Observation of collapse of pseudospin order in bilayer quantum Hall ferromagnets

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(Dated: March 23, 2022)

The Hartree-Fock paradigm of bilayer quantum Hall states with finite tunneling at filling factor \(\nu = 1\) has full pseudospin ferromagnetic order with all the electrons in the lowest symmetric Landau level. Inelastic light scattering measurements of low energy spin excitations reveal major departures from the paradigm at relatively large tunneling gaps. The results indicate the emergence of a novel correlated quantum Hall state at \(\nu = 1\) characterized by reduced pseudospin order. Marked anomalies occur in spin excitations when pseudospin polarization collapses by application of in-plane magnetic fields.

PACS numbers: 73.43.Nq, 73.21.-b, 71.35.Lk, 73.43.Lp

Electron bilayers in semiconductor quantum structures embedded in a quantizing perpendicular magnetic field \((B_z)\) are contemporary realizations of collective systems where bizarre quantum phases may appear. In particular, at Landau level filling factor \(\nu = 1\) they may support excitonic-superfluidity when there is no tunneling between the layers. These phases are driven by unique interplays between intra- and interlayer Coulomb interactions and have been the subject of large research efforts in last years.

The bilayer system is also characterized by the ‘bare’, or Hartree, tunneling gap \(\Delta_{\text{AS}}\) that represents the splitting between the symmetric and anti-symmetric linear combinations of the lowest quantum well levels, as shown in Fig. 1a. The ground state in the presence of tunneling displays the well known manifestations of the incompressible quantum Hall (QH) fluid (dissipationless longitudinal transport and quantized Hall resistance). Interactions however create intriguing behaviors such as the disappearance at \(\nu = 1\) of QH signatures when \(d/\ell_B\) (where \(d\) is the inter-well distance and \(\ell_B\) the magnetic length) is increased above a critical value.

The states of electron bilayers are efficiently described by introducing a pseudospin operator \(\sigma^\tau\). Electrons in the left quantum well have pseudospin along the \(+z\) direction normal to the plane, and those in the right well have pseudospin along \(-z\). The symmetric (antisymmetric) states have pseudospin aligned along the \(+x\) (\(-x\)) direction. The mean field Hartree-Fock configuration of QH incompressible states with only the lowest symmetric level populated is shown in Fig. 1a. This state has full pseudospin polarization (all pseudospins along the \(x\)-direction) with an order parameter given by the average value of the normalized pseudospin polarization \(\langle \tau^\tau \rangle = 1\).

Here we report direct evidence that the pseudospin order of the Hartree-Fock paradigm is lost. We show that the unexpected QH states with reduced pseudospin polarization are probed by inelastic light scattering measurements of low-lying spin excitations. One of the excitations is the long wavelength \((q \rightarrow 0)\) spin-flip (SF) mode that is built with transitions across \(\Delta_{\text{AS}}\) with simultaneous change in spin orientation. The other is the long wavelength spin-wave (SW) excitation built from transitions across the Zeeman gap \(E_Z\) of the lowest spin-split symmetric levels. The transitions that build SW and SF excitation modes are depicted in Fig. 1b. The time-dependent Hartree-Fock approximation (TD-HFA) that has been extensively employed to interpret bilayer experiments dictates that in the mean-field \(\nu = 1\) state with \(\langle \tau^\tau \rangle = 1\), the splitting between long wavelength SF and SW modes is \(\delta E_{\tau} = \Delta_{\text{AS}}\).

We discuss below that the measured deviations of \(\delta E_{\tau}\) from \(\Delta_{\text{AS}}\) provides direct evidence of the suppression of \(\langle \tau^\tau \rangle\). The pseudospin order parameter can be written as \(\langle \tau^\tau \rangle = n_S/n_{AS}\), where \(n_S\) and \(n_{AS}\) are expectation values of electron densities in symmetric and anti-symmetric levels, respectively. The reduced pseudospin order reported here thus implies that a new highly-correlated incompressible fluid at \(\nu = 1\) is formed by mixing states with both symmetric and antisymmetric electrons despite the large value of the tunneling gap.

Experiments were carried out in two nominally symmetric modulation-doped \(\text{Al}_{0.1}\text{Ga}_{0.9}\text{As}\) double quantum wells (DQWs) grown by molecular beam epitaxy and having total electron densities \(n \sim 1.1 - 1.2 \times 10^{11}\text{cm}^{-2}\). Resonant inelastic light scattering was performed on samples in a dilution refrigerator with a base temperature of \(\sim 50\text{mK}\) and with the tilted angle geometry shown in Fig. 1a. Dye or titanium-sapphire lasers were tuned to the fundamental optical gap of the DQW. Figure 1b displays light scattering spectra of tunneling excitations that illustrate the determination of \(\Delta_{\text{AS}}\) at \(B = 0\). The spectra show collective modes in charge and spin, CDE and SDE, and also the single-particle transition SPE. In the case of samples studied here static exchange and...
FIG. 1: (a) Schematic representation of the backscattering geometry and of the double quantum well in the single particle configuration at $\nu=1$. Transitions in the spin wave (SW) and spin flip (SF) modes are indicated by curved vertical arrows; short vertical arrows indicate the orientations of spin, S and A label the symmetric and anti-symmetric levels separated by the tunneling gap $\Delta_{SAS}$. $k_L(\omega)$ and $\omega(z)$ indicate the wavevector and frequency of incident (scattered) light. $B_T$, $B_L$, and $B_{TJ}$ are the total magnetic field and its components perpendicular and parallel to the plane of the sample. $\theta$ is the tilt angle. (b) Polarized (black curve) and cross-polarized (gray curve) inelastic light scattering spectra at $B_T=0$ and normal incidence. SDE and CDE label the peak due to spin and charge density excitations, respectively, and SPE the single particle excitation at $\sim\Delta_{SAS}$. (c) Resonant inelastic light scattering spectrum of SW and SF excitations at $\nu=1$ after conventional subtraction of the background due to the laser and main luminescence. Solid and dashed lines show the fit with two Lorentzian functions.

correlation corrections at $B=0$ are small due to similar populations and density probability profiles of the symmetric and anti-symmetric subbands [12, 20]. We find that LDA (local density approximation) estimates of the tunneling gap differ from Hartree $\Delta_{SAS}$ values and from the measured SPE position by less than 10% [21]. We therefore use the measured SPE energy as the tunneling gap $\Delta_{SAS}$ ($\Delta_{SAS}=0.36\text{meV}$ at $B=0$ for the sample shown in Fig. 1). At the $\nu=1$ incompressible quantum Hall states, the values of $\frac{\Delta_{SAS}}{E_c}$ for the two samples are $\sim0.036$ and $0.06$ ($\Delta_{SAS}=0.36\text{meV}$ and $0.58\text{meV}$; $E_c=\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}$ is the average Coulomb interaction energy per electron and $\varepsilon$ is the static dielectric constant), with $\frac{\Delta_{SAS}}{E_c}$ $\sim2.2$ and 2, respectively.

The spectrum of low-lying excitations of the sample with $\Delta_{SAS}=0.36\text{meV}$ at the lowest tilt angle $\theta=5^\circ$ and $\nu=1$ is shown in Fig. 1. Two peaks labeled SW and SF are observed. The SW peak is the long wavelength spin wave that occurs at $E_Z$ as required by Larmor theorem. The higher energy peak, labeled SF, is also due to spin excitations because it displays light scattering selection rules identical to the SW peak. We assign the SF feature to the long wavelength spin-flip (SF) excitation across the tunneling gap. The identification is supported by the angular dependence displayed in Fig. 2, showing that the SF energy approaches $E_Z$ as $\Delta_{SAS}$ is reduced by the in-plane component of magnetic field $B_{TJ}$ [22].

To evaluate the impact of these results we recall again that in TDHFA $\delta E_r=\Delta_{SAS}$ [15]. At the angle of $\theta=5^\circ$, where $B_{TJ}$ is quite small and finite angle corrections are negligible, we find that $\delta E_r=0.13\pm0.01\text{meV}$, much smaller than the value of $\Delta_{SAS}\sim0.36\text{meV}$ determined from the spectra in Fig. 1. This result uncovers a major breakdown of the TDHFA predictions, in particular that the state has full pseudospin polarization. It is extremely important that the bilayers at $\nu=1$ continue to display well-defined magneto-transport signatures characteristic of a QH incompressible fluid [13, 23]. The implication is that the emergent highly-correlated fluid revealed by the light scattering measurements does not significantly change electrical conduction in the $\nu=1$ QH state at low temperatures.

To gain more quantitative insights into the effect of correlations and pseudospin reduction on spin modes we can use the pseudospin language introduced above and the coupled spin-pseudospin bilayer Hamiltonian $\hat{H}$ derived in Ref. [24]. This provides a framework to analyze the dynamics of electron spins and pseudospins in incompressible bilayers at $\nu=1$, where in-plane fluctuations of total charge density can be neglected. $\hat{H}$ is written in terms of spin and pseudospin operators ($\mathbf{S}_i$ and $\mathbf{T}_i=\frac{1}{2}\mathbf{S}_i$ respectively) acting on states belonging to a complete set of localized orbital wavefunctions $\{|i\}$ in the lowest Landau level [24]. It includes all relevant interactions in both spin and pseudospin channels, and coupling terms between spin and pseudospin operators.

In order to derive the energies of long-wavelength SW and SF we note that these spin excitations correspond to in-phase and out-of-phase spin modes in the two layers, respectively. The associated states can then be constructed by using projection operators $\pm T_i^z$ into the first and second layer and the spin-lowering operator $S_i^-$. Following this procedure the associated states can be written as

$$|\Psi_{SW}\rangle = N^{-\frac{1}{2}} \sum_i S_i^- |\Psi_0\rangle,$$

$$|\Psi_{SF}\rangle = N^{-\frac{1}{2}} \sum_i \tau_i^- S_i^- |\Psi_0\rangle,$$

where $N$ is the total number of electrons, and $|\Psi_0\rangle$ is the ferromagnetic, fully spin polarized (at zero temperature)
QH ground state with any degree of pseudospin polarization [24]. Using the Hamiltonian $H$ described above, it is possible to write the energy difference $\delta E_\tau$ between SF and SW as:

$$\delta E_\tau = \langle \Psi_{SF} | \hat{H} | \Psi_{SF} \rangle - \langle \Psi_{SW} | \hat{H} | \Psi_{SW} \rangle = \Delta_{\text{SAS}}(\tau^x), \quad (3)$$

where the last result follows a straightforward calculation. Eq. (3) remarks that a reduced pseudospin order parameter determines the tunneling SF energy. This conclusion is likely to remain valid even when $B_{//} \neq 0$. In this case phase differences are introduced between the wave functions in the two layers; their impact can be described in terms of a tilting of the pseudo-magnetic field associated to the tunneling gap along the x-y plane.

In the commensurate phase expected at relatively low $B_{//}$ [13] pseudospins are thus aligned in different directions as a function of in-plane positions [3]. In Eq. (3) therefore $\langle \tau^x \rangle$ must be replaced by the average of $\tau_x$ in the direction of this pseudo-magnetic field. We call this quantity $\langle \tau^x(\theta) \rangle$. In the mean-field configuration, neglecting correlation effects, we continue to have $\langle \tau^x(\theta) \rangle = 1$ and $\delta E_\tau = \Delta_{\text{SAS}}$.

The prediction reported in Eq. (3) allows us to link the measured SF-SW splitting $\delta E_\tau$ with a reduced $\langle \tau^x \rangle$ beyond TDHFA. We stress that by reducing the pseudospin order electrons can efficiently optimize their inter- and intra-layer correlations by decreasing the charging energy associated to fluctuations in layer occupation (fluctuation of the pseudospin in the $z$-direction). For $\theta=5^\circ$, $\langle \tau^x \rangle = \frac{n_{S}+n_{AS}}{n_{S}+n_{AS}} = 0.36$, showing that the new state with reduced pseudospin order is characterized by an high expectation value $\frac{n_{AS}}{n_{S}+n_{AS}} = 0.32$ (or 32%) for the fraction of the total electron density into the anti-symmetric level. It is therefore tempting to describe this QH incompressible state in terms of bound electron-hole pairs across the tunneling gap making a particle-hole transformation in the lowest symmetric Landau level [25, 26].

It is surprising to observe this major loss of pseudospin ferromagnetic order at sizable values of $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}$. Correlations in electron bilayers at $\nu=1$ were theoretically evaluated within models that consider the impact of quantum fluctuations from low-lying tunneling modes such as magneto-rotons [24, 27, 28, 29]. In these theories pseudospin order parameter is suppressed because of these in-plane pseudospin quantum fluctuations, leading eventually to the incompressible-compressible phase transition associated to the disappearing of the QH state. Because of the difference between intra- and inter-layer interactions, in fact, $\tau^x$ is not a good quantum number and it fluctuates in the true many-body ground state. In agreement with our findings, these calculations suggest that significant loss of pseudospin polarization could occur at high $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}$ values.

The suppression of $\tau^x$ is influenced by $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}$. For the sample with larger $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}=0.58\text{meV}$ the extrapolated value at zero angle yields $\frac{n_{AS}}{n_{S}+n_{AS}} \approx 17\%$ ($\langle \tau^x \rangle \sim 0.65$).

We have also reduced $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}$ by increasing $B_{//}$ at larger tilt angles $\theta$ [22]. Figs. 2a and 2b show that with increasing angles $\delta E_{\tau}$ shrinks until it collapses at a ‘critical’ angle $\theta_c \sim 35^\circ$. Points in Fig. 2a are the SF-SW splitting $\delta E_\tau$ as a function of angle. We have not been able to observe SF modes for angles $\theta > \theta_c$. Figure 2c shows the ratio $\frac{n_{AS}}{n_{S}} = \frac{1-\langle \tau(\theta) \rangle}{1+\langle \tau(\theta) \rangle}$ determined from the measured splitting $\delta E_\tau(\theta)$ and from $\delta E_\tau(\theta) = \Delta_{\text{SAS}}(\theta) \cdot \langle \tau(\theta) \rangle$, where $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}(\theta)$ includes the single-particle angular dependence derived in Ref. [22] and plotted in Fig. 2c. Within this framework $\frac{n_{AS}}{n_{S}} \to 1$ in a continuous way ($\langle \tau(\theta) \rangle \to 0$) when $\theta \to \theta_c$. It is possible, however, that close to the collapse of $\delta E_\tau$, higher-order corrections to Eq. (3) will affect the precise determination of the pseudospin polarization.

The data, however, reveal strong increase of correlations as $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}(\theta)$ diminishes. The value of $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}(\theta_c)$ is consistent with the phase transformation to the compressible phase (without QH effect) [3, 4, 13]. Given the values in our samples of $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}^{\text{TDHFA}}$ and $\Delta_{\text{SAS}}^{\text{comm}}$ the commensurate-incommensurate phase transition observed in Ref. [13] is not expected to occur here for $\theta \leq \theta_c$. Additionally, the transition to the incommensurate phase would produce a non-observed abrupt reduction of $\langle \tau_x(\theta) \rangle$. It is possible, however, that the decrease of exchange energy associated to the effect of $B_{//}$ could contribute to increase quantum fluctuations, further reducing the order parameter.

Evidence of a phase transition at the collapse of pseudospin order at $\theta_c$ is also seen in the marked temperature
dependence of SF and SW modes, as shown in Fig. 3b. For typical spectra with \( \theta < \theta_c \), the intensities of the peaks have a large temperature dependence. The temperature dependence is slower for the asymmetric SW modes measured at \( \theta > \theta_c \). To describe this behavior we introduce a temperature \( T_{1/2} \) at which the peak intensity is half of its value at the lowest temperature. Figure 3b displays \( T_{1/2} \) versus angle for both SW (black circles) and SF (gray triangles). It can be seen that at \( \theta_c \) there is an abrupt change in \( T_{1/2} \) that accompanies the disappearance of the SF mode. The strong decrease of \( T_{1/2} \) for the SW for \( \theta < \theta_c \) suggests a rich spin dynamics in the ferromagnetic \( \nu = 1 \) state that may be linked to spin-pseudospin coupling.

In conclusion we determined major reductions of pseudospin ferromagnetic order due to correlations in the incompressible phase of coupled bilayers at \( \nu = 1 \) by inelastic light scattering measurements of spin excitations. The results are surprising by revealing large correlation effects in a range of \( \frac{dS}{dE} \) and \( \frac{dI}{dE} \) values where magneto-transport results find well-defined QH signatures. Further studies, including absorption across the fundamental gap between valence and conduction bands [30, 31], should clarify if the correlated state with reduction of pseudospin order displays the properties of an electron-hole excitonic quantum fluid.

VP acknowledges support from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italian Ministry of Research and from the European Community’s Human Potential Program (Project HPRN-CT-2002-00291). AP acknowledges the National Science Foundation under Award Number DMR-03-52738, the Department of Energy under award DE-AIO2-04ER46133, and the W. M. Keck Foundation. We thank Allan H. MacDonald for illuminating discussions.

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