

## FINITE GROUPS WITH $p$ -SYLOW COVERINGS

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ABSTRACT. In this paper we characterize the finite groups with an irredundant covering containing some  $p$ -Sylow subgroups. In particular we analyze the symmetric and alternating groups, finding their  $p$ -elements having a  $p$ -subgroup as centralizer.

### 1. Introduction

A group  $G$  is said to have a covering by subgroups if  $G$  is the set-theoretic union of its proper subgroups. These subgroups are called components of the covering. The covering is called irredundant if each proper sub-collection of those subgroups fails to cover  $G$ . We will always assume that coverings are irredundant. Covering aspects of groups have been studied by many authors from several different perspectives [2, 3, 9, 13]. A more specific question is covering a group by some special subgroups. For example in [4] the coverings of infinite groups consisting of normal subgroups are investigated and in [8] the authors studied the groups having Hall coverings. See also [5] and [6] for components consisting of conjugates of two subgroups. Here we study the finite groups with components containing Sylow subgroups. Let  $G$  be a finite group and  $p$  a prime, by a  $p$ -Sylow covering of  $G$  we mean an irredundant

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covering of  $G$  containing some  $p$ -Sylow subgroups. Some examples are in order.

**Example 1.1.** • In the Symmetric group  $S_3$ , the family  $\{A_3, \langle(1\ 2)\rangle, \langle(1\ 3)\rangle, \langle(2\ 3)\rangle\}$  is a covering of  $S_3$  whose components are Sylow subgroups of  $S_3$ .

• Let  $G = S_3 \times C_2$ . Then  $G$  has no 3-Sylow covering, but there is a 2-Sylow covering. Of course this covering consists of all Sylow 2-subgroups of  $G$  and the subgroup  $A_3 \times C_2$ .

• Let  $G = C_2 \times C_2 \times C_3$ . There is no 2 or 3-Sylow covering of  $G$ .

These examples raise the following questions:

- (1) Could one cover a given group by its Sylow subgroups?
- (2) Let  $G$  be a group and  $p$  a prime dividing  $|G|$ . When there exists a  $p$ -Sylow covering?
- (3) For a given group  $G$ , is there a  $p$ -Sylow covering for any prime number  $p$  dividing  $|G|$ ?

The first problem has been studied independently by Higman ([7]) and Zacher ([14], [15]) when  $G$  is soluble, by Suzuki ([11]) in the case of a simple group and by Brandl ([1]) in general. A missing case of the last paper was studied by Jabara and Lucido ([8]). In section 2, we provide a necessary and sufficient condition on  $G$  for affirmative answers to the next questions.

If  $G$  is a finite group and  $p$  a prime, a  $p$ -element is an element whose order is a power of  $p$ . A  $p$ -element in  $G$  is called a  $C_{pp}$ -element if its centralizer in  $G$  is a  $p$ -subgroup. Note that  $a \in G$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element if and only if every conjugate of  $a$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element. In section 3, we use the results of section 2 to characterize all symmetric and alternating groups with  $p$ -Sylow coverings. Furthermore we find all  $C_{pp}$ -elements in these groups. Let  $\tau$  be a permutation in  $S_n$  or  $A_n$ ; when we use the statements *a cycle in  $\tau$*  or *a permutation in  $\tau$* , we mean a product of some disjoint cycles which appear in the decomposition of  $\tau$  into the product of disjoint cycles.  $\text{Supp}(\tau)$  is the set of point in  $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  such that  $\tau$  moves them and  $\text{Fix}(\tau) = \{1, 2, \dots, n\} - \text{Supp}(\tau)$ . All unexplained notation is standard (see [12]). It is clear that we have to restrict ourselves to the groups with a proper Sylow subgroup, therefore the groups in this paper are not  $p$ -groups.

## 2. Coverings containing Sylow subgroups

We begin this section by the following theorem providing an answer to the question 2 raised in the previous section.

**Theorem 2.1.** *Let  $G$  be a non-cyclic finite group, and let  $p$  be a prime dividing  $|G|$ . Then  $G$  has a  $p$ -Sylow covering if and only if there exists a  $C_{pp}$ -element in  $G$ .*

**Proof.** Suppose that  $G$  has a covering containing Sylow  $p$ -subgroup  $P$ . If each  $a \in P$  is not a  $C_{pp}$ -element, then there exists an element  $x \in C_G(a)$  such that  $o(x) = q$ , where  $q$  is a prime distinct from  $p$ . Therefore  $ax$  belongs to a component of the covering which is not a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup. So  $(ax)^q = a^q$  belongs to this component and consequently  $a$  does. Therefore each element of  $P$  belongs to another component of the covering, against the irredundancy of the covering.

Conversely, let  $a \in G$  be a  $C_{pp}$ -element. Suppose by contradiction that  $G$  has no  $p$ -Sylow covering. Let  $A_1$  be a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $G$  containing  $a$ . Now we make a covering as follows: First consider  $\{A_1\}$  and then add other Sylow  $p$ -subgroups to this set one by one until they cover all the  $p$ -elements of  $G$ . Then for any other prime  $q$  with  $q$  dividing  $|G|$ , do the same procedure. By this way we obtain a set like  $\mathcal{A} = \{A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n\}$  which is an irredundant covering for the elements of  $G$  whose orders have at most one prime divisor. Define  $\mathcal{B} = \{\langle g \rangle \mid g \in G \setminus \bigcup_{i=1}^n A_i\}$ . Order  $\mathcal{B}$  by inclusion and add the maximal member of each chain in  $\mathcal{B}$  to  $\mathcal{A}$ . Now  $\mathcal{A}$  is a covering for  $G$ . But we supposed that  $G$  has no  $p$ -Sylow covering, therefore all Sylow  $p$ -subgroups of  $G$  can be omitted from  $\mathcal{A}$ . In particular  $A_1$  is a subset of union of some other members in  $\mathcal{A}$ . But then the union of some elements of  $\mathcal{B}$  includes  $A_1$ . Thus there exists a subgroup  $B \in \mathcal{B}$  such that  $a \in B$ . Now by definition of elements of  $\mathcal{B}$ , we have  $B \subseteq C_G(a)$ , against the fact that  $B$  is not a  $p$ -group.  $\square$

It is clear that whenever we mention a  $p$ -Sylow covering for a given group  $G$ , it is not important which Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $G$  is chosen. The following corollary of Theorem 2.1 gives an answer to the third question:

**Corollary 2.2.** *Let  $G$  be a non-cyclic finite group. Then  $G$  has a  $p$ -Sylow covering for each prime  $p$  dividing  $|G|$  if and only if for each  $p$ , there exists a  $C_{pp}$ -element in  $G$ .*

### 3. The symmetric and alternating groups

Let  $n$  be a positive integer and let  $p$  be a prime. Suppose that  $\alpha_1$  is the largest positive integer with  $n \geq p^{\alpha_1}$  and  $\alpha_2$  is the largest positive integer with  $n - p^{\alpha_1} \geq p^{\alpha_2}$  and so on. Thus we have  $n = p^{\alpha_1} + p^{\alpha_2} + \dots + p^{\alpha_t} + r$ , where  $t$  and  $r$  are positive integer,  $0 \leq r \leq p - 1$  and  $\alpha_1 \geq \alpha_2 \geq \dots \alpha_t \geq 0$ . We call this representation the  $p$ -representation of  $n$ . Observe that in any  $p$ -representation the maximum numbers of equal exponents  $\alpha_i$  is  $p - 1$ . Moreover collecting the  $p$ -powers with the same exponent we pass from the  $p$ -representation of  $n$  to the unique representation  $n_{(p)}$  of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ . Now let  $\tau = \tau_1 \tau_2 \dots \tau_t \in S_n$ , where  $\tau_1 = (a_1 \ a_2 \ \dots \ a_{p^{\alpha_1}})$ ,  $\tau_2 = (a_{p^{\alpha_1}+1} \ a_{p^{\alpha_1}+2} \ \dots \ a_{p^{\alpha_1}+p^{\alpha_2}})$ , ...  $\tau_t = (a_{p^{\alpha_1}+\dots+p^{\alpha_{t-1}+1}} \ \dots \ a_{p^{\alpha_1}+\dots+p^{\alpha_t}})$ , such that  $a_i$ 's are in  $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  and pairwise distinct. If a permutation in  $S_n$  has the above form we say it has the  $p$ -form in  $S_n$ .

**Remark 3.1.** Let  $n$  be a positive integer and let  $p$  be a prime. If a representation  $n = p^{\alpha_1} + p^{\alpha_2} + \dots + p^{\alpha_k} + s$  of  $n$  is not the  $p$ -representation, then at least  $p$  integers among the  $a_i$  are equal or  $s \geq p$ .

The following lemma is a corollary in [12], p 297.

**Lemma 3.2.** *If  $\tau$  is a permutation in  $S_n$  and decomposition of  $\tau$  contains exactly  $a_i$   $i$ -cycles, with  $a_i \geq 0$ , then  $|C_{S_n}(\tau)| = \prod (a_i!) i^{a_i}$ , where  $n = a_1 + 2a_2 + \dots + na_n$ .*

**Corollary 3.3.** *For each  $n \geq 3$ , the symmetric group  $S_n$  has a  $C_{22}$ -element. Moreover  $\tau \in S_n$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element if and only if  $\tau$  is a product of  $2^k$ -cycles, with  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ , such that at most two of them have the same length.*

**Proof.** By Lemma 3.2, each permutation with 2-form is a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$ , so for each  $n$ ,  $S_n$  has a  $C_{22}$ -element. The second part follows directly from Lemma 3.2.  $\square$

**Corollary 3.4.** *For each  $n \geq 3$ , the symmetric group  $S_n$  has a 2-Sylow covering.*

**Theorem 3.5.** *Let  $G$  be the symmetric group  $S_n$  for  $n \geq 3$  and let  $p \leq n$  be an odd prime. Then  $G$  has a  $C_{pp}$ -element if and only if 0 and 1 are the only digits appearing in the representation of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ . Moreover in this situation,  $\tau \in S_n$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element if and only if  $\tau$  has the  $p$ -form in  $S_n$ .*

**Proof.** Suppose  $G$  has a  $C_{pp}$ -element  $\tau$  and  $\tau$  consists of  $a_i$   $i$ -cycles with  $i = p^{b_i}$ . By Lemma 3.2,  $\prod_i (a_i!) i^{a_i}$  is a power of  $p$  and  $a_i$ 's are all equal to 1 or 0. Thus  $n = p^{b_1} + p^{b_2} + \dots + p^{b_k} + r$ , where  $b_i$ 's are pairwise distinct and  $r = 0$  or 1. Hence the only digits appearing in the representation of  $n$  in basis  $p$  are 0 and 1.

Conversely suppose 0 and 1 are the only digits appearing in the representation of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ . Under this condition, by Lemma 3.2, each permutation with  $p$ -form is a  $C_{pp}$ -element. On the other hand if the  $p$ -element  $\tau \in S_n$  has not the  $p$ -form, then there are at least  $p$  cycles with the same length. Thus Lemma 3.2 completes the proof.  $\square$

**Corollary 3.6.** *Let  $G$  be the symmetric group  $S_n$  for  $n \geq 3$  and let  $p$  be an odd prime divisor of  $|G|$ . Then  $G$  has a  $p$ -Sylow covering if and only if 0 and 1 are the only digits which appear in the representation of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ .*

**Lemma 3.7.** *For any integer number  $n \geq 7$ , there exists a prime  $p \geq 3$  such that  $p + 4 \leq n < 3p$ .*

**Proof.** We proceed by induction on  $n$ . If  $n = 7$ , then take  $p = 3$ . Now let  $n > 7$  and  $p$  be a prime such that  $p + 4 \leq n < 3p$ . If  $n + 1 < 3p$ , then  $p$  satisfies the property for  $n + 1$ . So let  $n + 1 = 3p$ . Then by Bertrand theorem, there exists a prime  $q$  such that  $p < q < 2p$ . For such a  $q$  we have  $q + 4 \leq 2p + 3 \leq 3p = n + 1 < 3q$ .  $\square$

In the Example 1.1, we had a  $p$ -Sylow covering of  $S_3$  for each prime  $p$  dividing  $|G|$ . Also we have  $4_{(3)} = 11$ , and therefore by Corollaries 3.4 and 3.6,  $S_4$  has a  $p$ -Sylow covering for each prime  $p$  dividing  $|G|$  too.

**Theorem 3.8.** *The groups  $S_3$  and  $S_4$  are the only symmetric groups which have a  $p$ -Sylow covering for each prime  $p \leq n$ .*

**Proof.** In the last paragraph we saw the result for  $n = 3$  and 4. For  $n \in \{5, 6, 7, 8\}$ , 2 appears in  $n_{(3)}$  hence  $S_n$  does not have the covering containing a 3-Sylow subgroup. So let  $n \geq 9$ . By Lemma 3.7, there exists a prime  $p > 3$  such that  $p + 4 \leq n < 3p$ . Let  $P$  be a  $p$ -Sylow subgroup of  $S_n$ . Then  $|P| \leq p^2$ . If  $|P| = p$ , then  $S_4 \leq C_{S_n}(P)$ , hence an element of order 3 centralizes each element in  $P$ . So let  $|P| = p^2$ . If  $\tau$  is an arbitrary element in  $P$ , then  $\tau$  is a  $p$ -cycle or a product of two  $p$ -cycles. In both cases, 2 divides  $|C_{S_n}(\tau)|$  and the result follows from Corollary 3.6.  $\square$

Now we are going to find similar results for the alternating groups.

**Lemma 3.9.** *Let  $2^n + 2^{n-1} + \dots + 2^2 + 2 = 2^{a_1} + 2^{a_2} + \dots + 2^{a_s}$ , where  $a_i \geq 1$ . If these two representations are not the same, then at least three of  $a_i$ 's are equal.*

**proof.** By induction on  $n$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 3.10.** *For  $n \geq 3$ , the alternating group  $A_n$  has a  $C_{22}$ -element if and only if  $n$  does not have the form  $2^{2k} - 1$ , for any  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . Moreover in this situation,  $\tau \in A_n$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element if and only if  $\tau$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$ .*

**Proof.** First suppose that  $n = 2^{2k} - 1$ , where  $k$  is a positive integer. Hence  $n - 1 = 2^m + 2^{m-1} + \dots + 2$ , where  $m$  is an odd number. Let  $\tau$  be a 2-element in  $A_n$ . We show that  $\tau$  is not a  $C_{22}$ -element. If  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| > 2$ , then  $\tau$  commutes with a cycle of length 3. If  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| \leq 2$ , then since  $n$  is an odd number, we get  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| = 1$ . Let  $\tau = \tau_1 \cdots \tau_s$  be the product of disjoint cycles  $\tau_i$  of length  $2^{a_i}$ . Then  $2^{a_1} + 2^{a_2} + \dots + 2^{a_s} = n - 1 = 2^m + 2^{m-1} + \dots + 2$ . These two representations of  $n - 1$  are not the same, since  $s$  is even and  $m$  is odd. Hence by Lemma 3.9, three  $a_i$ 's are equal. Without loss of generality we may assume that  $\tau_1, \tau_2$  and  $\tau_3$  are three disjoint cycles in  $\tau$  with equal length. Now there exists a  $\pi \in S_n$  such that  $\pi^3 = \tau_1 \tau_2 \tau_3$  with  $\pi \in C_{S_n}(\tau)$  and by defining  $\rho = \pi \tau_j$  with  $j \neq 1, 2, 3$ ,  $\rho$  is an element in  $C_{A_n}(\tau)$ . So 3 divides  $|C_{A_n}(\tau)|$ . For the converse suppose that  $n$  does not have the form  $2^{2k} - 1$  for any  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . This condition can be mentioned as: At least one 0 appears in

the representation of  $n$  to the basis 2 or the number of 1's is odd. Take a permutation  $\tau = \tau_1\tau_2 \cdots \tau_t$  in  $S_n$  with 2-form. By definition of 2-form, each length of cycle appears at most one time, thus according to Lemma 3.2, we have that  $\tau$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$ . If all the digits of  $n$  to the basis 2 are 1, then  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| = 1$  and the number of cycles in  $\tau$  are even, so  $\tau \in A_n$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element. Hence suppose that at least one 0 appears in the representation of  $n$  to the basis 2 and  $\tau \notin A_n$ . Then we have two cases:

*Case (i).* If we have just one 0 in the right side digit of  $n_{(2)}$ , i.e.,  $n_{(2)} = 11 \cdots 10$ , then we put  $\tau' = \tau_1 \cdots \tau_{t-1}$ . Now  $\tau'$  is a permutation in  $A_n$  with  $|\text{Fix}(\tau')| = 2$  and the result follows from Lemma 3.2.

*Case (ii).* If the digit 0 appears in another position, we define  $\alpha_{t+1} = 0$ . In this situation, we have at least one  $\alpha_i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq t$ , such that  $\alpha_i > \alpha_{i+1} + 1$ . Let  $\tau' = \tau_1 \cdots \tau_{i-1} \tau_i^2 \tau_{i+1} \cdots \tau_t$ , then  $\tau' \in A_n$ . We may write  $\tau_i^2 = \pi_1 \pi_2$ , where  $\pi_1$  and  $\pi_2$  are distinct cycles of length  $2^{\alpha_i-1} > 2^{\alpha_{i+1}}$ . Hence  $\tau' \in A_n$ . Since  $\pi_1$  and  $\pi_2$  are the only cycles in  $\tau'$  with equal length, by Lemma 3.2, the order of  $|C_{S_n}(\tau')|$  is a power of 2 and the result follows.

For the second part it is enough to show that if a 2-element  $\tau \in A_n$  contains three cycles with the same length, then it is not a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $A_n$ . This is clear if  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| \geq 3$ . Hence let  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| \leq 2$ , by defining  $\rho$  as above, we conclude that 3 divides  $|C_{A_n}(\tau)|$  and we are done.  $\square$

**Remark 3.11.** The set of  $C_{22}$ -elements of  $A_n$  coincides with the set of  $C_{22}$ -elements of  $S_n$  if and only if  $n = 2^{2k+1} - 1$  for some  $k \in \mathbb{N}$  and it is constituted by the elements in 2-form. Suppose that  $n = 2^{2k+1} - 1$ , and let  $\tau$  be a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$ . If  $\tau$  has 2-form in  $S_n$ , then  $\tau$  belongs to  $A_n$  and we are finished. Suppose that  $\tau$  does not have the 2-form. Since  $n$  is odd,  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)|$  must be odd and since  $C_{S_n}(\tau)$  is a 2-group, we get  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| = 1$ . If  $\tau$  is the product of disjoint cycles of lengths  $2^{a_1}, \dots, 2^{a_s}, 1$ , we obtain  $2^{a_1} + \dots + 2^{a_s} = 2^{2k} + 2^{2k-1} + \dots + 2$  and these two representations are different. Thus by Lemma 3.9, there are three cycles with the same length, against the fact that  $C_{S_n}(\tau)$  is a 2-group. Now suppose that  $n \neq 2^{2k+1} - 1$ , and let  $\tau$  be a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$  with 2-form. If  $\tau$  does not belong to  $A_n$  we are finished. Let  $\tau \in A_n$ . Then  $n \neq 2^{2k} - 1$ , and hence at least one zero appears in  $n_{(2)}$ . Define  $\tau'$  as in the cases (i) or (ii) of the last theorem. Now  $\tau'$  is a  $C_{22}$ -element in  $S_n$  which does not belong to  $A_n$ .

**Corollary 3.12.** *For  $n \geq 3$ , the alternating group  $A_n$  has a 2-Sylow covering if and only if  $n$  does not have the form  $2^{2^k} - 1$ , for any  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ .*

**Theorem 3.13.** *Let  $n \geq 4$ . For each odd prime  $p$  dividing  $|A_n|$ ,  $A_n$  has a  $C_{pp}$ -element if and only if 0, 1 and 2 are the only digits appearing in the representation of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ , and 2 appears at most once. Moreover in this situation,  $\tau \in A_n$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element, for a prime  $p \geq 5$  if and only if  $\tau$  has the  $p$ -form in  $S_n$ , and  $\tau \in A_n$  is a  $C_{33}$ -element if and only if  $\tau$  is the product of disjoint  $3^k$ -cycles such that their lengths are pairwise different except at most three of them.*

**Proof.** Let  $p \leq n$  be a prime and let  $\tau \in A_n$  be a  $C_{pp}$ -element consisting of  $a_i \geq 1$   $i$ -cycles, where  $i$  is a power of  $p$ . Remembering that for each  $\sigma \in A_n$ ,  $|C_{S_n}(\sigma)| = \epsilon |C_{A_n}(\sigma)|$ , with  $\epsilon = 1$  or 2, by Lemma 3.2,  $|C_{S_n}(\tau)| = \prod_i (a_i!) i^{a_i} = \epsilon p^m$ , where  $m$  is a positive integer. Now either we have  $a_i = 1$  for all  $i$  or there exists just one  $j$  such that  $a_j \neq 1$ . In the second case if  $p = 3$ , then  $a_j = 2$  or 3 and if  $p \neq 3$ , then  $a_j = 2$ . Thus  $n = p^{b_1} + \dots + p^{b_k}$ , where  $b_i \in \mathbb{N}$  and at most two of them are equal. Therefore the digits of  $n_{(p)}$  consist of 0, 1 and at most one 2.

Conversely, by the hypothesis, in the  $p$ -representation of  $n$  either  $r = 0$ , 1 and at most  $\alpha_j$  and  $\alpha_{j+1}$  are equal or  $r = 2$  and  $\alpha_i$ 's are pairwise distinct. Consider a permutation  $\tau$  with the  $p$ -form in  $S_n$ . If 2 does not appear in  $n_{(p)}$ , then  $\tau$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element in  $A_n$ . Otherwise  $\tau$  commutes with a cycle of length  $2p^{\alpha_j}$  or 2, hence  $C_{A_n}(\tau)$  has index 2 in  $C_{S_n}(\tau)$ . On the other hand, by Lemma 3.2,  $|C_{S_n}(\tau)| = 2p^m$ , where  $m$  is a positive integer, whence  $|C_{A_n}(\tau)|$  is a power of  $p$ .

Now suppose  $n_{(p)}$  has the right digits. Let  $p \neq 3$ , we know that each permutation in  $A_n$  with  $p$ -form is a  $C_{pp}$ -element in  $A_n$ . Now suppose  $\tau \in A_n$  does not have the  $p$ -form. Therefore there exist at least  $p$  cycles with equal length  $p^{m_1}$ , so 3 divides  $|C_{A_n}(\tau)|$  and  $\tau$  is not a  $C_{pp}$ -element. Now let  $p = 3$ . If  $\tau$  has at most three cycles of equal length  $3^{m_1}$ , then the only elements in  $C_{S_n}(\tau)$  which are not 3-element are products of cycles of length  $3^k$  and  $3^{m_2}$  cycles of length  $2 \cdot 3^{m_3}$  where  $m_2 + m_3 = m_1$ , but these permutations do not belong to  $A_n$ . If  $\tau$  does not satisfy the hypothesis, then it includes four disjoint cycles  $\sigma_i$ ,  $i = 1, 2, 3, 4$ , such that  $o(\sigma_1) = o(\sigma_2) = 3^{m_4}$  and  $o(\sigma_3) = o(\sigma_4) = 3^{m_5}$  (not necessarily  $m_4 \neq m_5$ ). Now we have two disjoint cycles with lengths  $2 \cdot 3^{m_4}$  and  $2 \cdot 3^{m_5}$  in  $C_{S_n}(\tau)$  and their product belongs to  $A_n$  so we are done.  $\square$



**Corollary 3.14.** *Let  $n \geq 4$  and let  $p \leq n$  be an odd prime. Then  $A_n$  has a  $p$ -Sylow covering if and only if 0,1 and 2 are the only digits appearing in the representation of  $n$  to the basis  $p$ , and 2 appears at most once.*

**Theorem 3.15.** *The groups  $A_n$  for  $n \in \{4, 5, 6, 7\}$  are the only alternating groups which have a  $p$ -Sylow covering for each prime  $p$  dividing  $|A_n|$ .*

**Proof.** For  $n \leq 8$  we can directly check the result by Corollaries 3.12 and 3.14. Let  $n \geq 9$ . If  $n - 3$  has a prime divisor  $q > 3$ , then  $n \equiv 3 \pmod{q}$  and by Corollary 3.14, the  $q$ -Sylow covering does not exist. Otherwise 2 and 3 are the only prime divisors of  $n - 3$ . If  $n - 3$  is not a prime power, then  $n - 4$  has an odd prime divisor  $r \geq 5$ , so  $n \equiv 4 \pmod{r}$  and again the result follows from Corollary 3.14. So let  $n - 3$  is a power of 2 or 3. From Lemma 3.7, there exists a prime  $p > 3$  such that  $p + 4 \leq n < 3p$ . Let  $P$  be a  $p$ -Sylow subgroup of  $A_n$ . If  $|P| = p$  then the result follows by the same argument as in Theorem 3.8. Let  $|P| = p^2$ . Suppose that  $\tau$  is a  $C_{pp}$ -element in  $P$ . Clearly  $|\text{Fix}(\tau)| \leq 2$  and  $\tau$  is a product of two cycles of length  $p$ . So  $|C_{S_n}(\tau)| = 2|C_{A_n}(\tau)| = 2p^2 \cdot |\text{Fix}(\tau)|!$ . Therefore  $n = 2p$  or  $n = 2p + 1$ . Now the only possible case is  $n - 3 = 2p - 2 = 2^\alpha$ , where  $\alpha$  is a positive integer. But in this case  $n - 4$  has an odd prime divisor greater than 3 and this completes the proof.  $\square$

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