)\) has exactly \(bw/(2k)\) 0s and \(bw/(2k)\) 1s in each column. In particular, \(bw/(2k)\) is an integer.

(ii) ([1]) In an ABD\((k, w)\) with \(w > 0\) any given star pattern occurs in an even number of rows. Moreover, among the rows with a given star pattern there are as many with an even number of 1s as with an odd number of 1s.

(iii) For \(w \leq 4\) the only ABD\((k, w)\) are the trivial ones with \(w = 0\) or \(w = k\) (represented, respectively, by a single row of stars or minus signs only) and the two examples shown above.

(iv) ([2]) If \(w > 3\), then \(k \leq w(w-1)/2\).

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(v) ([3]) There is no ABD(10, 5).
(vi) ([6]) If ABD($k_i, w_i$) exist for $i = 1, 2$, then there also is an ABD($k_1 k_2, w_1 w_2$).
(vii) ([1]) Suppose that $k \geq w > 0$ and $k' \geq w' > 0$ and $k' / k \geq w' / k$. Then if an ABD($k, w$) exists, and $2^w w' / (2k')$ is an integer, then ABD($k', w'$) also exists.

One may use generating function arguments to get more detailed information on the possible star patterns. See [1].

The purpose of this note is to show that an ABD(8, 5) exists:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
-0000^{***} & *01*10&0 \\
-0001^{***} & -1*1*11 \\
-01^{***} & **11*001 \\
-**101^{*} & *10*000\* \\
*01*110 & *1*0*001 \\
**01*111 & *100**11 \\
-**111^{0*} & -1*0*10* \\
-1*00^{*} & *1**0110 \\
*010^{*}01 & *1**1000 \\
-1*1**11 & -1**1*10 \\
*010^{*}1*0 & *101*0*1 \\
\end{array}
\]

Now the smallest open case is the question of whether an ABD(12, 6) exists.

Acknowledgment. This note was inspired by a letter from Knuth, who asked whether there had been any progress on ABDs since 1976 and in particular whether the existence of an ABD(8, 5) was still open.

REFERENCES