Phenomenology of Jet Quenching in Heavy Ion Collisions

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We derive an analytical expression for the quenching factor in the strong quenching limit where the $p_T$ spectrum of hard partons is dominated by surface emission. We explore the phenomenological consequences of different scaling laws for the energy loss and calculate the additional suppression of the away-side jet.

It is commonly believed that the yield for “hard” observables in high-energy nuclear reactions scales as the number of binary nucleon-nucleon (NN) collisions occurring during the encounter of the two nuclei. This expectation applies to processes that are characterized by a high virtuality $q^2$, for which final state interactions are negligible, such as lepton pair production or the total yield of heavy flavor quarks. There is no a priori reason to expect this rule to hold for high-qt processes, in which the final state can be strongly modified by interactions with comovers. A well documented example is the production of heavy vector mesons, such as the $J/\Psi$, which is found to be “anomalously” suppressed in collisions of heavy nuclei at the CERN-SPS.

The yield of hadrons produced with high transverse momentum $p_T$ in Au-Au collisions at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC) has recently been shown to be significantly suppressed in comparison with the cumulative yield of NN collisions. This effect, called “jet quenching”, was predicted to occur as a result of energy loss by the hard scattered partons due to interactions with the surrounding dense medium. The theory of this energy loss has been a topic of intense research over the past few years. It is not yet complete agreement between different experiments about the scaling of the hadron yields with the number of nucleons participating in the reaction, $N_{\text{part}}$, or with the binary collision number $N_{\text{coll}}$. The PHOBOS collaboration has presented evidence that the yield of charged hadrons with $p_T \approx 4 \text{ GeV/c}$ scales like $N_{\text{part}}^{2/3}$. This finding is contradicted by data from the PHENIX collaboration. It is not clear whether the discrepancy is due to different normalization methods, different experimental acceptance, or other reasons.

In addition, the experiments have found that the suppression factors for mesons and baryons are quite different up to transverse momenta of 5 GeV/c. It was recently proposed that this phenomenon can be attributed to a competition between different hadron formation processes, with parton recombination dominating at lower $p_T$ and fragmentation at higher $p_T$. The participant or binary collision scaling may be complicated in the transition region. The situation is predicted to simplify for $p_T > 6 \text{ GeV/c}$, where hadrons are overwhelmingly produced by fragmentation of an energetic parton.

We will first show analytically that the spectrum of high-$p_T$ partons, in the limit of large energy loss, is dominated by partons emitted from the surface of the collision zone and thus scales like the surface rather than the volume of the interaction region. We will then explore the scaling of the quenching factor $Q(p_T)$ with participant number and $p_T$. We finally calculate the additional suppression of the away-side jet and the azimuthal anisotropy of the parton yield in noncentral collisions.

We begin by considering the loss of energy by an energetic parton traversing a homogeneous, static medium of thickness $L$. We assume that the geometry is given by a cylinder with radius $R$, as in the boost-invariant Bjorken model for a nuclear collision with impact parameter $b = 0$, and that the parton moves in the transverse plane in the local rest frame of the medium. We further assume that the effective energy loss, defined as the shift of the momentum spectrum of fast partons, depends on $p_T$ and $L$ in the following general way:

$$\Delta p_T = \mu p_T^b L,$$

where $\mu$ is a scaling exponent. The linear dependence on $L$ holds when the loss occurs in subsequent, independent interactions with the medium. It has also been shown to be valid, when multiple interactions are suppressed by...
the LPM effect, due to the steep fall-off of the parton spectrum with $p_T$. The traversed pathlength inside the medium for a parton created at transverse position $r$ with an angle $\phi$ relative to the radial direction is

$$L(\phi) = (R^2 - r^2 \sin^2 \phi)^{1/2} - r \cos \phi \approx \frac{z^2}{2R \cos \phi},$$

(2)

where $r = |r|$, $z^2 = R^2 - r^2$, and the approximation is valid near the surface ($z \ll R$). Perturbative QCD predicts that the parton spectrum at moderately large values of $p_T$ has the form

$$\frac{dN}{d^2p_T} = N_0 \left(1 + \frac{p_T}{p_0}\right)^{-\nu},$$

(3)

with a power $\nu \approx 8$ and $p_0 \approx 1.75 \text{ GeV/c}$. The quenched spectrum is given by

$$\frac{d\tilde{N}}{d^2p_T} = Q(p_T) \frac{dN}{d^2p_T},$$

$$= \frac{1}{2\pi^2 R^2} \int_0^{2\pi} d\phi \int_0^R r^2 \frac{dN(p_T + \Delta p_T)}{dp_T}. \quad (4)$$

Replacing the integration over $r$ with an integration over $z$, using the approximation and formally extending the range of the integration to infinity, one finds:

$$Q(p_T) \approx \frac{2(p_0 + p_T)}{\pi R \eta (\nu - 1)p_T^\nu}. \quad (5)$$

Two things are remarkable about this result. First, the factor $R$ in the denominator reduces the scaling of the parton yield with the size of the reaction zone by one power of $R$, from a volume to a surface dependence. Second, the dependence of $Q(p_T)$ on $p_T$ is determined by the power $\mu$ governing the $p_T$-dependence of the energy loss. For $\mu = 1$ the quenching factor $Q$ falls slowly with increasing $p_T$; for $\mu = 1/2$ it grows with $p_T$, implying less quenching at higher $p_T$.

We have confirmed the range of validity of the approximate analytical expression by comparing it with the exact integral. As seen in Fig. 1, the analytical approximation $Q_{\text{anal}}$ deviates from the exact result by less than 5% when the quenching factor $Q \leq 0.2$. An even better agreement is found when the analytical result is divided by the correction factor $(1 + Q_{\text{anal}}^2)$. The excellent agreement suggests that we may extend the calculation to noncentral collisions. Generalizing the surface-to-volume ratio of the cylindrical geometry ($S/V = 2/R$) to the geometry of a collision with impact parameter $b$, one finds

$$Q(p_T, b) = Q(p_T, 0) \alpha_b/\alpha_b - \sin \alpha_b$$

(6)

with $\alpha_b = 2 \arccos(b/2R)$. This approximation is valid with about the same accuracy as (5), except for very peripheral collisions.

In order to be able to address the experimental data, we need to relax some of the geometrical oversimplifications used above.

FIG. 1: Comparison between the analytical approximation and the exact result for the quenching factor $Q$. The curves are for Au+Au at $b = 0$ and $p_T = 6 \text{ GeV/c}$, with $a = 1/2$. The calculation assumes a homogeneous transverse profile for jet production and quenching medium. Also shown is the expression $Q_{\text{anal}}/(1 + Q_{\text{anal}}^2)$.

1. The transverse profile of the primary jet yield is not homogeneous, but proportional to the binary NN collision profile

$$T(r, b) = \rho_1(r)\rho_2(r - b)$$

(7)

where $\rho_i(r)$ is the longitudinally integrated density of nucleus $i$.

2. The density of the comoving medium is also not homogeneous in the transverse plane. We assume that it is proportional to the local density of participant nucleons which, in the Glauber model, is given by

$$\rho_{\text{part}}(r) = \rho_1(r) \left(1 - e^{-\sigma\rho_2(r - b)}\right) + \rho_2(r - b) \left(1 - e^{-\sigma\rho_1(r)}\right), \quad (8)$$

where $\sigma$ denotes the inelastic NN cross section.

3. The comover medium expands and its density decreases with time. Here we assume

$$\rho(r, \tau) = C \rho_{\text{part}}(r)/\tau + \tau_0,$$

(9)

which is modeled to represent a longitudinal, boost invariant expansion. As an approximation to the phenomenology at full RHIC energy we use the values $C \approx 3$ and $\tau_0 = 1 \text{ fm/c}$.

Finally, we need to return to equation for the energy loss. Perturbative QCD predicts that the radiative energy loss depends quadratically on the medium thickness $L$. As pointed out by Baier et al., this holds for the average energy loss $\Delta E$ of a given parton, but the average energy loss of observed partons with fixed transverse momentum $p_T$ differs a scaling. This is so, because the energy loss distribution $D(\epsilon)$ is strongly
skewed toward small values of \(\epsilon\) by the steeply falling \(p_T\)-spectrum of fast partons. In fact, the average shift of the spectrum due to the energy loss, here called the effective energy loss, is given by

\[
\Delta p_T \approx \alpha_s L \sqrt{\pi \hat{q} p_T / \nu},
\]

where \(\hat{q}\) encodes the “scattering power” of the medium, which is proportional to the density. For an expanding medium, the expression \(\hat{q} L^2\) must be replaced with

\[
\hat{q}_0 L_{\text{eff}}^2 = 2 \hat{q}_0 \int_0^L \tau d\tau \rho(\mathbf{r}(\tau), \tau) / \rho(\mathbf{r}, 0),
\]

where \(\mathbf{r}(\tau) = \mathbf{r} + \nu \tau\) denotes the position of the fast parton in the medium at time \(\tau\), and \(\hat{q}_0\) is a function of the transverse position \(\mathbf{r}\) at which the jet is produced. We thus can make contact with (1) by writing

\[
\Delta p_T = \eta' L_{\text{eff}} \sqrt{\rho(\mathbf{r}, 0) p_T / \nu}
\]

with the constant \(\eta' = \alpha_s \sqrt{\pi \hat{q}_0 / \rho(0)}\), which does not depend on \(\mathbf{r}\).

We will denote the scaling law (12) for the energy loss as BDMS. In our following numerical study we have explored two other scaling laws. The first one is the Bethe-Heitler (BH) scaling law

\[
\Delta p_T = \eta p_T \int_0^L d\tau \rho(\mathbf{r}(\tau), \tau) \equiv \eta p_T (L \rho)_{\text{eff}}
\]

corresponding to \(\mu = 1\). The second scaling law is

\[
\Delta p_T = \eta p_T \sqrt{(L \rho)_{\text{eff}}},
\]

which we will call the (RW) scaling law. It could be interpreted as describing a random walk in \(p_T\) as the fast parton traverses the medium, with some interactions resulting in an energy gain and others in a loss of energy.

We begin the discussion of our numerical results for the quenching factor \(Q\) with its dependence on the transverse momentum of the fast parton, shown in Fig. 2. The QCD-motivated BDMS law (solid line) and the other two scaling laws exhibit clearly different behaviors. This reflects the different \(p_T\) scaling of the energy loss in these models (linear for BH and RW; square-root for BDMS). The data from the RHIC experiments [2, 3, 15] suggest that the quenching first becomes stronger with increasing momentum, reaches a minimum, and finally begins to diminish. This would indicate that the BDMS law only applies at high \(p_T\), and that other laws govern the energy loss at lower \(p_T\) [21] or hadron production is not dominated by parton fragmentation in this kinematic region. We note that the dependence of \(Q\) on \(p_T\) is well described by the analytical formula (13).

The impact parameter dependence of the quenching factor is shown in Fig. 4 plotted as the yield per half the number of participant nucleons against the participant number \(N_{\text{part}}\). The unquenched jet yield, scaling with the number of binary NN collisions, would increase relative to \(N_{\text{part}}\). As the figure shows, the quenching counteracts this increase, and the yield per participant actually falls for the BDMS and the BH laws as the collision centrality increases. An approximately flat behavior, as observed in the PHOBOS experiment [14], is only found for the RW scaling law.

For noncentral collisions, the quenching factor \(Q\) is a function of the azimuthal emission angle, because the geometry is not axially symmetric. This is known to lead to an angular asymmetry of a quadrupole shape in the spectra of high-\(p_T\) particles [22, 24]. The elliptic flow parameter \(v_2\) is defined as the Fourier component proportional to \(\cos(2\phi)\) of the angular distribution of particles with respect to the scattering plane [22]. We find (see Fig. 4) that the values of \(v_2 \lesssim 0.1\) obtained for all three scaling laws are significantly smaller than the measured values \((v_2 \approx 0.2)\) for semicentral and peripheral collis-
in the PHOBOS data up to $p_T = 4.25$ GeV/c; only the RW scaling law yields such a dependence. This may indicate that energy gain and loss mechanisms are competing in this momentum range \textsuperscript{28}. Another explanation may be that hadrons at intermediate momenta are not produced by fragmentation of fast partons, but by other processes, such as parton recombination. The observed magnitude of the elliptic flow lends support to this interpretation. Finally, we have found a universal relation between the same-side and away-side suppression factors for the BDMS law, which can be tested experimentally.

Acknowledgments: This work was supported in part by a grant from the U. S. Department of Energy (DE-FG02-96ER90945). I thank S. A. Bass, X.-N. Wang, and K. Rajagopal for valuable comments on the manuscript.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{v2.png}
\caption{Elliptic flow parameter $v_2$ as a function of the number of participants for the three energy loss models. The values of the parameters as the same as in Fig. \textsuperscript{4}.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Qasj.png}
\caption{Incremental away-side jet suppression factor $Q_{\text{asj}}$ as function of the “same-side” jet suppression factor $Q$ for the BDMS energy loss law.}
\end{figure}

However, the calculated $v_2$ for partons would be large enough to explain the measured elliptic flow of hadrons, if the hadrons were produced by recombination in the $p_T$-range of the RHIC data \textsuperscript{27}.

As observed hadrons from hard partons preferentially originate from the surface region facing the detector, the parton emitted in the opposite direction has to traverse more material and thus endures an even larger energy loss. This leads to an additional suppression of the away-side jet and its leading hadron spectrum. The dependence of the incremental away-side hadron suppression factor $Q_{\text{asj}}$ on the primary suppression factor $Q$ is shown in Fig. \textsuperscript{5} for the BDMS scaling law for two impact parameters ($b = 0$ and $b = 8$ fm). There appears to be a universal relationship, which is linear for $Q \geq 0.2$.

Several conclusions can be drawn from our results. First, the momentum dependence of the BDMS energy loss formula does not seem to agree with some of the RHIC data. A linear dependence of the average energy loss on $p_T$ is in better agreement with the data in the $p_T$ region explored so far \textsuperscript{21}. Also, the dependence of the effective momentum loss $\Delta p_T$ on the medium thickness $L_{\text{eff}}$ predicted by BDMS does not yield a scaling of the charged hadron yield with participant number as seen
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