On fixed-point-free automorphisms

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ABSTRACT

Let $R$ be a cyclic group of prime order which acts on the extraspecial group $F$ in such a way that $F = [F, R]$. Suppose $RF$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$ and $(|R|, |G|) = 1$. It is proved that $F(C_G(R)) \subseteq F(G)$. As corollaries to this, it is shown that the Fitting series of $C_G(R)$ coincides with the intersections of $C_G(R)$ with the Fitting series of $G$, and that when $|R|$ is not a Fermat prime, the Fitting heights of $C_G(R)$ and $G$ are equal.

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1. Introduction

If a group $A$ acts on a group $G$ in such a way that $C_G(A) = 1$, then one can often say something about the structure of $G$ given properties of $A$. For example, due to a result of V. Belyaev and B. Hartley [1, Theorem 0.11], if $A$ is nilpotent, then $G$ is soluble. It was conjectured by J. Thompson [11] that the Fitting height of a soluble group $G$, denoted $f(G)$, is bounded by a function of the order of one of its Carter subgroups (a Carter subgroup is a self-normalising nilpotent subgroup, and in any soluble group there is a single conjugacy class of such subgroups). It is applicable here since if a nilpotent group $A$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(A) = 1$, then $AG$ is a soluble group and $A$ is a

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Carter subgroup. J. Thompson proved his conjecture in the case where \(|A|, |G| = 1\). The bounds he obtained were improved in numerous papers that followed, most notably, linear bounds were found by H. Kurzweil [9] and best-possible by A. Turull [13]. This conjecture is a special case of the more general Fitting height conjecture, which can be stated as follows:

Let \(A\) be a group which acts on the soluble group \(G\) so that \(C_G(A) = 1\). Then the Fitting height of \(G\) is bounded above by the length of the longest chain of subgroups in \(A\).

This has been largely settled when \(A\) is soluble of coprime order to \(G\); many of these results are collected in [12]. Much of the recent work towards settling the Fitting height conjecture when \(|A|\) is not assumed to be coprime to \(|G|\) has concerned when \(A\) is cyclic. For example, it has been proved when \(A\) is cyclic of order a product of two and three distinct primes by K. Cheng [2] and G. Erkan and İ. Güloğlu [5] respectively. Further work has been done by G. Erkan in [3], where \(A\) is cyclic of order \(p^nq\) for primes \(p\) and \(q\) greater than 3 and \(n \in \mathbb{N}\).

However, E. Khukhro has taken a slightly different approach, and has considered the case where \(A\) has a nilpotent subgroup \(B\) so that \(C_G(B) = 1\) and has asked: Can we bound the Fitting height of \(G\) in terms of how elements outside of \(B\) act on \(G\)? In particular, he has considered the case where \(A\) is a Frobenius group and has proved the following:

**Theorem 1.1** (Khukhro). Suppose that a finite group \(G\) admits a Frobenius group of automorphisms \(FH\) with kernel \(F\) and complement \(H\) so that \(C_G(F) = 1\). Then:

1. \(F_i(C_G(H)) = F_i(G) \cap C_G(H)\) for all \(i\); and
2. \(f(G) = f(C_G(H))\).

**Proof.** See [7, Theorem 2.1]. \(\square\)

Since Frobenius kernels are nilpotent, E. Khukhro is still considering the situation where a nilpotent group acts fixed-point-freely on a group \(G\), but there is also an ‘additional’ action which comes from the complement \(H\); and indeed it is in terms of the action of this complement that he obtains structural information about \(G\), namely, that its Fitting height is equal to that of the fixed-point subgroup of \(H\).

In what follows, we also consider the situation where a group \(A\) acts on a group \(G\) in such a way that for some nilpotent subgroup \(B < A\), we have \(C_G(B) = 1\), and we obtain structural information about \(G\) in terms of how elements outside of this nilpotent subgroup act on \(G\). Namely, we prove the following:

**Theorem 1.2.** Let \(R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r\) for some prime \(r\) and \(F\) be extraspecial. Suppose that \(R\) acts on \(F\) in such a way that \(F = [F, R]\), and that \(RF\) acts on a group \(G\) so that \(C_G(F) = 1\) and \((r, |G|) = 1\). Then \(F(C_G(R)) \subseteq F(G)\).
From this we obtain the following corollaries which reflect more obviously the recent work of E. Khukhro.

**Corollary 1.3.** Let $R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r$ for some prime $r$ and $F$ be extraspecial. Suppose that $R$ acts on $F$ in such a way that $F = [F, R]$, and that $RF$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$ and $(r, |G|) = 1$. Then $F_i(C_G(R)) = F_i(G) \cap C_G(R)$ for all $i$.

**Corollary 1.4.** Let $R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r$ for some non-Fermat prime $r$ and $F$ be extraspecial. Suppose that $R$ acts on $F$ in such a way that $F = [F, R]$, and that $RF$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$ and $(r, |G|) = 1$. Then $f(C_G(R)) = f(G)$.

It should be mentioned that by a theorem of A. Turull [13], we already have that $f(G) \leq f(C_G(R)) + 2$, even without any $F$.

In Section 2 we set some notation and recall some results which will be needed in the proof of Theorem 1.2. We will then prove Theorem 1.2 and Corollaries 1.3 and 1.4 in Section 3. The proof of Theorem 1.2 proceeds by considering a counterexample with $|RFG|$ minimal. A series of reductions are made until we find that $G = QV$ where $Q$ is an $RF$-invariant Sylow $q$-subgroup of $G$, and $V = F(G)$ is minimal normal in $RFG$. Hence, $V$ is an irreducible $\mathbb{F}_p[RFQ]$-module on which $Q$ acts faithfully. We then consider $\overline{V}$, which we take to be an irreducible $k[RFQ]$-submodule of $W = V \otimes_{\mathbb{F}_p} k$ where $k$ is a splitting field for $RFQ$. This is also a module on which $Q$ acts faithfully. We obtain a contradiction by finding that the nontrivial subgroup $1 \neq O_{q_i}(C_G(R)) \subseteq Q$ acts trivially on $\overline{V}$.

After the present paper was submitted, the authors were informed by the referee about a recent paper by G. Erçan and İ. Güloğlu [4]. Here they consider a soluble finite group $G$ admitting a ‘Frobenius-like’ group of automorphisms $FR$ of odd order such that $|F'|$ is of prime order, $C_G(F) = 1$, and $(|G|, |R|) = 1$. ‘Frobenius-like’ means that $F$ is a nilpotent normal subgroup and $F/RF'$ is a Frobenius group with Frobenius kernel $F/F'$ and complement $R$.) Theorem A of that paper asserts that $F_i(C_G(R)) = F_i(G) \cap C_G(R)$ for all $i$ and $f(C_G(R)) = f(G)$. These results are of course very similar to Corollaries 1.3 and 1.4 of the present paper. They are more general in the sense they do not require $R$ to be of prime order, but less general in their stipulation that $RF$ must be of odd order. Furthermore, the authors were also made aware that [4] contains Proposition C, which can be used to significantly shorten the proof of Theorem 1.2 of the present paper. This proposition is as follows.

**Proposition 1.5** (Erçan–Güloğlu). Let $FH$ be a Frobenius-like group such that $F'$ is of prime order and $|F', H| = 1$. Suppose that $FH$ acts on a $q$-group $Q$ for some prime $q$ coprime to the order of $H$. Let $V$ be a $kQFH$-module where $k$ is a field with characteristic not dividing $|QH|$. Suppose further that $F$ acts fixed-point freely on the semidirect product $VQ$. Then we have

$$\text{Ker}(C_Q(H) \text{ on } C_V(H)) = \text{Ker}(C_Q(H) \text{ on } V).$$
We will make it clear later how Proposition 1.5 can be used to shorten the proof of Theorem 1.2.

2. Preliminaries

Let $G$ be a group. Then the Fitting subgroup, denoted $F(G)$, is the largest normal nilpotent subgroup of $G$. If we set $F_0(G) = 1$ and $F_1(G) = F(G)$, then we define $F_i(G)$ to be the full inverse image of $F(G/F_{i-1}(G))$ in $G$, for $i \geq 1$. Note that if $G$ is soluble, then there exists $n \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{0\}$ such that $F_n(G) = G$, and the smallest such $n$ is called the Fitting height of $G$. We denote this by $f(G)$.

The Frattini subgroup, denoted $\Phi(G)$, is defined to be the intersection of all maximal subgroups of $G$. We note that $\Phi(G) \subseteq F(G)$, and if $G \neq 1$, then $\Phi(G) \neq F(G)$. Also, for $N \trianglelefteq G$, we have $\Phi(N) \subseteq \Phi(G)$.

The next couple results highlight some very useful properties of the Fitting and Frattini subgroups.

**Lemma 2.1.** Let $G$ be a $p$-group such that $Z(\Phi(G)) \leq Z(G)$. Then $\Phi(G) \leq Z(G)$.

**Proof.** Let $\overline{G} = G/Z(G)$ and let $N$ be the inverse image of $\Omega_1(Z(\overline{G}))$. We obtain that $[N, \Phi(G)] = 1$. In particular, $N \cap \Phi(G) \leq Z(\Phi(G))$, and so by hypothesis, $N \cap \Phi(G) \leq Z(G)$. Then $\Omega_1(Z(\overline{G})) \cap \Phi(G) = 1$. As $\Phi(G) \leq \overline{G}$ and $\overline{G}$ is a $p$-group, this implies $\overline{\Phi(G)} = 1$. \square

The following is a well-known generalisation of a theorem of Gaschütz [10, Theorem 1.12].

**Lemma 2.2.** Let $X$ be a group and $G \trianglelefteq X$. Set

$$V = F(G)/(\Phi(X) \cap G).$$

1. $V = F(G/(\Phi(X) \cap G))$;
2. $V$ is a completely reducible $X$-module, possibly of mixed characteristic (by which we mean $V = V_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n$ where for each $i$ there exists a field $\mathbb{F}_i$ such that $V_i$ is an $\mathbb{F}_i[X]$-module).

One of the hypotheses of Theorem 1.2 is that the extraspecial group $F$ acts on the group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$. The nilpotence of $F$ here not only tells us that $G$ is soluble, but also gives very useful information about the action of $F$ on the Sylow subgroups of $G$ and $G/N$ for some $F$-invariant normal subgroup $N \trianglelefteq G$.

**Theorem 2.3** (Belyaev–Hartley). Let $A$ be a finite nilpotent group which acts on a finite group $G$ so that $C_G(A) = 1$. Then $G$ is soluble.

**Proof.** See [1, Theorem 0.11]. \square
Lemma 2.4. Suppose that a finite group $G$ admits a group $RF$ of automorphisms where $RF$ is the split extension of the nilpotent group $F$ by $R$. Suppose further that $C_G(F) = 1$. Then there is a unique $RF$-invariant Sylow $p$-subgroup of $G$ for each prime $p \in \pi(G)$.

Proof. See [8, Lemma 2.6].

Lemma 2.5. Let $G$ be a finite group admitting a nilpotent group $F$ of automorphisms such that $C_G(F) = 1$. If $N$ is a normal $F$-invariant subgroup of $G$, then $C_{G/N}(F) = 1$.

Proof. See [8, Lemma 2.2].

Throughout the proof of Theorem 1.2, we will often encounter the action of $RF$ on some direct product. We now set some notation and state some results which will be very useful to us when considering these actions.

Definition 2.6. Let $G$ be a group which acts on the set $\Omega$. Then we define:

1. $\text{Mov}_\Omega(G) = \{ \alpha \in \Omega \mid \alpha^g \neq \alpha \text{ for some } g \in G \}$; and
2. $\text{Fix}_\Omega(G) = \{ \alpha \in \Omega \mid \alpha^g = \alpha \text{ for all } g \in G \}$.

Lemma 2.7. Let $RG$ be a group and $V$ an irreducible $RG$-module on which $G$ acts faithfully. Suppose $V = V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n$ where each $V_i$ is a $G$-submodule of $V$. Let $H \leq RG$ be such that $H \subseteq C_G(V_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n)$ and $G = \langle H^{RG} \rangle$. Then $G = G_0 \times \cdots \times G_n$ where $G_i = C_G(V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_{i-1} \oplus V_{i+1} \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n)$.

Proof. First note that $H \subseteq G_0$. Let $x \in RG$, and suppose $V_0^x = V_i$. Let $h \in H$ and $v \in V_j \neq V_i$. Then $v^{-1}g = v$, and so $[v^{-1}h, v] = 1$. Hence $v^h = v$. Therefore, $h \in G_i$, and so we obtain that $G = \langle H^{RG} \rangle \subseteq G_0 \cdots G_n$. Note that each $G_i$ is normal in $G$ as the kernel of an action. Suppose there exists an $i$ such that $G_i \cap \prod_{j \neq i} G_j \neq 1$, and let $1 \neq g \in G_i \cap \prod_{j \neq i} G_j$. Then $g$ centralises $V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_{i-1} \oplus V_{i+1} \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n$ since $g \in G_i$, and centralises $V_i$ since $g \in \prod_{j \neq i} G_j$. Thus $g$ is a nontrivial element of $G$ which centralises $V$. This is a contradiction since $V$ is a faithful $G$-module. Thus $G = G_i \times \prod_{j \neq i} G_j$. By induction it follows that $G = G_0 \times \cdots \times G_n$. $\square$

Lemma 2.8. Let $G$ be a group which acts on a group $H = H_0 \times \cdots \times H_n$ in such a way that $C_H(G) = 1$ and for each $H_i \in \{ H_0, \ldots, H_n \}$ and $g \in G$ we have $H_i^g \in \{ H_0, \ldots, H_n \}$.

Let $G_0 = N_G(H_0)$. Then $C_{H_0}(G_0) = 1$.

Proof. Note that by induction, we may assume that $G$ is transitive on $\{ H_0, \ldots, H_n \}$. Now let $T = \{ g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_n \}$ be a set of representatives for the right cosets of $G_0$ in $G$.

Suppose $C_{H_0}(G_0) \neq 1$, and choose $1 \neq h \in C_{H_0}(G_0)$. Let $\hat{h} = \prod h^g_i$. We claim that $\hat{h}$ is fixed by $G$.

First note that elements in a common coset of $G_0$ in $G$ act in the same way on $h$. Let $g_i \in G_0g_i$, so $g_i = gg_i$ for some $g \in G_0$. Then $h^g_i = h^{gg_i} = h^{g_i}$. 

Now notice that the $h^{g_i}$ commute. This follows since for distinct $g_i, g_j \in T$, $h^{g_i}$ and $h^{g_j}$ lie in distinct $H_k$. For any $g \in G$, the set $Tg$ is another set of representatives for $G_0$ in $G$. Therefore, $\{h^{g_i}\} = \{h^{g_i}\}$. Hence, $\hat{h}^g = (\prod\{h^{g_i}\})^g = \prod\{h^{g_i}\} = \prod\{h^{g_i}\} = \hat{h}$ since the $h^{g_i}$ commute. □

We now finish this section by outlining some of the representation theoretic results which we will require throughout Section 3.

**Lemma 2.9.** Let $A = \langle a \rangle$ be a cyclic group which acts semiregularly on the abelian group $N$. Let $V$ be a faithful $\mathbb{F}[AN]$-module where $AN$ is the split extension of $N$ by $A$. Assume that $\text{char}(\mathbb{F})$ and $|N|$ are coprime and $C_V(N) = 0$. Then $V_A$ is free.

**Proof.** This is a special case of [7, Lemma 1.3]. □

**Theorem 2.10** (Flavell). Let $r$ be a prime, $R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r$ and $P$ an $r'$-group on which $R$ acts. Let $V$ be a faithful irreducible $RP$-module over a field of characteristic $p$ such that $C_V(R) = 0$. Then either:

1. $[R, P] = 1$; or
2. $[R, P]$ is a nonabelian special 2-group and $r = 2^n + 1$ for some $n \in \mathbb{N}$.

**Proof.** See [6, Theorem A]. □

3. **Proof of the main result**

The main aim of this section is to prove Theorem 1.2.

Let $R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r$ for some prime $r$ act on the extraspecial $s$-group $F$ in such a way that $F = [F, R]$. Then, clearly, $r \neq s$ and $C_F(R) \subseteq \Phi(F)$. In what follows we will show that if $RF$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$, then $F(C_C(R)) \subseteq F(G)$. The proof will proceed by considering a minimal counterexample $RFG$. Thus we must have $C_F(R) = Z(F)$. Otherwise $C_F(R) = 1$; but we know that a counterexample does not exist in this case by Theorem 1.1. Hence, we will establish Theorem 1.2 by proving the following:

**Theorem 3.1.** Let $R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r$ for some prime $r$ and $F$ be an extraspecial $s$-group. Suppose that $R$ acts on $F$ in such a way that $[R, Z(F)] = 1$ and $RF/Z(F)$ is a Frobenius group. Suppose further that $RF$ acts on a group $G$ so that $C_G(F) = 1$ and $(r, |G|) = 1$. Then $F(C_C(R)) \subseteq F(G)$.

**Proof.** Since $F$ is nilpotent, the condition $C_G(F) = 1$ forces $G$ to be soluble by Theorem 2.3. We begin by considering a counterexample with $|RFG|$ minimal. So $F(C_C(R)) \notin F(G)$. For notational purposes set $X = RFG$, so $G \trianglelefteq X$. 


Lemma 3.2. With $G$ and $X$ as above, we obtain that $F(G)$ is a completely reducible $X$-module.

Proof. We know by Lemma 2.2 that $F(G)/(\Phi(X) \cap G)$ is a completely reducible module for $X$. We work to show that $\Phi(X) \cap G = 1$. Suppose that $\Phi(X) \cap G \neq 1$ and set $\overline{G} = G/(\Phi(X) \cap G)$. By minimality, we have $F(C_G(R)) \leq F(\overline{G})$. We also have by Lemma 2.2 that $\overline{F(G)} = F(\overline{G})$. Now $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \leq F(C_G(R))$, and so $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \leq \overline{F(G)}$. Hence

$$F(C_G(R))(\Phi(X) \cap G) \leq F(G)(\Phi(X) \cap G) = F(G).$$

However, this is a contradiction since $F(C_G(R)) \not\subseteq F(G)$. \qed

Lemma 3.3. There exists a prime $p$ such that $F(G) = O_p(G)$ is an irreducible $X$-module.

Proof. We know from Lemma 3.2 that $F(G)$ is a completely reducible $X$-module. Suppose that $F(G)$ is not an irreducible $X$-module, and let $U$ and $V$ denote two distinct irreducible $X$-submodules. Clearly, $U \cap V = 1$. Therefore, $G$ embeds into $G/U \times G/V$ by the injective map given by $\phi(g) = (gU, gV)$.

Now let $\overline{G} = G/U$. Then $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \leq F(C_G(R)) \leq \overline{F(G)}$ where the inclusion on the right follows by minimality. Thus it follows that $\overline{F(C_G(R)) \overline{G}} \leq \overline{F(G)}$. Similarly, if we set $\overline{G} = G/V$, then $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \overline{G} \leq F(\overline{G})$. So the image of $\overline{F(C_G(R))}$ under $\phi$ is nilpotent. However, since $\phi$ is injective, $\overline{F(C_G(R))}$ must also be nilpotent. So $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \subseteq F(G)$, since $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \subseteq G$. This is a contradiction since $F(C_G(R)) \not\subseteq F(G)$. \qed

For notational purposes set $F(G) = V$.

Lemma 3.4. There exists a nontrivial RF-invariant Sylow $q$-subgroup $Q$ of $G$ such that $G = QV$ for some prime $q \neq p$.

Proof. Set $\overline{G} = G/V$. By minimality we have $\overline{F(C_G(R))} \leq \overline{F(G)}$. Now $F(C_G(R)) \not\subseteq F(G)$, and so there exists a prime $q \neq p$ so that $O_q(C_G(R)) \neq 1$. By the above, we obtain that $O_q(C_G(R)) \leq O_q(\overline{G})$. Let $K$ denote the full inverse image of $O_q(\overline{G})$ in $G$. So $O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq K \subseteq RF \subseteq G$. Now $K$ is RF-invariant, hence $C_K(F) = 1$. By Lemma 2.4, there exists a unique RF-invariant Sylow $q$-subgroup $Q$ of $K$. Thus $K = QV$. However, $F(K) = V$, and so by minimality it follows that $G = K$. \qed

Lemma 3.5. Let $1 \neq H \leq O_q(C_G(R))$. Then $Q = \langle H^F \rangle$.

Proof. By Lemma 3.4, $G = QV$ where $Q$ is an RF-invariant Sylow $q$-subgroup of $G$. By coprime action, we obtain that $O_q(C_G(R)) \leq Q$.

Set $Q_0 = \langle H^{RF} \rangle$. Then $Q_0 = \langle H^F \rangle$, since $H$ is centralised by $R$. Suppose $Q_0 < Q$, and set $G_0 = Q_0V$. Now $C_G(V) = V$, and so $O_q(G_0) = 1$. By minimality, we obtain that
\[ F(C_{G_0}(R)) \leq F(G_0) = V. \] However, \( 1 \neq H \subseteq F(C_{G_0}(R)) \). This contradiction forces \( Q_0V = G_0 = G = QV \), and so \( Q_0 = Q \). \( \square \)

We may consider \( V \) as an irreducible \( \mathbb{F}_p[RFQ] \)-module. We now extend the ground field to a splitting field \( k \) for \( RFQ \), and consider \( W = V \otimes_{\mathbb{F}_p} k \). Henceforth, let \( \overline{V} \) be an irreducible \( k[RFQ] \)-submodule of \( W \).

**Lemma 3.6.** \( Q \) acts faithfully on \( \overline{V} \) and \( C_\Sigma(F) = 0 \).

**Proof.** Suppose \( Q \) does not act faithfully on \( \overline{V} \). Then there exists \( 1 \neq K \subseteq Q \) with \( K \leq RFQ \) so that \( C_\Sigma(K) = \overline{V} \). Now \( C_\Sigma(K) \subseteq C_W(K) = C_V(K) \otimes_{\mathbb{F}_p} k \), and so \( C_V(K) \neq 0 \). Since \( K \leq RFQ \), it follows that \( C_V(K) \) is normalised by \( RFQ \). By the irreducibility of \( V \), we have \( C_V(K) = V \). However, \( Q \) acts faithfully on \( V \).

The second claim follows as \( C_W(F) = C_V(F) \otimes_{\mathbb{F}_p} k = 0 \) and \( C_\Sigma(F) \subseteq C_W(F) \). \( \square \)

**Lemma 3.7.** \( [C_\Sigma(R), O_q(C_G(R))] = 0 \).

**Proof.** Note that \( C_G(R) = C_V(R)C_Q(R) \) where \( C_V(R) \leq C_G(R) \). Thus

\[ [C_V(R), O_q(C_G(R))] = C_V(R) \cap O_q(C_G(R)) = 1. \]

By considering \( C_V(R) \) as an \( \mathbb{F}_p[O_q(C_G(R))] \)-module, we obtain that \( [C_W(R), O_q(C_G(R))] = 0 \). Since \( C_\Sigma(R) \subseteq C_W(R) \), it follows that \( [C_\Sigma(R), O_q(C_G(R))] = 0 \). \( \square \)

At this stage we note that we could invoke Proposition 1.5 to finish the proof of Theorem 1.2. As \( O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq C_Q(R) \), Proposition 1.5 together with Lemma 3.7 tells us that \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) acts trivially on \( \overline{V} \). However, since \( Q \) is faithful on \( \overline{V} \), we obtain that \( O_q(C_G(R)) = 1 \). It follows that \( F(C_G(R)) \subseteq F(G) \), which is a contradiction. We will now continue the proof of Theorem 1.2 without an appeal to Proposition 1.5.

**Lemma 3.8.** Suppose \( \overline{V} \) is an imprimitive module for \( RFQ \). Then \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) centralises any block which is not normalised by \( R \).

**Proof.** Let \( \overline{V} = U_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus U_n \) where the \( U_i \) are blocks of imprimitivity in the action of \( RFQ \) on \( \overline{V} \), and set \( \Omega = \{ U_0, \ldots, U_n \} \). Let \( R = \langle a \rangle \). We want to show that \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) centralises

\[ U = \bigoplus_{U_i \in \text{Mov}_\Omega(R)} U_i. \]

Clearly, \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) acts on \( \text{Mov}_\Omega(R) \). Let \( U_i \in \text{Mov}_\Omega(R) \), and consider

\[ U' = \bigoplus_{j=1}^{r} U_i^{a^j}. \]
Then for $u \in U_i$, $w = u + u^a + \cdots + u^{a^{r-1}}$ is centralised by $R$. Thus it is also centralised by $O_q(C_G(R))$. Hence, $U'$ is normalised by $O_q(C_G(R))$. An $r$-cycle in Sym($r$) is self-centralising, so as $O_q(C_G(R))$ is an $r'$-group, it follows that $O_q(C_G(R))$ normalises $U_i$. Since $w$ is centralised by $O_q(C_G(R))$, and $O_q(C_G(R))$ normalises $U_i$, it follows that $O_q(C_G(R))$ must centralise $u$. 

Henceforth, we will write $V = V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n$ where the $V_i$ are the homogeneous components with respect to $Z(Q)$. Set $\Gamma = \{V_0, \ldots, V_n\}$.

Our next major goal is to prove that $[Z(Q), Z(F)] \neq 1$. We thus proceed with the assumption that this is not the case and work to obtain a contradiction. We first need a few lemmas.

**Lemma 3.9.** Assume $[Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1$. Then $R$ has only one fixed point on $\Gamma$.

**Proof.** Let $R = \langle a \rangle$. By Lemma 3.8, we obtain that $O_q(C_G(R))$ centralises all of the subspaces $V_i \in \text{Mov}_R(R)$. Now $C_Q(V) = 1$ by Lemma 3.6, and so we have the strict inclusion $\text{Mov}_R(R) \subset \Gamma$. Now $\text{Fix}_R(R) \neq \emptyset$, hence $R$ is in the stabiliser of a point in the action of $RFQ$ on $\Gamma$, and is a Sylow $r$-subgroup of this stabiliser. Thus $N_{RFQ}(R)$ acts transitively on $\text{Fix}_R(R)$. Now $N_{RFQ}(R) = RZ(F)C_Q(R)$. Clearly $R$ acts trivially on $\text{Fix}_R(R)$. Also $[C_Q(R), Z(Q)] = 1$, and by hypothesis we have $[Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1$. Therefore, $Z(F)C_Q(R) \subseteq C_{RFQ}(Z(Q))$. Thus by Clifford’s Theorem, $Z(F)C_Q(R)$ acts trivially on $\Gamma$. In particular, $Z(F)C_Q(R)$ acts trivially on $\text{Fix}_R(R)$, and so $|\text{Fix}_R(R)| = 1$. 

In the following lemma, let $Q_i = C_Q(V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_{i-1} \oplus V_i \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n)$.

**Lemma 3.10.** If $[Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1$, then $Q = Q_0 \times \cdots \times Q_n$.

**Proof.** We can assume without loss of generality that $\text{Fix}_R(R) = \{V_0\}$. Since $R$ has no fixed points on $\Gamma - \{V_0\}$, it follows by Lemma 3.8 that $V_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_n$ is centralised by $O_q(C_G(R))$. Thus $O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Q_0$. The result now follows from Lemma 2.7 with $Q$ and $V$ in place of $G$ and $V$ respectively.

Let $F_0 = N_{F}(V_0)$. Then $F_0 \neq 1$ otherwise $V_0$ would be in a regular orbit under the action of $F$ on $\Gamma$. Thus $(V_0^F)$ would be a free $F$-module and so $C_{\Gamma}(F) \neq 1$ contrary to Lemma 3.6.

**Lemma 3.11.** If $[Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1$, then $Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^F_0 \rangle$.

**Proof.** Let $f \in F$ and suppose $V_0^F = V_i$. Let $g \in O_q(C_G(R))$ and $v \in V_j \neq V_i$. Then $v^{f^{-1}} \in V_k \neq V_0$, and so $[v^{f^{-1}}, g] = 1$. Hence $v^g = v$. Therefore, $g^f \in Q_i$, and so $O_q(C_G(R))^f \subseteq Q_0$ if and only if $f \in F_0$. 
Now \( Q/(Q_1 \times \cdots \times Q_n) \cong Q_0 \) and \( \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{F_0} \rangle \subseteq Q_1 \times \cdots \times Q_n \). So if we consider the canonical epimorphism \( \phi : Q \longrightarrow Q/(Q_1 \times \cdots \times Q_n) \), it follows that \( \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{F_0} \rangle \) maps onto \( Q/(Q_1 \times \cdots \times Q_n) \) under \( \phi \). So

\[
Q = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{F_0} \rangle \times Q_1 \times \cdots \times Q_n.
\]

By considering orders it follows that \(|Q_0| = |\langle O_q(C_G(R))^{F_0} \rangle|\). Hence \( Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{F_0} \rangle \). \( \square \)

**Lemma 3.12.** If \([Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1\), then \( C_{Q_0}(F_0) = 1 \).

**Proof.** By noting that \( C_Q(F) = 1 \), this follows by Lemma 2.8 with \( F \) and \( Q \) in place of \( G \) and \( H \) respectively. \( \square \)

**Lemma 3.13.** \([Z(Q), Z(F)] \neq 1\).

**Proof.** Assume that this is not the case so \([Z(Q), Z(F)] = 1\). Then \( Q \cong Q_0 \times \cdots \times Q_n \) where the \( Q_i \) are defined as in Lemma 3.10, and \( C_{Q_0}(F_0) = 1 \) by Lemma 3.12.

Now since the \( V_i \) are homogeneous components for \( Z(Q) \), and \( k \) is a splitting field for \( Z(Q) \), \( Z(Q) \) acts on \( V_0 \) by scalars. However, \( Z(Q) = Z(Q_0) \times \cdots \times Z(Q_n) \), and \( Z(Q_1) \times \cdots \times Z(Q_n) \) acts trivially on \( V_0 \). So \( Z(Q_0) \) acts on \( V_0 \) nontrivially by scalars, otherwise \( C_Q(\overline{V}) \neq 1 \) as \( Z(Q_0) \neq 1 \). This follows since \( 1 \neq O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Q_0 \). We know that \( Z(Q_0) \) acts by scalars on \( V_0 \), and so every element in \([F_0, Z(Q_0)]\) acts trivially on \( V_0 \). However, since \( Q_0 \) acts faithfully on \( V_0 \), and \([F_0, Z(Q_0)] \subseteq Z(Q_0)\), it follows that \( F_0 \) must centralise \( Z(Q_0) \), and thus \( 1 \neq C_{Q_0}(F_0) \). This is a contradiction to Lemma 3.12. \( \square \)

**Corollary 3.14.** \( Z(F) \) acts semiregularly on \( \Gamma \).

**Proof.** Suppose \( Z(F) \) normalises some \( V_j \in \Gamma \). Since \( RF \) is transitive on \( \Gamma \), and \( Z(F) = Z(RF) \), we find that \( Z(F) \) acts trivially on \( \Gamma \). Now \( Z(Q) \) acts on each \( V_i \in \Gamma \) by scalars, and so \([Z(F), Z(Q)]\) must act trivially on each \( V_i \in \Gamma \). This forces \([Z(F), Z(Q)] = 1\) since \( C_Q(\overline{V}) = 1 \), which is a contradiction to Lemma 3.13. \( \square \)

**Lemma 3.15.** \( Q \) acts trivially on any system of imprimitivity in the action of \( RFQ \) on \( \overline{V} \).

**Proof.** Let \( \overline{V} = U_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus U_n \) where the \( U_i \) are blocks of imprimitivity in the action of \( RFQ \) on \( \overline{V} \), and set \( \Omega = \{U_0, \ldots, U_n\} \). We work to show that \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) acts trivially on \( \Omega \). Then the normal closure of \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) in \( RFQ \) will also act trivially on \( \Omega \). Since \( \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{RFQ} \rangle = Q \), the claim will follow.

Let \( R = \langle a \rangle \). Then \( O_q(C_G(R)) \) centralises any \( U_i \in \text{Mov}_Q(R) \) by Lemma 3.8. Also, as in the proof of Lemma 3.9, we get that \( \text{Fix}_\Omega(R) \neq \emptyset \) and \( N_{RFQ}(R) \) is transitive on \( \text{Fix}_\Omega(R) \). Now \( N_{RFQ}(R) = RZ(F)C_Q(R) \). Clearly, \( R \) acts trivially on \( \text{Fix}_\Omega(R) \). Let \( U_j \in \text{Fix}_\Omega(R) \), and suppose \( Z(F) \not\subseteq N_F(U_j) \). Then \( N_F(U_j) \cap Z(F) = 1 \) since
$Z(F)$ is cyclic of prime order. In particular, $R$ acts semiregularly on $N_F(U_j)$ because $C_F(R) = Z(F)$. Note that $N_F(U_j) \neq 1$, otherwise $F$ would have a regular orbit on $\Omega$ and thus a nontrivial fixed point on $V$, contrary to Lemma 3.6. Therefore, $N_F(U_j)$ must be elementary abelian since it is isomorphic to its image under the canonical epimorphism $\varphi : F \rightarrow F/Z(F)$. Also $C_{U_j}(N_F(U_j)) = 0$ by Lemma 2.8. Hence $C_{U_j}(R) \neq 0$ by Lemma 2.9. Thus by Lemma 3.7, $O_q(C_G(R))$ normalises $U_j$.

Suppose that $O_q(C_G(R))$ does not normalise $U_j \in \mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$. Then reasoning as above we must have $Z(F) \subseteq N_F(U_j)$ and $C_{U_j}(R) = 0$. Thus $C_Q(R)$ can only map $U_j$ to a subspace $U_j \in \mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$ which itself is normalised by $Z(F)$. So $Z(F)$ must act trivially on $\mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$, otherwise we get two distinct orbits in the action of $N_{RFQ}(R)$ on $\mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$. Since $Z(F)$ is trivial on $\mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$, we obtain that $Z = [O_q(C_G(R)), Z(F)]$ is also trivial on $\mathrm{Fix}_\Omega(R)$. Also, $Z$ centralises each subspace $U_j \in \mathrm{Mov}_\Omega(R)$ since $Z \subseteq O_q(C_G(R))$, and so $Z$ acts trivially on $\Omega$. Note that $Z \neq 1$, since $[Z(Q), Z(F)] \neq 1$, and so by Lemma 3.5 we have $Q = \langle Z^F \rangle$. Thus it follows that $Q$ also acts trivially on $\Omega$. This is a contradiction since $U_j$ is not normalised by $O_q(C_G(R))$. ∎

**Corollary 3.16.** Every characteristic abelian subgroup of $Q$ is contained in $Z(Q)$.

**Proof.** Let $A$ be a characteristic abelian subgroup of $Q$. Let $\overline{V} = U_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus U_n$ where the $U_i$ are homogeneous components with respect to $A$. Then $\Omega = \{U_0, \ldots, U_n\}$ is a system of imprimitivity for $RFQ$ on $\overline{V}$, and so $Q$ is trivial on $\Omega$. Since $A$ acts by scalars on any given $U_i \in \Omega$, $[Q, A]$ centralises $\overline{V}$. This forces $[Q, A] = 1$, and thus $A \subseteq Z(Q)$. ∎

**Corollary 3.17.** $Q$ has nilpotence class at most two.

**Proof.** Since every characteristic abelian subgroup of $Q$ is contained in $Z(Q)$, it follows that $Z(\Phi(Q)) \subseteq Z(Q)$. Thus $\Phi(Q) \subseteq Z(Q)$ by Lemma 2.1, and so $Q/Z(Q)$ is abelian. ∎

Recall that $\Gamma$ is the set of $Z(Q)$-homogeneous components in $\overline{V}$. We know that the subset of components in $\Gamma$ which are normalised by $R$ is nonempty, and that $N_{RF}(R) = R \times Z(F)$ acts transitively on this set. We also know, since $Z(F) \subseteq RF$, that the orbits of the action of $Z(F)$ on $\Gamma$ forms a system of imprimitivity $\overline{W} = W_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus W_m$ for the action of $RF$ on $\Gamma$. We can assume without loss of generality that $V_0$ is normalised by $R$ and that $W_0$ is the direct sum of components in the orbit of $V_0$ under the action of $Z(F)$ on $\Gamma$. Henceforth, we set $Q_i = C_{\overline{\Gamma}}(W_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus W_{i-1} \oplus W_{i+1} \oplus \cdots \oplus W_m)$, and find that $Q = Q_0 \times \cdots \times Q_m$, which follows exactly as in Lemma 3.10.

**Lemma 3.18.** $Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{N_F(V_0)} \rangle$.

**Proof.** We first show that $N_F(W_0) = Z(F) \times N_F(V_0)$. We can assume without loss of generality that $W_0 = V_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus V_{s-1}$. Set $\Delta = \{V_0, \ldots, V_{s-1}\}$. By definition $Z(F) \subseteq N_F(W_0)$ and is transitive on $\Delta$. In particular, since $|\Delta| = s$, $N_F(W_0)$ is primitive on $\Delta$. Since $N_F(W_0)$ is an $s$-group and $|\Delta| = s$, $N_F(V_0)$ must be the full kernel
in the action of \(N_F(W_0)\) on \(\Delta\). We find that \(N_F(W_0)/N_F(V_0)\) is regular on \(\Delta\), and so \(N_F(W_0)/N_F(V_0) \cong \mathbb{Z}_s\). Thus it follows that \(N_F(W_0) = Z(F) \times N_F(V_0)\). Arguing exactly as in the proof of Lemma 3.11, we find that \(Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{N_F(W_0)} \rangle\). Now \([R, Z(F)] = 1\), and so \(O_q(C_G(R))^Z(F) = O_q(C_G(R))\). Thus

\[
Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{Z(F) \times N_F(V_0)} \rangle = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{N_F(V_0)} \rangle.
\]

\(\square\)

Lemma 3.19. \([Z(Q_0), R] = 1\).

**Proof.** Since the subspaces \(V_i \subseteq \overline{V}\) are homogeneous components for \(Z(Q)\), \(Z(Q_0)\) acts on them by scalars. Now \(W_0\) is the direct sum of components which are normalised by \(R\). Since \(Z(Q_0)\) acts by scalars on any given \(V_i \subseteq W_0\), it follows that \([Z(Q_0), R]\) acts trivially on \(W_0\). However, \(Q\) is faithful on \(\overline{V}\), and since \(Q_0\) centralises \(W_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus W_m\), this forces \([Z(Q_0), R] = 1\). \(\square\)

Lemma 3.20. \(Q\) is abelian.

**Proof.** Note that \(Q' \cap O_q(C_G(R)) = 1\). Hence

\[
[O_q(C_G(R)), C_Q(R)] \subseteq Q' \cap O_q(C_G(R)) = 1,
\]

and so \(O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Z(C_Q(R))\). By Lemma 3.19, we have \([Z(Q_0), R] = 1\), and so since \(Q\) has nilpotence class at most two, \(Q_0 = [Q_0, R] \ast C_{Q_0}(R)\). However, since \(O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Z(C_Q(R))\), it follows that \(O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Z(C_{Q_0}(R))\), and so \(O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Z(Q_0) \subseteq Z(Q)\). Set \(G_0 = Z(Q)V\). If \(G_0 < G\), then \(F(C_{G_0}(R)) \subseteq F(G_0) = V\) by induction. However, since \(O_q(C_G(R)) \subseteq Z(Q)\), there are clearly \(q\)-elements in \(F(C_{G_0}(R))\). Thus \(G_0 = G\), and so \(Z(Q) = Q\). \(\square\)

We now complete the proof of Theorem 3.1.

It follows from Corollary 3.14 that \(Z(F) \not\subseteq N_F(V_i)\) for any \(V_i \in G\). Thus \(Z(F) \cap N_F(V_0) = 1\) since \(Z(F)\) is cyclic of prime order. Hence \(N_F(V_0) = [R, N_F(V_0)]\). Since \(Q\) is abelian, Lemma 3.19 now says that \([Q_0, R] = 1\), and so \([Q_0, N_F(V_0)] = 1\). Thus \(Q_0 = \langle O_q(C_G(R))^{N_F(V_0)} \rangle = O_q(C_G(R))\). Now \(N_F(V_0)\) is abelian, and \(C_{V_0}(N_F(V_0)) = 0\) by Lemma 2.8. Hence \(C_{V_0}(R) \neq 0\) by Lemma 2.9. Since \([O_q(C_G(R)), C_V(R)] = 1\), we must have that \(Q_0\) acts trivially on \(C_{V_0}(R)\). However, \(V_0\) is a homogeneous component for \(Q_0\), and so \(Q_0\) must act trivially on \(V_0\). It follows that \(Q_0\) acts trivially on \(W_0\) and thus \(Q_0\) acts trivially on \(\overline{V}\), however, this is a contradiction since \(C_Q(\overline{V}) = 1\). \(\square\)

**Corollary 3.21.** Let \(R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r\) for some prime \(r\) and \(F\) be an extraspecial \(s\)-group. Suppose that \(R\) acts on \(F\) in such a way that \([R, Z(F)] = 1\) and \(RF/Z(F)\) is a Frobenius group. Suppose further that \(RF\) acts on a group \(G\) so that \(C_G(F) = 1\) and \((r, |G|) = 1\). Then \(F_i(C_G(R)) = F_i(G) \cap C_G(R)\) for all \(i\).
Proof. Let \( i \in \mathbb{N} \) be the least such that \( F_i(C_G(R)) \nsubseteq F_i(G) \). We know that \( F(C_G(R)) \leq F(G) \) by Theorem 3.1, and so \( i > 1 \). Let \( \overline{G} = G/F_{i-1}(G) \), and \( \phi \) be the canonical epimorphism from \( G \) onto \( \overline{G} \). Now \( \overline{F_i}(C_G(R)) \leq \overline{C_G}(R) \) and \( \overline{F_i}(C_G(R)) \) is nilpotent since \( F_{i-1}(C_G(R)) \subseteq \ker(\phi) \). Now

\[
\overline{F_i}(C_G(R)) \leq F(\overline{C_G}(R)) = F(C_G(R)) \leq F(\overline{G}).
\]

By the definition of \( F_i(G) \), we have \( F(\overline{G}) = \overline{F_i}(G) \). Therefore, \( \overline{F_i}(C_G(R)) \subseteq \overline{F_i}(G) \).

However, this is a contradiction since \( \overline{F_i}(C_G(R)) \nsubseteq \overline{F_i}(G) \). \( \square \)

Corollary 3.22. Let \( R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r \) for some non-Fermat prime \( r \) and \( F \) be an extraspecial \( s \)-group. Suppose that \( R \) acts on \( F \) in such a way that \( [R, Z(F)] = 1 \) and \( RF/Z(F) \) is a Frobenius group. Suppose further that \( RF \) acts on a group \( G \) so that \( C_G(F) = 1 \) and \( (r, |G|) = 1 \). Then \( f(C_G(R)) = f(G) \).

Proof. Let \( n \in \mathbb{N} \) be the Fitting height of \( C_G(R) \). Now we know that \( F_n(C_G(R)) = F_n(G) \cap C_G(R) \), and so \( C_G(R) \leq F_n(G) \). We work to show that \( F_n(G) = G \). Suppose this is not the case, so \( F_n(G) < G \). Let \( S \) be an \( RF \)-invariant section of \( G/F_n(G) \) which has no proper \( RF \)-invariant subgroups. By coprime action, \( R \) acts fixed point freely on \( G/F_n(G) \). Also, \( F \) acts nontrivially on \( S \) since \( C_{G/F_n(G)}(F) = 1 \). By Theorem 2.10, it follows that either \( [R, F/C_F(S)] = 1 \) or \( r \) is a Fermat prime. By hypothesis, the former must hold. Since \( C_F(R) = \Phi(F) \), we obtain that \( F = C_F(S)\Phi(F) \). However, this implies \( F = C_F(S) \), which is a contradiction. \( \square \)

Note that if \( G \) is a minimal counterexample to Corollary 3.22, we obtain that \( f(G) \leq f(C_G(R)) + 1 \) in any case, since \( G/F_n(G) \) admits a fixed-point-free automorphism of prime order.

Corollaries 3.21 and 3.22 together with Theorem 1.1 confirm Corollaries 1.3 and 1.4 stated in the introduction. Note that we cannot drop the condition that \( r \) be a non-Fermat prime in Corollary 3.22. In particular, if \( R \cong \mathbb{Z}_r \) where \( r \) is a prime of the form \( r = 2^n + 1 \), then there exists an extraspecial group \( F \) on which \( R \) acts such that \( F = [F, R] \), and a group \( G \) on which \( RF \) acts such that \( C_G(F) = 1 \), \( f(G) = 1 \) and \( f(C_G(R)) = 0 \).

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