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Coherent Forward Broadening in Cold Atom Clouds

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It is shown that homogeneous line-broadening in a diffuse cold atom cloud is proportional to the resonant optical depth of the cloud. Further, it is demonstrated how the strong directionality of the coherent interactions causes the cloud’s spectra to depend strongly on its shape, even when the cloud is held at constant densities. These two numerical observations can be predicted analytically by extending the single photon wavefunction model. Lastly, elongating a cloud along the line of laser propagation causes the excitation probability distribution to deviate from the exponential decay predicted by the Beer-Lambert law to the extent where the atoms in the back of the cloud are more excited than the atoms in the front. These calculations are conducted at low densities relevant to recent experiments.

PACS numbers:

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the seminal work of Dicke [1], the effects of collective emission in an ensemble of radiators has been studied extensively. Collective long-range interactions have shown their import in many phenomena such as coherent forward scattering [2, 3], the collective Lamb shift [4], fault-tolerant quantum computation [5], laser cooling [6], and homogeneous line-broadening [7]. The study of collective effects and their role in transition lines is of particular importance for the implementation of highly accurate atomic clocks [8–12], where achieving narrow resonance lines is essential. As the quest for extremely accurate atomic clocks progresses, an understanding of the plethora of physical processes in cold atomic gasses, such as density dependent line-broadening [8], will need to be understood using models that extend the classical theories of line-broadening, since these models mainly rely on local interactions [13–15].

Although the interaction between an individual pair of atoms or molecules in a cold, diffuse gas can be tiny, the long-range nature of the dipole-dipole couplings can lead to the substantial constructive buildup of small interactions over an entire ensemble [2, 3, 16–20]. This understanding has been improved using single photon wavefunction theories that provide analytic predictions about the line-broadening seen in an atomic cloud when driven by an extremely weak laser [3, 16, 19]. This figure shows collective effects similar to those predicted using single photon wavefunction theories [3, 16, 19]. Even at densities where individual interactions are tiny, a cloud can still show signs of coherence due to the buildup of the \( \frac{e^{ikr}}{r} \) term present in dipole-

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dipole couplings. This leads the line-broadening and the excitation distribution of a cloud to depend strongly on its overall shape, since interactions add constructively between atoms separated by a position vector parallel to the direction of the driving laser \( \hat{k} \equiv \frac{1}{k} \mathbf{r} \). For constant \( \rho \) and \( N \), clouds that are elongated parallel to \( \hat{k} \) are more broadened than those elongated perpendicular to \( \hat{k} \).

This work is organized as follows: In Sec. II, we describe our numerical approach, as well as a variant of the Gauss-Seidel iteration routine that allows for the simulation of larger numbers of atoms. In Sec. III, we provide an analytic derivation of the dependence of a cloud’s line-shape on its density, aspect ratio, and number of atoms. This is done using an improvement of the single photon wavefunction model so that it includes a vectorized electromagnetic field, as well as a spherically non-symmetric Gaussian cloud. In Sec. IV, we discuss the results of our numerical model. Here we show that until a cloud becomes too elongated along the line of laser propagation, the results of our analytic model are numerically accurate. Lastly, we show that for clouds highly elongated along \( \hat{k} \) and driven by a red detuned laser, a counter-intuitive excitation distribution develops: the atoms in the back of the cloud (farther along \( \hat{k} \)) are more likely to be excited than the atoms in the front of the cloud. This is the reverse of the typical exponential decay predicted by the Beer-Lambert law. We discuss experimental possibilities and provide concluding remarks in Sec. V.

II. NUMERICAL METHOD

For a weak laser, a collection of atoms can be treated as classical radiating dipoles or equivalently as coupled damped harmonic oscillators [20, 23–25],

\[
\hat{a}_\alpha^\dagger(t) = \left( i \Delta - \frac{i}{2}\hbar \right) \hat{a}_\alpha(t) - \frac{i}{\hbar} d \mu \left( r_\alpha \right)
- \left( \frac{\hbar}{2} \right) \sum_{\beta \neq \alpha, \nu} G_{\mu \nu}(r_\beta - r_\alpha) \hat{a}_\nu^\dagger(t),
\]

where \( a_{\alpha}^\dagger \) represents the \( \mu \)-th polarization amplitude of the \( \alpha \)-th atom, \( d \) is the electric dipole matrix element, \( E^\mu\left( r_\alpha \right) \) is the \( \mu \)-th component of the laser field at atom \( \alpha \), \( \Delta \) is the detuning, and \( G_{\mu \nu}(\mathbf{r}) \) is the usual dipole field propagator [26],

\[
G_{\mu \nu}(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{3 e^{i k r}}{2i k r} \left\{ [\delta_{\mu \nu} - \hat{r}_\mu \hat{r}_\nu] + [\delta_{\mu \nu} - 3\hat{r}_\mu \hat{r}_\nu] | \frac{i}{k r} - \frac{1}{(k r)^2} \right\},
\]

where \( \mathbf{r} = |\mathbf{r}| \), and \( \hat{r}_\alpha \) are the components of the vector \( \hat{r} = \mathbf{r}/r \). These coupled equations can be rewritten in matrix-vector form:

\[
\dot{\mathbf{a}} = \mathbf{M} \mathbf{a} - \frac{i}{\hbar} \mathbf{E}
\]

and the steady state solution (\( \dot{\mathbf{a}} = 0 \)) may be obtained by inverting a symmetric \( 3N \times 3N \) matrix for systems where the atoms’ energy levels are degenerate in \( M_f \), and a \( N \times N \) matrix for the system with Zeeman splitting. For these calculations, we average over \( 1.2 \times 10^5/N \) randomly distributed atom positions for the line-shape calculations and \( 9.6 \times 10^5/N \) randomly distributed positions for the excitation distribution calculations. The atoms are treated as stationary and distributed according to a Gaussian density distribution:

\[
\rho(r) = \frac{N}{\sigma^3 (2\pi)^{3/2}} \exp \left\{ -\frac{1}{2\sigma^2} \left\{ \xi (y^2 + z^2) + \frac{x^2}{\xi^2} \right\} \right\}
\]

where \( \sigma \) is the standard deviation of a spherically symmetric cloud chosen to produce a specific average density \( \bar{\rho} = N/(4\pi \sigma^2)^{3/2} \) and \( \xi \) is a constant that parametrizes the shape of the cloud with respect to the laser direction. Here the laser is set so that it is propagating in the \( \hat{x} \) direction and polarized in the \( \hat{z} \) direction. For spherically symmetric calculations (\( \xi = 1 \)), we find that the results using a Gaussian density distribution agree with a constant density distribution to within 5%, for up to \( 10^4 \) atoms.

In order to avoid the usual \( N^3 \) scaling of the computation time, we solve this matrix equation using an adaptation of the Gauss-Seidel [27] iteration algorithm. This may be written in the form:

\[
a_{n+1} = \mathbf{D}^{-1} \left( \frac{i\hbar}{\mathbf{M}} (\mathbf{M} - \mathbf{D}) a_n \right)
\]

For the usual Gauss-Seidel iteration routine, \( \mathbf{D} \) would consist of the diagonal elements of \( \mathbf{M} \). However, this diverges whenever \( \mathbf{D}^{-1} (\mathbf{M} - \mathbf{D}) \) contains an eigenvalue with an absolute value greater than 1. We avoid this problem by allowing \( \mathbf{D} \) to change depending on the current row during a matrix multiply. When a row corresponding to a particular atom is being updated in \( \mathbf{a} \), we choose \( \mathbf{D} \) such that it contains current atom’s couplings to its \( m \) closest neighboring atoms. This routine allows the largest couplings, that would lead to the divergence discussed above to be conducted exactly, while the majority of the smaller couplings are iterated. This algorithm scales at a rate close to \( N^2 \), allowing us to simulate much larger numbers of atoms than we could otherwise. Note that this numerical method is much more efficient at lower densities.

III. SINGLE-PHOTON MODEL FOR A NON-SYMMETRIC GAUSSIAN CLOUD

This study is conducted in the limit of weak laser intensity. Because of this, the single photon wave-function model [3, 19] should be a fair approximation. Following this model, we write our wave-function as:

\[
|\Psi(t)\rangle = \beta_+(t) |+\rangle \{0\} + \sum_\alpha \alpha \beta_\alpha(t) |-\rangle \{0\} + \sum_k \alpha \gamma_k \{k\} |g\rangle \{\gamma_k = 1\}
\]

where
where \(|+)\) is the superradiant Dicke timed state:
\[
|+) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_j e^{i(k_0 \cdot r_j)} |j) \tag{8}
\]
where \(|j)\) refers to the state where the \(j^{th}\) atom is excited and the rest are in the ground state, and \((-|\alpha)\) is the \(\alpha^{th}\) subradiant state.

However, in the limit where \(\Delta\) the superradiant or ground states. This allows one to write the differential equation for \(\dot{\beta}_+(t)\) as:
\[
\dot{\beta}_+(t) = -\frac{i}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_j \sum_{k \lambda} \left\{ (\hat{e}_{k \lambda} \cdot \hat{x}) g_k \pi_j \hat{a}_{k \lambda} e^{i\omega_k t+i k \cdot r_j} + c.c. \right\} \tag{10}
\]
where \(\Delta \equiv (\omega_0 - \omega_k)\). Similarly we obtain:
\[
\dot{\beta}_{(\alpha)}(t) = -\frac{i}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_j \sum_{k \lambda} \left\{ (\hat{e}_{k \lambda} \cdot \hat{x}) g_k \pi_{\alpha,j} \hat{a}_{(k \lambda)} e^{i(k \cdot r_j + i \Delta \tau)} \right\} \tag{12}
\]
where \(c_{\alpha,j}\) refers to amplitude of the \(j^{th}\) ket of the \(\alpha^{th}\) subradiant state. However, in the limit \(k \sigma_x, y, z \gg 1\) and \(N \gg 1\), there is no Agarwal-Fano coupling \(3\), meaning that the \((N-1)\) subradiant states will not interact with the superradiant or ground states. This allows one to write the differential equation for \(\dot{\beta}_+(t)\) as:
\[
\dot{\beta}_+(t) = -\frac{1}{N} \sum_{j,j'} \sum_{k \lambda} \int_0^t dt' \beta_+(t') e^{i\Delta(t-t')} (\hat{e}_{k \lambda} \cdot \hat{x}) g_k^2 |k\rangle^2 \tag{13}
\]
The sum over atom positions now gives:
\[
\sum_{j,j'} e^{i(k_{\lambda} \cdot r_j)} = N + \sum_{j,j' \neq j} e^{i(k_{\lambda} \cdot r_j - r_{j'})} \tag{14}
\]
Changing the sum in Eq. 14 into an integral over atom positions in a Gaussian cloud elongated along the line of laser propagation gives:
\[
N + N(N-1) \int_0^\infty d^3 x_1 d^3 x_2 \exp \left\{ -\frac{1}{2\sigma^2} \left\{ \xi(x_1^2 + x_2^2 + y_1^2 + y_2^2) + \frac{z_1^2 + z_2^2}{\xi^2} \right\} \right\} \tag{15}
\]
Performing the integrals over atom positions gives:
\[
N + N(N-1) \exp \left\{ -\frac{\sigma^2}{\xi} \right\} \tag{16}
\]
Setting \(k_0 = k_0 \hat{z}\), and plugging Eq. (16) into Eq. (13) and converting the sum over \(k\) into an integral gives:
\[
\dot{\beta}_+(t) = -\frac{\Gamma}{2} (1 + \frac{\xi b_0}{8}) \beta_+(t), \tag{18}
\]
where \(\Gamma = \frac{4\omega^3 |\langle \psi \rangle|^2}{3N\sigma^2}\) is the cooperativity parameter of the gas.

IV. NUMERICAL RESULTS

A. Line-Broadening

Our numerical calculations show that for spherically symmetric clouds, our the analytic prediction of Sec. III is correct. This section shows that a spherically symmetric cloud (\(\xi = 1\)) with a density such that \(\rho \lambda^3 \ll 1\), emits light with a line-width that is approximately \((1 + \zeta b_0)\Gamma\), where \(\zeta\) is a numerically determined constant. Using numbers for the \(^1S_1 \rightarrow ^3P_1\) transition of \(^{88}\text{Sr}\), we calculate the value of \(\zeta\) for two cases: first, for the transition from the \(^3P_1\) state without a magnetic field, and second for the transition from the \(\hat{z}\) polarized state, where \(^3P_1\) has been Zeeman split. For the Zeeman split case, we choose the \(|J_y = 0, M_y = 0\rangle\) to \(|J_z = 1, M_z = 0\rangle\) transition with the driving laser polarized in the \(\hat{z}\) direction.
This choice gives a maximum laser coupling between the states and gives a large eﬀect from the dipole-dipole interaction. We show that the fractional change in line-width, \((\Gamma' - \Gamma)/\Gamma\), is \(\zeta(0)\) using up to \(3 \times 10^3\) atoms for the system that is degenerate in \(M_J\) and up to \(2 \times 10^4\) atoms for the system with Zeeman splitting. For atoms experiencing no magnetic ﬁeld, it is determined that \(\zeta \simeq 0.126\) and for the Zeeman split case, \(\zeta \simeq 0.127\). This is in good agreement with the result of \(\zeta = 1/8\) derived in Sec. III using our extension of the single photon model. The fact that the numerical calculations with and without Zeeman splitting give essentially the same answer, even though one includes four states and the other only two states, is due to the strong forward dependence of the coherent interactions. Since a laser polarized in the \(\hat{z}\) direction will only illuminate the polarization state corresponding to \(\hat{z}\), and scattered radiation in the forward direction has the same polarization as the laser, coherent forward scattering, where the scattered emission from a cloud adds coherently along \(\hat{k}\) [2, 3], the atom-atom interactions that contribute to broadening also add coherently along \(\hat{k}\). Thus, for a given \(\bar{\rho}\), the number of atoms that interact coherently and contribute to the line-broadening increases with the size of the cloud.

For illustrative purposes, we rewrite our equation for a system’s fractional change in line-width as, \((\Gamma' - \Gamma)/\Gamma = 12\pi\xi\bar{\rho}^{2/3}N^{1/3}/k^2 = 24\pi^{3/2}\xi\bar{\rho}\bar{\sigma}/k^2\), in the limit \(N \gg 1\). These equations explicitly show the parametric dependence of \(\Gamma'\). In order to demonstrate this in our calculations, Fig. 2a shows the photon scattering rate \(\gamma\) versus \(N\) at a constant density of \(\bar{\rho} = 5 \times 10^{17} m^{-3}\) \((\bar{\rho}/k^3 \simeq 6.6 \times 10^{-4})\). In Fig. 2b, we show that \((\Gamma' - \Gamma)/(\Gamma\bar{\rho}^{2/3})\) when plotted against \(N^{1/3}\) gives a straight line, which agrees with our analytic result for values of \(\bar{\rho}\) between \(10^{15} m^{-3}\) and \(5 \times 10^{17} m^{-3}\). This plot shows no cutoff for clouds up to \(2 \times 10^4\) atoms.

The power law \(N^{1/3}\) scaling of the fractional change in line-width can be understood qualitatively using the following picture. Since the average spacing of the atoms for the largest densities shown is over \(1.8\lambda\), large-scale eﬀects only occur if there is constructive interference in the sum over many photon-propagation paths. Here constructive interference occurs because the phase diﬀerence between the driving laser at atom \(\alpha\) and at atom \(\beta\) is exactly the phase diﬀerence a photon will gain when traveling from atom \(\alpha\) to \(\beta\) if \(\rho_\alpha - \rho_\beta\) \(\cdot\) \(\hat{k}\) \(\simeq +1\). On the other hand if \(\rho_\alpha - \rho_\beta\) \(\cdot\) \(\hat{k}\) \(\neq +1\), the phases will randomize, resulting in no constructive interference. Just as in the case of coherent forward scattering, where the scattered emission from a cloud adds coherently along \(\hat{k}\) [2, 3], the atom-atom interactions that contribute to broadening also add coherently along \(\hat{k}\). Thus, for a given \(\bar{\rho}\), the number of atoms that interact coherently and contribute to the line-broadening increases with the size of the cloud.

B. Comparison with Ref. [8]

This equation for \(\Gamma'\) may be relevant to the density dependent line-broadening observed in Ref. [8]. For densities of \(5.0 \times 10^{17} m^{-3}\), Ref. [8] measures the homogeneous line-width of their sample to be \(\simeq 29\) kHz, compared to the measured low density line-width \(\simeq 14.5\) kHz, making the density dependent broadening \(\simeq 14.5\) kHz. Our equation for line-broadening predicts this value to be \(\simeq 26.8\) kHz, assuming a single atom lifetime of \(21.3\mu s\) [29]. This calculation also assumes \(N = 10^9\) and a spherically symmetric cloud, both of which were not speciﬁed in Ref. [8]. Reference [8] does note that at constant \(\bar{\rho}\), clouds containing more atoms have larger homogeneous line-widths, which was explained by noting that the collisional scattering lengths for atom-atom collisions increases as the relative motion between the molecules decreases. Alternatively, the increased broadening with \(N\) seen in Ref. [8], could be explained using the above formula in which the fractional change in line-width increases proportional to \(N^{1/3}\) for a given average density. The diﬀerence between our extrapolated result and Ref. [8] might be due to the simplicity of our model and/or the lack of important information about experimental parameters (for example the number of atoms in particular measurements). A more accurate calculation for this system will require the eﬀects of atomic collisions and non-stationary atoms as well as knowledge of the shape of the atomic cloud. We address the importance of the cloud shape below.

C. Dependence of Line-Shape on the Aspect Ratio

Because the dipole-dipole interactions parallel to \(\hat{k}\) add constructively, the scattering rate will also depend on the shape of the atomic cloud. A cloud that is highly elongated along \(\hat{k}\) will have a larger fraction of its atoms interact constructively, causing the absorption line to be signiﬁcantly more broadened. We illustrate this in Fig. 3, where we show how the Lorentzian line-shape, changes signiﬁcantly as we morph the cloud from being ﬂattened against \(\hat{k}\) to being elongated along \(\hat{k}\). In these calculations, we parametrize the spatial distribution with the variable \(\xi\) deﬁned by Eq. 4, so that the \(\bar{\rho}\) is kept constant while the cloud is elongated parallel or perpendicular to \(\hat{\xi}\). Here the length to width ratio is proportional to \(\xi^{3/2}\).

Varying the value of \(\xi\) produces several eﬀects. First, the line-width of our scattered emission proﬁle grows as the cloud is elongated along \(\hat{k}\) until ﬁnally it deviates from a Lorentzian proﬁle. Numerically, we ﬁnd that \(\Gamma' = (1 + \xi\zeta_b)\Gamma\) for \(0.0 < \xi < 2.0\), which agrees with our analytic result \((1 + \frac{\xi_2}{2\pi})\Gamma\). For values of \(\xi > 2\), the line-shape of the scattered light begins to deviate from a Lorentzian proﬁle. Both of these eﬀects are shown in Fig. 3. The deviation from a Lorentzian at large values of \(\xi\) implies that the approximation of 1 superradiant state and (N-1) non-interacting subradiant states [3, 16, 19] is not valid in this regime, which means that many dif-
FIG. 2. (a) Photon scattering rate $\gamma$ in arbitrary units versus detuning divided by $\Gamma$ ($\delta \equiv \Delta / \Gamma$), for a symmetric Gaussian cloud with $\bar{\rho} = 5 \times 10^{17} m^{-3}$. (b) Broadening normalized by $\bar{\rho}^{2/3}$, $\eta \equiv (\Gamma' - \Gamma) / (\Gamma \bar{\rho}^{2/3})$, in units of $10^{-12}$ m$^2$ for densities $10^{15} - 5 \times 10^{17} m^{-3}$ compared to the broadening predicted using the single photon wavefunction model. These densities span a range $\bar{\rho}/k^3 = 1.3 \times 10^{-6} - 6.6 \times 10^{-4}$.

D. Counterintuitive Excitation Distribution

Figure 4 shows the average probability that an atom is excited in a cloud of $10^4$ atoms versus the distance along the laser direction for different values of $\xi$ (Fig. 4a) and for different detunings (Fig. 4b). For values of $\xi > 5$ and red detunings, the excitation distribution shifts towards the back of the cloud, in contrast to the exponential decay predicted by the Beer-Lambert law. A similar effect has been observed in arrays of several metallic nanospheres [31] and is due to the constructive buildup of electric field along the line of radiators. For clouds stretched parallel to $\hat{k}$, we see that for red detuned lasers the excitation distribution of the sample is altered such that a larger fraction of the atoms are excited, causing an effective red-shift of the scattered line-shape.

V. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

All of these phenomena should be observable experimentally. The calculations in Figs 2-4 focus on the $^{88}\text{Sr} \, ^1S_1 \rightarrow ^3P_1$ transition, but the effects shown here are independent of the value of $\Gamma$ since the damping and coupling terms in Eq. 1 both contain $\Gamma$. The predictions described above should be realizable for any azimuthally symmetric cloud of atoms with densities similar to those shown here when the inhomogeneous broadening is negligible. Manipulating cold atomic clouds is common in experiments [8, 32–35], which makes testing the predictions of this letter feasible. For example using a magneto-optical trap (MOT), one could create a cold atomic cloud with a Gaussian density distribution equivalent to that in Eq. 4 and change the values of $\sigma_{x,y,z}$ [32]. In this manner, the $\Gamma' = (1 + \xi b_0)\Gamma$ relationship could be measured by driving the cloud with a low intensity laser and measuring the emitted spectra for various numbers of atoms and cloud geometries. The predicted excitation distribution could also be shown by measuring the intensity of light emitted by different parts of the cloud.

In conclusion, collective effects can be manipulated in a cold gas of atoms, while keeping the average density of the atoms constant. When $\bar{\rho}/k^3 \ll 1$, the fractional
FIG. 4. The average probability of an individual atom being excited in a $10^8$ atom cloud for various values of $\delta$ (see Fig. 2) and shapes $\xi$ versus $\mathbf{r} \cdot \hat{k}$ in units of $10^5a_0$ (setting the center of the cloud as the origin). (a) The average probability of excitation ($P$) for a cloud driven by a red detuned laser ($\delta = -3.1$) for increasing values of $\xi$. It should be noted that in the figure, plots with larger values of $\xi$ average over fewer atoms since those clouds are stretched beyond the region plotted. (b) The ‘Normalized’ average probability of excitation ($P'$) for a cloud at $\xi = 5$ for positive and negative laser detunings, where ‘Normalized’ means that each curve is divided by its initial point.

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