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# 2-Distance Colorings of Integer Distance Graphs

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## Abstract

A 2-distance  $k$ -coloring of a graph  $G$  is a mapping from  $V(G)$  to the set of colors  $\{1, \dots, k\}$  such that every two vertices at distance at most 2 receive distinct colors. The 2-distance chromatic number  $\chi_2(G)$  of  $G$  is then the smallest  $k$  for which  $G$  admits a 2-distance  $k$ -coloring. For any finite set of positive integers  $D = \{d_1, \dots, d_k\}$ , the integer distance graph  $G = G(D)$  is the infinite graph defined by  $V(G) = \mathbb{Z}$  and  $uv \in E(G)$  if and only if  $|v - u| \in D$ . We study the 2-distance chromatic number of integer distance graphs for several types of sets  $D$ . In each case, we provide exact values or upper bounds on this parameter and characterize those graphs  $G(D)$  with  $\chi_2(G(D)) = \Delta(G(D)) + 1$ .

**Keywords:** 2-distance coloring; Integer distance graph.

**MSC 2010:** 05C15, 05C12.

## 1 Introduction

All the graphs we consider in this paper are simple and loopless undirected graphs. We denote by  $V(G)$  and  $E(G)$  the set of vertices and the set of edges of a graph  $G$ , respectively. For any two vertices  $u$  and  $v$  of  $G$ , we denote by  $d_G(u, v)$  the *distance* between  $u$  and  $v$ , that is the length of a shortest path joining  $u$  and  $v$ . We denote by  $\Delta(G)$  the maximum degree of  $G$ .

A (proper)  $k$ -coloring of a graph  $G$  is a mapping from  $V(G)$  to the set of colors  $\{1, \dots, k\}$  such that every two adjacent vertices receive distinct colors. The smallest  $k$  for which  $G$  admits a  $k$ -coloring is the *chromatic number* of  $G$ , denoted  $\chi(G)$ . A *2-distance  $k$ -coloring* of a graph  $G$  is a mapping from  $V(G)$  to the set of colors  $\{1, \dots, k\}$  such that every two vertices at distance at most 2 receive distinct colors. 2-distance colorings are sometimes called  *$L(1,1)$ -labelings* (see [5] for a survey on  $L(h, k)$ -labelings) or *square colorings* in the literature. The smallest  $k$  for which  $G$  admits a 2-distance  $k$ -coloring is the *2-distance chromatic number* of  $G$ , denoted  $\chi_2(G)$ .

The *square*  $G^2$  of a graph  $G$  is the graph defined by  $V(G^2) = V(G)$  and  $uv \in E(G^2)$  if and only if  $d_G(u, v) \leq 2$ . Clearly, a 2-distance coloring of a graph  $G$  is nothing but a proper coloring of  $G^2$  and, therefore,  $\chi_2(G) = \chi(G^2)$  for every graph  $G$ .

The study of 2-distance colorings was initiated by Kramer and Kramer [7] (see also their survey on general distance colorings in [8]). The case of planar graphs has attracted a lot of attention in the literature (see e.g. [1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 12]), due to the conjecture of Wegner that suggests an upper bound on the 2-distance chromatic number of planar graphs depending on their maximum degree (see [13] for more details).

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In this paper, we study 2-distance colorings of distance graphs. Although several coloring problems have been considered for distance graphs (see [10] for a survey), it seems that 2-distance colorings have not been considered yet. We present in Section 2 a few basic results on the chromatic number of distance graphs. We then consider specific sets  $D$ , namely  $D = \{1, a\}$ ,  $a \geq 3$  (in Section 3),  $D = \{1, a, a + 1\}$ ,  $a \geq 3$  (in Section 4), and  $D = \{1, \dots, m, a\}$ ,  $2 \leq m < a$  (in Section 5). We finally propose some open problems in Section 6.

## 2 Preliminaries

Let  $D = \{d_1, \dots, d_k\}$  be a finite set of positive integers. The *integer distance graph* (simply called *distance graph* in the following)  $G = G(D)$  is the infinite graph defined by  $V(G) = \mathbb{Z}$  and  $uv \in E(G)$  if and only if  $|v - u| \in D$ .

If  $\gcd(\{d_1, \dots, d_k\}) = p > 1$ , the distance graph  $G(D)$  has  $p$  connected components, each of them being isomorphic to the distance graph  $G(D')$  with  $D' = \{d_1/p, \dots, d_k/p\}$ . In that case, we thus have  $\chi_2(G(D)) = \chi_2(G(D'))$  so that we can always assume  $\gcd(D) = 1$ .

It is easy to observe that the square of the distance graph  $G(D)$  is also a distance graph, namely the distance graph  $G(D^2)$  where

$$D^2 = D \cup \{d + d' \mid d, d' \in D\} \cup \{d - d' \mid d, d' \in D, d > d'\}.$$

For instance, for  $D = \{1, 2, 5\}$ , we get  $D^2 = \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10\}$ . Note that if  $D$  has cardinality  $k$ , then  $D^2$  has cardinality at most  $k(k + 1)$ .

As observed in the previous section,  $\chi_2(G) = \chi(G^2)$  for every graph  $G$ . Therefore, since  $(G(D))^2 = G(D^2)$ , determining the 2-distance chromatic number of the distance graph  $G(D)$  reduces to determining the chromatic number of the distance graph  $G(D^2)$ . The problem of determining the chromatic number of distance graphs has been extensively studied in the literature. When  $|D| \leq 2$ , this question is easily solved, thanks to the following general upper bounds:

**Proposition 1 (folklore)** *For every finite set of positive integers  $D = \{d_1, \dots, d_k\}$  and every positive integer  $p$  such that  $d_i \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$  for every  $i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq k$ ,  $\chi(G(D)) \leq p$ .*

**Proof.** Let  $\lambda : V(G(D)) \rightarrow \{1, \dots, p\}$  be the mapping defined by

$$\lambda(x) = 1 + (x \pmod{p}),$$

for every integer  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ . Since  $d_i \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$  for every  $i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq k$ , the mapping  $\lambda$  is clearly a proper coloring of  $G(D)$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 2 (Walther [11])** *For every finite set of positive integers  $D$ ,*

$$\chi(G(D)) \leq |D| + 1.$$

**Proof.** A  $(|D| + 1)$ -coloring of  $G(D)$  can easily be produced using the First-Fit greedy algorithm, starting from vertex 0, from left to right and then from right to left, since every vertex has exactly  $|D|$  neighbors on its left and  $|D|$  neighbors on its right.  $\square$

Therefore, when  $|D| \leq 2$ ,  $\chi(G(D)) = 2$  if  $|D| = 1$  or all elements in  $D$  are odd (since  $G(D)$  is then bipartite), and  $\chi(G(D)) = 3$  otherwise (since  $G(D)$  then contains cycles of odd length). The case  $|D| = 3$  has been settled by Zhu [14]. Whenever  $|D| \geq 4$ , only partial results have been obtained, namely for sets  $D$  having specific properties.

A coloring  $\lambda$  of a distance graph  $G(D)$  is *p-periodic*, for some integer  $p \geq 1$ , if  $\lambda(x + p) = \lambda(x)$  for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ . Walther also proved the following:

**Theorem 3 (Walther [11])** *For every finite set of positive integers  $D$ , if  $\chi(G(D)) \leq k$  then  $G(D)$  admits a  $p$ -periodic  $k$ -coloring for some  $p$ .*

The *pattern* of such a  $p$ -periodic coloring is defined as the sequence  $\lambda(x) \dots \lambda(x+p-1)$ . In particular, the coloring defined in the proof of Proposition 1 was  $p$ -periodic with pattern  $12 \dots p$ . In the following, we will describe such patterns using standard notation of Combinatorics on words. For instance, the pattern  $121212345$  will be denoted  $(12)^3345$ .

Finally, note that in any 2-distance coloring of a graph  $G$ , all vertices in the closed neighborhood of any vertex must be assigned distinct colors. Therefore, we have the following:

**Observation 4** *For every graph  $G$ ,  $\chi_2(G) \geq \Delta(G) + 1$ .*

In particular, this bound is attained by the distance graph  $G(D)$  with  $D = \{1, \dots, k\}$ ,  $k \geq 2$ :

**Proposition 5** *For every  $k \geq 2$ ,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, k\})) = 2k + 1 = \Delta(G(\{1, \dots, k\})) + 1$ .*

**Proof.** It is easy to check that the mapping  $\lambda$  given by

$$\lambda(x) = 1 + (x \bmod 2k + 1)$$

for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$  is a 2-distance  $(2k + 1)$ -coloring of  $G(\{1, \dots, k\})$ . Equality then follows from Observation 4.  $\square$

### 3 The case $D = \{1, a\}$ , $a \geq 3$

We study in this section the 2-distance chromatic number of distance graphs  $G(D)$  with  $D = \{1, a\}$ ,  $a \geq 3$  (note that the case  $a = 2$  is already solved by Proposition 5).

When  $D = \{1, a\}$ ,  $a \geq 3$ , we have  $\Delta(G(D)) = 4$  and

$$D^2 = \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, 2a\}.$$

The following theorem gives the 2-distance chromatic number of any such graph:

**Theorem 6** *For every integer  $a \geq 3$ ,*

$$\chi_2(G(\{1, a\})) = \begin{cases} 5 & \text{if } a \equiv 2 \pmod{5}, \text{ or } a \equiv 3 \pmod{5}, \\ 6 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

**Proof.** Since  $\{1, a\}^2 = \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, 2a\}$ , we get  $d \not\equiv 0 \pmod{5}$  for every  $d \in \{1, a\}^2$  whenever  $a \equiv 2 \pmod{5}$  or  $a \equiv 3 \pmod{5}$  and thus, by Proposition 1 and Observation 4,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a\})) = 5$ .

Note that for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ , the set of vertices

$$C(x) = \{x - a, x - 1, x, x + 1, x + a\}$$

induces a clique in  $G(\{1, a\}^2)$  (see Figure 1). We now claim that every 2-distance 5-coloring  $\lambda$  of  $G(\{1, a\})$  is necessarily 5-periodic, that is  $\lambda(x + 5) = \lambda(x)$  for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ . To show that, it suffices to prove that any five consecutive vertices  $x, \dots, x + 4$  must be assigned distinct colors. Assume to the contrary that this is not the case and, without loss of generality, let  $x = 0$ . Since vertices 0, 1 and 2 necessarily get distinct colors, we only have two cases to consider:

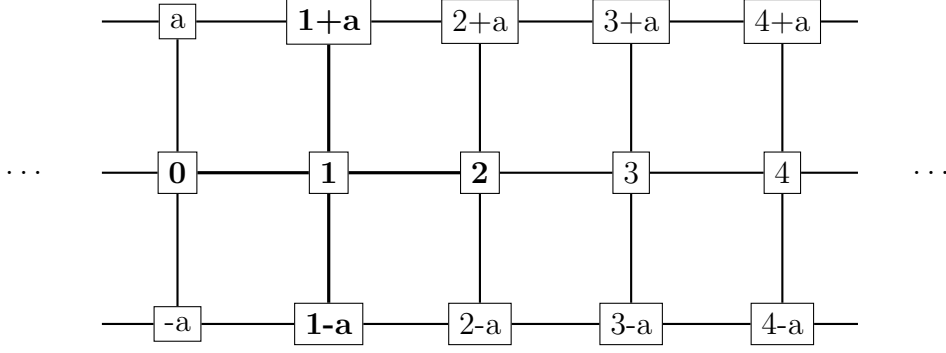


Figure 1: The distance graph  $G(\{1, a\})$ ,  $a \geq 3$

1.  $\lambda(0) = \lambda(3) = 1$ ,  $\lambda(1) = 2$ ,  $\lambda(2) = 3$ .

Since  $C(1)$  induces a clique in  $G(\{1, a\}^2)$  (depicted in bold in Figure 1), we have

$$\{\lambda(1-a), \lambda(1+a)\} = \{4, 5\},$$

which implies

$$\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(2+a)\} = \{4, 5\}.$$

(More precisely,  $\lambda(2-a) = 9 - \lambda(1-a)$  and  $\lambda(2+a) = 9 - \lambda(1+a)$ ). This implies  $\lambda(3-a) = \lambda(3+a) = 2$ , a contradiction since  $d(3-a, 3+a) = 2$ .

2.  $\lambda(0) = \lambda(4) = 1$ ,  $\lambda(1) = 2$ ,  $\lambda(2) = 3$ ,  $\lambda(3) = 4$ .

As in the previous case we have

$$\{\lambda(1-a), \lambda(1+a)\} = \{4, 5\},$$

which implies

$$\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(2+a)\} = \{1, 5\}.$$

We then get  $\lambda(3-a) = \lambda(3+a) = 2$ , again a contradiction.

Therefore,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a\})) = 5$  if and only if 5 do not divide any element of  $\{1, a\}^2 = \{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, 2a\}$ . This is clearly the case if and only if  $a \equiv 2 \pmod{5}$  or  $a \equiv 3 \pmod{5}$ .

We finally prove that there exists a 2-distance 6-coloring of  $G(\{1, a\})$  for any value of  $a$ . We consider three cases, according to the value of  $(a \pmod{3})$ :

1.  $a = 3k$ ,  $k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a-1)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^k (456)^{k-1} 45.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 5$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-1\} \cup \{(2a-1)p + 3q, p \geq 1, 1-k \leq q \leq k-1\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = 6$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \cup \{(2a-1)p + 3q, p \geq 1, 2-k \leq q \leq k-2\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, 2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 6-coloring of  $G(\{1, a\})$ .

2.  $a = 3k + 1, k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a - 2)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^k(456)^k.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c, 1 \leq c \leq 6$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \cup \{(2a - 2)p + 3q, p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

Therefore,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, 2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 6-coloring of  $G(\{1, a\})$ .

3.  $a = 3k + 2, k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a + 1)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^{k+1}(456)^k 45.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c, 1 \leq c \leq 5$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k\} \cup \{(2a + 1)p + 3q, p \geq 1, -k \leq q \leq k\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = 6$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \cup \{(2a + 1)p + 3q, p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, 2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 6-coloring of  $G(\{1, a\})$ .

This concludes the proof. □

## 4 The case $D = \{1, a, a + 1\}, a \geq 3$

We study in this section the 2-distance chromatic number of distance graphs  $G(D)$  with  $D = \{1, a, a + 1\}, a \geq 3$  (note that the case  $a = 2$  is already solved by Proposition 5).

When  $D = \{1, a, a + 1\}, a \geq 3$ , we have  $\Delta(G(D)) = 6$  and

$$D^2 = \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, a + 2, 2a, 2a + 1, 2a + 2\}.$$

We first prove the following:

**Theorem 7** *For every integer  $a, a \geq 3$ ,*

$$\chi_2(G(\{1, a, a + 1\})) = 7 = \Delta(G(\{1, a, a + 1\})) + 1$$

*if and only if  $a \equiv 2 \pmod{7}$  or  $a \equiv 4 \pmod{7}$ .*

**Proof.** Since  $\{1, a, a + 1\}^2 = \{1, 2, a - 1, a, a + 1, a + 2, 2a, 2a + 1, 2a + 2\}$ , we get  $d \not\equiv 0 \pmod{7}$  for every  $d \in \{1, a, a + 1\}^2$  whenever  $a \equiv 2 \pmod{7}$  or  $a \equiv 4 \pmod{7}$  and thus, by Proposition 1 and Observation 4,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a, a + 1\})) = 7$ .

Note that for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ , the set of vertices

$$C(x) = \{x - a - 1, x - a, x - 1, x, x + 1, x + a, x + a + 1\}$$

induces a clique in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$ . We now claim that every 2-distance 7-coloring  $\lambda$  of  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\})$  is necessarily 7-periodic, that is  $\lambda(x + 7) = \lambda(x)$  for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ . To show that, it suffices to prove that any 7 consecutive vertices  $x, \dots, x + 6$  must be assigned distinct colors. Assume to the contrary that this is not the case and, without loss of generality, let  $x = 0$ . Since vertices 0, 1 and 2 necessarily get distinct colors, we only have four cases to consider (see Figure 2):

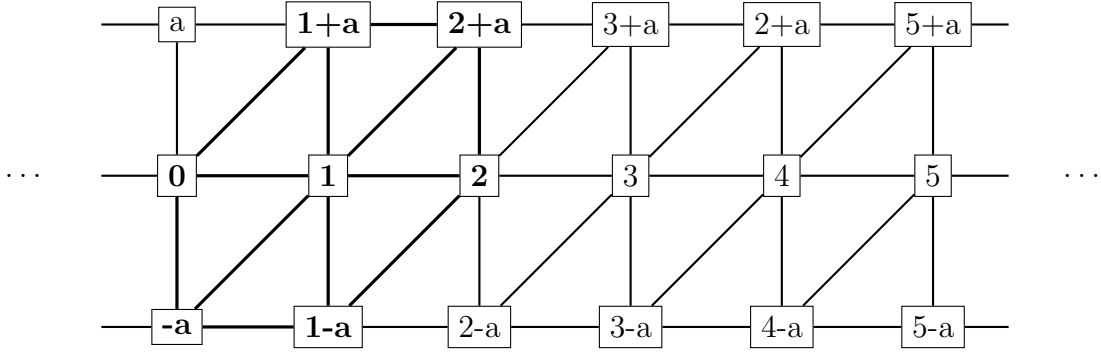


Figure 2: The distance graph  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\})$ ,  $a \geq 3$

1. Vertices 0, 1, 2, 3 are colored with the colors 1, 2, 3 and 1, respectively.

We consider two subcases:

- (a)  $\lambda(4) = 2$ .

Since  $C(1)$  induces a clique in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$  (depicted in bold in Figure 2), we have

$$\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1 - a), \lambda(1 + a), \lambda(2 + a)\} = \{4, 5, 6, 7\}.$$

For similar reasons, we also have

$$\{\lambda(2 - a), \lambda(3 - a), \lambda(3 + a), \lambda(4 + a)\} = \{4, 5, 6, 7\}.$$

This implies  $\lambda(-a) = \lambda(4 - a)$  or  $\lambda(1 + a) = \lambda(5 + a)$ . Each of these cases thus corresponds to case 2 below.

- (b)  $\lambda(4) \notin \{1, 2, 3\}$ .

Assume  $\lambda(4) = 4$ , without loss of generality. As in the previous subcase, we have

$$\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1 - a), \lambda(1 + a), \lambda(2 + a)\} = \{4, 5, 6, 7\},$$

and, similarly,

$$\{\lambda(1 - a), \lambda(2 - a), \lambda(2 + a), \lambda(3 + a)\} = \{4, 5, 6, 7\}.$$

Moreover, since  $\lambda(4) = 4$ , we get

$$\{\lambda(3 + a), \lambda(2 - a)\} \subseteq \{5, 6, 7\}.$$

On the other hand, considering the clique  $S(3)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$ , we also get

$$\{\lambda(4 + a), \lambda(3 - a)\} \subseteq \{5, 6, 7\}.$$

We thus get a contradiction since we only have three available colors for the clique induced by the four vertices  $2 - a, 3 - a, a + 3$  and  $a + 4$  in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$ .

2. Vertices 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 are colored with the colors 1, 2, 3, 4 and 1, respectively.

Again considering cliques  $C(2)$  and  $C(3)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$ , we get

$$\{\lambda(1 - a), \lambda(2 + a)\} \subseteq \{5, 6, 7\},$$

and

$$\{\lambda(2 - a), \lambda(3 + a)\} \subseteq \{5, 6, 7\},$$

a contradiction since vertices  $1 - a, 2 - a, a + 2$  and  $a + 3$  induce a clique in  $G(\{1, a, a + 1\}^2)$ .

3. Vertices  $0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$  are colored with the colors  $1, 2, 3, 4, 5$  and  $1$ , respectively. Considering the cliques  $C(1)$ ,  $C(2)$  and  $C(3)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a+1\}^2)$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned}\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1-a), \lambda(1+a), \lambda(2+a)\} &= \{4, 5, 6, 7\}, \\ \{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} &\subseteq \{1, \lambda(-a), \lambda(1+a)\} \setminus \{4, 5\}, \\ \{\lambda(3-a), \lambda(4+a)\} &\subseteq \{2, \lambda(1-a), \lambda(2+a)\} \setminus \{4, 5\},\end{aligned}$$

and thus

$$\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} \subseteq \{1, 6, 7\} \quad \text{and} \quad \{\lambda(3-a), \lambda(4+a)\} \subseteq \{2, 6, 7\}.$$

Assuming that none of cases 1 or 2 occurs, we have two subcases to consider:

- (a)  $\lambda(6) = 2$ .

Considering the clique  $C(4)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a+1\}^2)$ , we get

$$\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} \subseteq \{3, \lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} \setminus \{1, 2\} = \{3, 6, 7\}.$$

If  $\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} = \{3, 6\}$ , then

$$\{\lambda(3-a), \lambda(4+a)\} = \{2, 7\},$$

$$\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} = \{1, 6\},$$

$$\{\lambda(1-a), \lambda(2+a)\} = \{5, 7\}$$

and

$$\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1+a)\} = \{4, 6\}.$$

If  $\lambda(-a) = 6$  then  $\lambda(2-a) = 1$  and thus  $\lambda(4-a) = \lambda(-a) = 6$  which corresponds to subcase 2. If  $\lambda(1+a) = 6$  then  $\lambda(3+a) = 1$  and thus  $\lambda(5+a) = \lambda(1+a) = 6$  which again corresponds to subcase 2.

The case  $\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} = \{3, 7\}$  is similar and leads to the same conclusion.

Finally, if  $\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} = \{6, 7\}$  then  $\lambda(3-a) = \lambda(4+a) = 1$ , a contradiction since  $d_{G(\{1, a, a+1\})}(4-a, 5+a) = 2$ .

- (b)  $\lambda(6) = 6$ .

Considering the clique  $C(4)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a+1\}^2)$ , we get

$$\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} \subseteq \{3, \lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} \setminus \{1, 6\} = \{3, 7\}.$$

This implies

$$\{\lambda(3-a), \lambda(4+a)\} = \{2, 6\},$$

$$\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} = \{1, 7\},$$

$$\{\lambda(1-a), \lambda(2+a)\} = \{5, 6\}$$

and

$$\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1+a)\} = \{4, 7\}.$$

If  $\lambda(-a) = 7$  then  $\lambda(2-a) = 1$  and thus  $\lambda(4-a) = \lambda(-a) = 7$  which corresponds to subcase 2. If  $\lambda(1+a) = 7$  then  $\lambda(3+a) = 1$  and thus  $\lambda(5+a) = \lambda(1+a) = 7$  which again corresponds to subcase 2.



4. Vertices  $0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6$  are colored with the colors  $1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6$  and  $1$ , respectively. Again considering the cliques  $C(1)$ ,  $C(2)$  and  $C(3)$  in  $G(\{1, a, a+1\}^2)$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned}\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1-a), \lambda(1+a), \lambda(2+a)\} &= \{4, 5, 6, 7\}, \\ \{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} &\subseteq \{1, \lambda(-a), \lambda(1+a)\} \setminus \{4, 5\},\end{aligned}$$

and thus

$$\{\lambda(3-a), \lambda(4+a)\} \subseteq \{2, \lambda(1-a), \lambda(2+a)\} \setminus \{4, 5, 6\} = \{2, 7\}.$$

This implies

$$\begin{aligned}\{\lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} &= \{1, 6\}, \\ \{\lambda(1-a), \lambda(2+a)\} &= \{5, 7\}\end{aligned}$$

and

$$\{\lambda(-a), \lambda(1+a)\} = \{4, 6\}.$$

Therefore,

$$\{\lambda(4-a), \lambda(5+a)\} \subseteq \{3, \lambda(2-a), \lambda(3+a)\} \setminus \{1, 6\} = \{3\},$$

a contradiction since  $d_{G(\{1, a, a+1\})}(4-a, 5+a) = 2$ .

Therefore, every 2-distance 7-coloring  $\lambda$  of  $G(\{1, a, a+1\})$  is necessarily 7-periodic, and thus  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a, a+1\})) = 7$  if and only if 7 do not divide any element of  $\{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, a+2, 2a, 2a+1, 2a+2\}$ . This is clearly the case if and only if  $a \equiv 2 \pmod{7}$  or  $a \equiv 4 \pmod{7}$ .  $\square$

The following result provides an upper bound on  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a, a+1\}))$  for any value of  $a$ .

**Theorem 8** *For every integer  $a$ ,  $a \geq 3$ ,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, a, a+1\})) \leq 9 = \Delta(G(\{1, a, a+1\})) + 3$ .*

**Proof.** We consider three cases, according to the value of  $(a \pmod{3})$ :

1.  $a = 3k$ ,  $k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $3a$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^k(456)^k(789)^k.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 9$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-1\} \cup \{3ap+3q, p \geq 1, 1-k \leq q \leq k-1\}.$$

Therefore,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, a+2, 2a, 2a+1, 2a+2\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 9-coloring of  $G(\{1, a, a+1\})$ .

2.  $a = 3k+1$ ,  $k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(3a+2)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^k(456)^k7123(789)^{k-1}4568.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 6$ , then

$$\begin{aligned}d(x, y) \in & \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-1\} \\ & \cup \{3q+2a-1, 1-k \leq q \leq 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+2a-1, p > 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p-2a+1, p > 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p > 0, 1-k \leq q < 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q+2a-1, p > 0, 1-k \leq q < 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p > 0, 0 < q \leq k-1\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q-2a+1, p > 0, 0 < q \leq k-1\}.\end{aligned}$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = 7$ , then

$$\begin{aligned} d(x, y) \in & \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \\ & \cup \{3q+4, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q-4, p > 0, 2-k \leq q \leq 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q+4, p > 0, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p > 0, 2-k \leq q \leq k-2\}. \end{aligned}$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = 8$ , then

$$\begin{aligned} d(x, y) \in & \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \\ & \cup \{3q+a-2, 2-k \leq q \leq 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+a-2, p > 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p-a+2, p > 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p > 0, 2-k \leq q < 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q+a-2, p > 0, 2-k \leq q < 0\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p > 0, 0 < q \leq k-2\} \\ & \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q-a+2, p > 0, 0 < q \leq k-2\}. \end{aligned}$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = 9$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-2\} \cup \{(3a+2)p+3q, p \geq 1, 2-k \leq q \leq k-2\}.$$

Therefore, in all these cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, a+2, 2a, 2a+1, 2a+2\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 9-coloring of  $G(\{1, a, a+1\})$ .

3.  $a = 3k+2, k \geq 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(3a+1)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$(123)^{k+1}(456)^{k+1}(789)^k 7.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c, 1 \leq c \leq 7$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k\} \cup \{(3a+1)p+3q, p \geq 1, -k \leq q \leq k\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c, 8 \leq c \leq 9$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{3q, 0 \leq q \leq k-1\} \cup \{(3a+1)p+3q, p \geq 1, 1-k \leq q \leq k-1\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, a-1, a, a+1, a+2, 2a, 2a+1, 2a+2\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance 9-coloring of  $G(\{1, a, a+1\})$ .

This concludes the proof. □

From Theorems 7 and 8, we thus get:

**Corollary 9** For every integer  $a, a \geq 3, a \not\equiv 2, 4 \pmod{7}$ ,

$$8 \leq \chi_2(G(\{1, a, a+1\})) \leq 9.$$

## 5 The case $D = \{1, \dots, m, a\}, 2 \leq m < a$

We study in this section the 2-distance chromatic number of distance graphs  $G(D)$  with  $D = \{1, \dots, m, a\}, 2 \leq m < a$  (note that the case  $a = m+1$  is already solved by Proposition 5).

When  $D = \{1, \dots, m, a\}$ , we have  $\Delta(G(D)) = 2m+2$  and

$$D^2 = \{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a-m, a-m+1, \dots, a+m\} \cup \{2a\}.$$

We first prove the following:

**Theorem 10** For all integers  $m$  and  $a$ ,  $2 \leq m < a$ ,

$$\chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) = 2m + 3 = \Delta(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) + 1$$

if and only if  $a \equiv m + 1 \pmod{2m + 3}$  or  $a \equiv m + 2 \pmod{2m + 3}$ .

**Proof.** Since  $\{1, \dots, m, a\}^2 = \{1, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ ,  $d \not\equiv 0 \pmod{2m + 3}$  for every  $d \in \{1, \dots, m, a\}^2$  whenever  $a \equiv m + 1 \pmod{2m + 3}$  or  $a \equiv m + 2 \pmod{2m + 3}$ , and thus, by Proposition 1 and Observation 4,  $\chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) = 2m + 3$ .

We now claim that every 2-distance  $(2m + 3)$ -coloring  $\lambda$  of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$  is necessarily  $(2m + 3)$ -periodic, that is  $\lambda(x + 2m + 3) = \lambda(x)$  for every  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ . To show that, it suffices to prove that any  $2m + 3$  consecutive vertices  $x, \dots, x + 2m + 2$  must be assigned distinct colors. Assume to the contrary that this is not the case and, without loss of generality, let  $x = 0$ . Since vertices  $0, 1, \dots, 2m$  necessarily get distinct colors, we only have two cases to consider:

1. Vertices  $0, 1, \dots, 2m + 1$  are colored with the colors  $1, 2, \dots, 2m + 1$  and  $1$ , respectively. Note that vertices  $m - a$  and  $m + a$  are both adjacent to all vertices  $0, 1, \dots, 2m$ . Hence,

$$\{\lambda(m - a), \lambda(m + a)\} = \{2m + 2, 2m + 3\},$$

which implies

$$\{\lambda(m + 1 - a), \lambda(m + 1 + a)\} = \{2m + 2, 2m + 3\}$$

(more precisely,  $\lambda(m + 1 - a) = 4m + 5 - \lambda(m - a)$  and  $\lambda(m + 1 + a) = 4m + 5 - \lambda(m + a)$ ). This implies  $\lambda(m + 2 - a) = \lambda(m + 2 + a) = 2$ , a contradiction since  $d(m + 2 - a, m + 2 + a) = 2$ .

2. Vertices  $0, 1, \dots, 2m + 1, 2m + 2$  are colored with the colors  $1, 2, \dots, 2m + 1, 2m + 2$  and  $1$ , respectively.

As in the previous case we have

$$\{\lambda(m - a), \lambda(m + a)\} = \{2m + 2, 2m + 3\},$$

which implies

$$\{\lambda(m + 1 - a), \lambda(m + 1 + a)\} = \{1, 2m + 3\}.$$

We thus get  $\lambda(m + 2 - a) = \lambda(m + 2 + a) = 2$ , again a contradiction.

Therefore, every 2-distance  $(2m + 3)$ -coloring  $\lambda$  of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$  is necessarily  $(2m + 3)$ -periodic, and thus  $\chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) = 2m + 3$  if and only if  $2m + 3$  do not divide any element of  $\{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ . This is clearly the case if and only if  $a \equiv m + 1 \pmod{2m + 3}$  or  $a \equiv m + 2 \pmod{2m + 3}$ . □

For other values of  $a$ , we propose the following general upper bound on

**Theorem 11** For all integers  $m$  and  $a$ ,  $2 \leq m < a$ ,

$$\chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) \leq 4m + 2 = 2\Delta(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) - 2.$$

**Proof.** Let  $a = (2m + 1)k + r$ ,  $0 \leq r < 2m + 1$ . We consider four cases, depending on the value of  $r$ . In each case, we will provide a periodic 2-distance  $(4m + 2)$ -coloring of the distance graph  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$ .

1.  $r < m$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a - r - m)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$[12 \dots (2m + 1)]^k [(2m + 2)(2m + 1) \dots (4m + 2)]^{k-1} (2m + 2)(2m + 3) \dots (3m + r + 2).$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 3m + r + 2$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \\ \cup \{p(2a - r - m) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $3m + r + 3 \leq c \leq 4m + 2$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k - 2\} \\ \cup \{p(2a - r - m) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, 2 - k \leq q \leq k - 2\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance  $(4m + 2)$ -coloring of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$ .

2.  $r = m$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a - 2m)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$[12 \dots (2m + 1)]^k [(2m + 2)(2m + 1) \dots (4m + 2)]^k.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 4m + 2$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \\ \cup \{p(2a - 2m) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

Therefore,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance  $(4m + 2)$ -coloring of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$ .

3.  $r = m + 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a + 1)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$[12 \dots (2m + 1)]^{k+1} [(2m + 2)(2m + 1) \dots (4m + 2)]^k (2m + 2)(2m + 3).$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq 2m + 3$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k\} \\ \cup \{p(2a + 1) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, -k \leq q \leq k\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $2m + 4 \leq c \leq 4m + 2$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \\ \cup \{p(2a + 1) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance  $(4m + 2)$ -coloring of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$ .

4.  $m + 2 \leq r < 2m + 1$ .

Let  $\lambda$  be the  $(2a - r + m + 1)$ -periodic mapping defined by the pattern

$$[12 \dots (2m + 1)]^{k+1} [(2m + 2)(2m + 1) \dots (4m + 2)]^k (2m + 2)(2m + 3) \dots (m + r + 1).$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $1 \leq c \leq m + r + 1$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k\} \\ \cup \{p(2a - r + m + 1) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, -k \leq q \leq k\}.$$

If  $\lambda(x) = \lambda(y) = c$ ,  $m + r + 2 \leq c \leq 4m + 2$ , then

$$d(x, y) \in \{q(2m + 1), 0 \leq q \leq k - 1\} \\ \cup \{p(2a - r + m + 1) + q(2m + 1), p \geq 1, 1 - k \leq q \leq k - 1\}.$$

Therefore, in both cases,  $d(x, y) \notin \{1, 2, \dots, 2m\} \cup \{a - m, a - m + 1, \dots, a + m\} \cup \{2a\}$ , and thus  $\lambda$  is a 2-distance  $(4m + 2)$ -coloring of  $G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})$ .

This concludes the proof. □

From Theorems 10 and 11, we thus get:

**Corollary 12** *For all integers  $m$  and  $a$ ,  $2 \leq m < a$ ,  $a \not\equiv m + 1, m + 2 \pmod{2m + 3}$ ,*

$$2m + 4 \leq \chi_2(G(\{1, \dots, m, a\})) \leq 4m + 2.$$

## 6 Discussion

In this paper, we studied 2-distance colorings of several types of distance graphs. In each case, we characterized those distance graphs that admit an optimal 2-distance coloring, that is distance graphs  $G(D)$  with  $\chi_2(G(D)) = \Delta(G(D)) + 1$ . We also provided general upper bounds for the 2-distance chromatic number of the considered graphs.

We leave as open problems the question of completely determining the 2-distance chromatic number of distance graphs  $G(D)$  when  $D = \{1, a, a+1\}$ ,  $a \geq 3$ , or  $D = \{1, \dots, m, a\}$ ,  $2 \leq m < a$ .

Considering other types of sets  $D$  would certainly be also an interesting direction for future research.

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