Universal and non-universal effective $N$-body interactions for ultracold harmonically-trapped few-atom systems

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We derive the ground-state energy for a small number of ultracold atoms in an isotropic harmonic trap using effective quantum field theory (EFT). Atoms are assumed to interact through pairwise energy-independent and energy-dependent delta-function potentials with strengths proportional to the scattering length $a$ and effective range volume $V$, respectively. The calculations are performed systematically up to order $l^{-4}$, where $l$ denotes the harmonic oscillator length. The effective three-body interaction contains a logarithmic divergence in the cutoff energy, giving rise to a non-universal three-body interaction in the EFT. Our EFT results are confirmed by nonperturbative numerical calculations for a Hamiltonian with finite-range two-body Gaussian interactions. For this model Hamiltonian, we explicitly calculate the non-universal effective three-body contribution to the energy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The properties of dilute Bose gases are to leading order determined by the two-body free-space $s$-wave scattering length $a$ [1]. Two-body contact interactions between each pair of bosons are typically assumed, and used to derive expansions around the non-interacting [2,17] or strongly-interacting unitary limit [14,15,18,21]. Both few- and many-body systems have been considered and, in some cases, the two limits have been connected using the local density approximation [11,19,22,24]. If the expansion is carried out to sufficiently high order in $a$ or $1/a$, respectively, corrections due to the two-body effective range volume $V$ have to be accounted for if a consistent description that allows one to connect to atomic systems with realistic interaction potentials is desired [2,4,10–14,17,24]. A question that has intrigued researchers for decades is how three-body interactions come into play [7,10–14,17,24]. In the strongly-interacting regime, three-body physics manifests itself in the Efimov effect. Signatures of the Efimov effect are seen by detecting atom losses governed by the three-body recombination rate [20,29]. In contrast, we investigate in this work elastic three-body scattering processes. We consider $N$ identical bosons with mass $M$ in a spherically symmetric harmonic trap with angular frequency $\omega$ and harmonic oscillator length $l = \sqrt{\hbar/(M\omega)}$ in the regime where the two-body $s$-wave scattering length $a$ and two-body effective range volume $V$ are small compared to the harmonic oscillator length $l$ and volume $l^3$, respectively. The effective range volume $V$ is related to the effective range $r_{eff}$ by

$$ V = \frac{1}{2} r_{eff} a^2. \quad (1) $$

Earlier work developed a perturbative effective field theory (EFT) and derived a low-energy Hamiltonian that accounts for terms up to order $(a/l)^3$ and $V/l^3$ [17]. The resulting ground-state energy was interpreted in terms of universal effective two-, three-, and four-body interactions. The present paper extends this earlier work and determines universal and non-universal contributions of the terms proportional to $(a/l)^4$, $aV/l^4$, and $g_3(0)/l^4$ to the ground-state energy; here, $g_3(0)$ denotes a three-body coupling constant. Throughout this paper, the term universal is used to indicate that the quantity under consideration is fully determined by the low-energy two-body scattering observables. The term non-universal, in contrast, is used to indicate that the quantity under consideration cannot, in general, be determined from the low-energy two-body scattering observables.

Our key findings are the following. (i) The $(a/l)^4$ term contains effective five-, four-, three- and two-body interactions. The $aV/l^4$ term contains effective three- and two-body interactions. (ii) The effective three-body interaction at order $l^{-4}$ contains a logarithmic divergence in a cutoff energy $\Lambda$, introduced to regularize the EFT, which signals a fundamental difference in character between the two- and three-body interactions. Specifically, our results imply that the effective three-body interaction contains a non-universal contribution that cannot be predicted from the low-energy two-body scattering observables. Similar physics has previously been seen for the homogeneous system [8,9,30] and for few-body systems confined to a periodic box [10,13]. (iii) We extract the non-universal three-body contribution from numerical ground state energies for $N = 3–5$ bosons interacting via a short-range two-body Gaussian model potential.

Section II introduces the system Hamiltonian and summarizes our final expression for the ground-state energy of the trapped $N$-boson system. Sections III and IV...
cuss the structure of the terms at order $l^{-4}$. In addition, Sec. IV elucidates that the field theoretical treatment indicates the presence of a non-universal three-body interaction. Lastly, Section V summarizes our results and discusses implications.

II. SYSTEM HAMILTONIAN AND GROUND-STATE ENERGY

We consider $N$ identical bosons with mass $M$ in a three-dimensional isotropic harmonic trap with angular trapping frequency $\omega$. Our aim is to derive an expression for the ground-state energy of the $N$-boson system, applicable in the low energy regime, using quantum field theory [31]. Our Hamiltonian is

$$H = H_1 + \sum_{p=2}^{N} \sum_{m=0,2,...} H^{(m)}_{p,\text{bare}}, \quad (2)$$

where $H_1$ denotes the single-particle Hamiltonian

$$H_1 = \int \hat{\psi}^\dagger(\vec{r}_1) \left( -\frac{\hbar^2}{2M} \vec{\nabla}^2 + \frac{1}{2} M \omega^2 \hat{\psi}(\vec{r}_1) \right) d\vec{r}_1 \quad (3)$$

and the bosonic field operators $\hat{\psi}(\vec{r})$ and $\hat{\psi}^\dagger(\vec{r})$ destroy and create particles at position $\vec{r}$, respectively. The term $H^{(m)}_{p,\text{bare}}$ denotes $p$-body contact interactions

$$H^{(m)}_{p,\text{bare}} = \frac{1}{p!} \int \hat{\psi}^\dagger(\vec{r}_1) \cdots \hat{\psi}^\dagger(\vec{r}_p) W_p^{(m)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2, \cdots, \vec{r}_p) \times \hat{\psi}(\vec{r}_1) \cdots \hat{\psi}(\vec{r}_p) \, d\vec{r}_1 d\vec{r}_2 \cdots d\vec{r}_p. \quad (4)$$

The superscript “($m$)” indicates the order of the derivative operator in the $p$-body potentials $W_p^{(m)}$. In our calculations, we expand the field operators in terms of the eigenstates of the single-particle harmonic oscillator Hamiltonian [16] [17]. Through order $l^{-4}$, we find that only three potentials are needed: $W_2^{(0)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2)$, $W_2^{(2)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2)$, and $W_3^{(0)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2, \vec{r}_3)$; no local four- or higher-body potentials are necessary. The two-body potential $W_2^{(0)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2)$ corresponds to the “usual” $\delta$-function pseudopotential [32]

$$W_2^{(0)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2) = g_{2,\text{bare}}^{(0)} \delta(\vec{r}_1 - \vec{r}_2), \quad (5)$$

where $g_{2,\text{bare}}^{(0)}$ is the two-body bare coupling constant. The $m = 2$ two-body potential $W_2^{(2)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2)$ depends on the energy through the second-derivative operators [16] [17]

$$W_2^{(2)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2) = \frac{1}{2} g_{2,\text{bare}}^{(2)} \times \left[ \vec{\nabla}_{12}^2 \delta(\vec{r}_1 - \vec{r}_2) + \delta(\vec{r}_1 - \vec{r}_2) \vec{\nabla}_{12}^2 \right], \quad (6)$$

where $g_{2,\text{bare}}^{(2)}$ is another two-body bare coupling constant. The operators $\vec{\nabla}_{12}$ and $\vec{\nabla}_{12}^2$ are gradients with respect to the relative distance vector $\vec{r}_1 - \vec{r}_2$ that act to the left and right, respectively. Note that the two-body interaction with $m = 1$ is absent due to symmetry constraints. The lowest order three-body potential is modeled by the product of two $\delta$-functions,

$$W_3^{(0)}(\vec{r}_1, \vec{r}_2, \vec{r}_3) = g_{3,\text{bare}}^{(0)} \delta(\vec{r}_1 - \vec{r}_2) \delta(\vec{r}_2 - \vec{r}_3), \quad (7)$$

where $g_{3,\text{bare}}^{(0)}$ is the three-body bare coupling constant. The three-body potential acts only when three particles are at the same position.

We calculate the $N$-boson ground-state energy using renormalized Rayleigh-Schrödinger perturbation theory. Divergences arise at second- and higher-order in perturbation theory [31]. To obtain physical results we include counterterm interactions for each $p$ and $m$ combination. Specifically, we write the bare coupling constant as $\frac{E_N}{\hbar \omega} g_p^{(m)} = \frac{E_N}{\hbar \omega} g_p^{(0)} + g_p^{(ct)}$, where $g_p^{(m)}$ is the physical coupling constant and $g_p^{(ct)}$ the counterterm coupling constant. The counterterms $g_{2,ct}^{(0)}$ and $g_{2,ct}^{(2)}$ are determined self-consistently such that the EFT energy shifts reproduce the ground-state energy for two harmonically-trapped bosons interacting through a short-range potential with free-space $s$-wave scattering length $a$ and free-space effective range volume $V$ up to order $l^{-4}$ (see, e.g., Ref. [17]). In this renormalization scheme, the physical coupling constants are

$$g_2^{(0)} = \frac{4\pi\hbar^2}{M} a \quad \text{and} \quad g_2^{(2)} = -\frac{4\pi\hbar^2}{M} V. \quad (9)$$

We find it convenient to organize the contributions to the ground-state energies $E_N$ in terms of powers of $1/l$ [16] [17]. To understand this structure, it is instructive to perform a dimensional analysis. The coupling constants $g_p^{(m)}$, and correspondingly $g_p^{(0)}$, have units of $\text{energy} \times \text{(length)}^{3p-3+m}$. For the scaled ground-state energy $E_N/\hbar \omega$ this implies that the first-order correction due to the Hamiltonian term proportional to $g_2^{(0)}$ corresponds to an energy shift of order $1/l$. Similarly, the term proportional to $g_2^{(2)}$ corresponds to a shift of order $1/l^2$, and the terms proportional to $(g_2^{(0)})^3$ and $g_2^{(2)}$ correspond to shifts of order $1/l^3$. Finally, the contributions $(g_2^{(0)})^4$, $(g_2^{(0)})^2$, and $g_2^{(0)}$ lead to terms of order $1/l^4$. Thus, we can write the scaled energy as

$$\frac{E_N}{\hbar \omega} = \frac{3}{2} N + \sum_{p=2}^{N} \left( \frac{N}{p} \right) U_p, \quad (10)$$

where the dimensionless effective $p$-body interaction en-
energies $U_p$ are power series in $1/l$:  
\begin{equation}
U_p = \sum_{K=1}^{\infty} \sum_{k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0} U_p^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)} \bigg|_{k_2,0+3k_2,2+4k_3,0=K}.
\end{equation}

The notation $O(l^{-K})$ indicates that the term is proportional to $l^{-K}$. The dimensionless partial energies
\begin{equation}
U_p^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)} = c_p^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)}
\end{equation}
are proportional to $(g_2^{(0)})^{k_2,0} (g_2^{(2)})^{k_2,2} (g_3^{(0)})^{k_3,0}$. The three superscripts $k_{p,m}$ take the values $0,1,2, \ldots$ subject to the constraint $k_{2,0} + 3k_{2,2} + 4k_{3,0} = K$; here, the prefactors of the $k_{p,m}$ are given by $3p + m - 5$. The factors of $\pm 4\pi$ in the first two terms in the second line of Eq. (12) are included for later convenience.

Equation (10) is valid when $a/l$, $V/f^3$, and $g_3^{(0)}/(\hbar^2/M f^2)$ are much smaller than one. The expansion coefficients $c_p^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)}$ are summarized in Table I.

After renormalization of the two-body interactions all coefficients are finite except $c_3^{(4,0,0)}$, which diverges logarithmically with the cutoff. The origin and implications of this logarithmic divergence are discussed in Sec. IV.

The $p = 2$ coefficients agree with what one obtains by expanding the exact zero-range solution for two $s$-wave interacting particles in a harmonic trap [12, 33].

### III. THE UNIVERSAL EFFECTIVE FOUR- AND FIVE-BODY INTERACTIONS

References [16, 17] showed that the renormalized perturbation theory treatment at orders $K = 2$ and $3$ requires a counterterm coupling constant $g_{2,ct}^{(0)}$, which cancels all divergences at these orders. As we discuss now, new physics emerges at order $K = 4$.

We start our discussion of the $K = 4$ terms by considering the effective four- and five-body interaction energies $U_4^{(4,0,0)}$ and $U_5^{(4,0,0)}$. The five-body term, which first arises at this order, is finite. The four-body term is finite after renormalization of the two-body interaction, with $g_{2,ct}^{(0)}$ removing power-law divergences. Since $U_4^{(4,0,0)}$ and $U_5^{(4,0,0)}$ are fully determined by $a/l$, we refer to these effective interactions as universal. We were unable to evaluate the sums that give the coefficients $c_4^{(4,0,0)}$ and $c_5^{(4,0,0)}$ analytically. Numerical estimates and uncertainties are reported in Table I.

To validate our EFT results for the effective four- and five-body interactions, we compare to numerical simulations of $N = 2, 3, 4$, and 5 bosons interacting via a finite-range, non-singular potential. We consider a Hamiltonian with pairwise additive Gaussian model interaction $V_g(r) = V_0 \exp[-(r/r_0)^2/2]$, with depth $V_0$ and width $r_0$, and determine the energies $E_N$, $N > 2$, numerically using an explicitly correlated Gaussian basis set [17, 31, 32]. For $N = 2$, we use a grid-based B-spline approach. For a given width $r_0$, we adjust the depth $V_0$ ($V_0 < 0$ and $V_0 > 0$) such that $V_g(r)$ reproduces the desired physical free-space $s$-wave scattering length $a$ at zero collision energy. The parameters are chosen such that $V_g(r)$ supports at most one bound state.

The effective range volume for the Gaussian potential as a function of $V_0$ and thus scattering length $a$ was previously numerically calculated by us. The result is shown in Fig. 3 of Ref. [17]. Crucial here is that in the limit of zero scattering length the effective range volume approaches zero. In fact, we have $\tilde{V} = -\alpha a + O(a^3)$ from a perturbative Born calculation of the two-body free-space scattering amplitude.
TABLE I. Expansion coefficients $c_p^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)}$, defined in Eq. (12), of the effective $p$-body interactions for $N$ bosons in an isotropic harmonic trap, up to order $l^{-5}$. Columns 4 and 5 give analytic expressions and numerical values, respectively, obtained using renormalized perturbation theory. The numbers in round brackets in column 5 denote the numerical uncertainty; those without error bars have been rounded. After renormalization of the two-body interactions, all coefficients are finite except for the logarithmically diverging $c_4^{(3,0,0)}$. The terms $D_a$, $D_b$, $D_c$, and $D_d$ are defined in the text. To interpret Fig. 1(a), we calculate the $K = 5$ effective four-body contribution proportional to $V^2$. This gives $c_4^{(2,1,0)} = 25.42247$. No other $K = 5$ contributions are calculated in the present paper. The function $\zeta(z)$ is the Riemann Zeta function.

| $p$ | $k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0$ | $K$ | compact expression / comment | numerical value |
|-----|------------------|-----|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 2   | (1, 0, 0)        |     | $\frac{(2/\pi)^{1/2}}{(1 - \log 2)}$ | 0.797884561 |
|     | (2, 0, 0)        |     | $\frac{1}{2\pi}(1 - \log 2)$ | 0.195348572 |
|     | (3, 0, 0)        |     | $\frac{(2/\pi)^{3/2}}{(1 - \frac{3}{2\pi} - 3\log 2 + \frac{1}{2}\log^2 2)}$ | $-0.39118531$ |
|     | (0, 1, 0)        |     | $\frac{(3/2)(2/\pi)^{1/2}}{(3/2)^2}$ | 1.196826841 |
|     | (4, 0, 0)        |     | $\frac{1}{\sqrt{\pi}}[12 + \pi^2(-2 + \log 4) - 4(-3 + \log 4)^2\log 4 - 3\zeta(3)]$ | $-0.408766576$ |
|     | (1, 1, 0)        |     | $\frac{(1/\pi)(8 - 6\log 2)}{(1/\pi)(8 - 6\log 2)}$ | 1.222665489 |
| 3   | (2, 0, 0)        |     | $\frac{(2/\pi)[-4\sqrt{3} + 6 - 12\log 2 - 6\log(2 - \sqrt{3})]}{(12(2/\pi))}$ | $-0.855758313$ |
|     | (3, 0, 0)        |     | see Ref. [17] (sum evaluated numerically) | 2.7921(1) |
|     | (4, 0, 0)        |     | $10.8629(1) - 12(2D_a + D_b + 2D_c - 3D_d)$ | log-divergent |
|     | (1, 1, 0)        |     | $-(4/3\pi)[-36 + 26\sqrt{3} + 9\log 64 - 27\log(2 + \sqrt{3})]$ | $-4.628303758$ |
|     | (0, 0, 1)        |     | $16/(3\sqrt{\pi})$ | 0.980140259 |
| 4   | (3, 0, 0)        |     | see Ref. [17] (sum evaluated numerically) | 2.433174845 |
|     | (4, 0, 0)        |     | sum evaluated numerically | $-20.0(2)$ |
| 5   | (4, 0, 0)        |     | sum evaluated numerically | $-11.12(2)$ |

Interestingly, following Refs. [11, 12], we can extract $U_4^{(4,0,0)}$ and $U_5^{(4,0,0)}$ from the numerically determined $E_N$ using

$$U_4^{(4,0,0)} = -U_4^{(3,0,0)} - 6 + (E_4 - 4E_3 + 6E_2)/(\hbar\omega) + O(l^{-5})$$

(13) and

$$U_5^{(4,0,0)} = 15/2 + (E_5 - 5E_4 + 10E_3 - 10E_2)/(\hbar\omega) + O(l^{-5})$$

(14)

where the dimensionless partial energy $U_4^{(3,0,0)}$ has been obtained and validated in Ref. [17].

Figure 1(a) compares the numerically extracted scaled $U_4^{(4,0,0)}/(a/l)^4$, for $r_0 = 0.01l$, to the EFT prediction $c_4^{(4,0,0)} = -20.0$ given in Table 1 as a function of $a/l$. Similarly, Fig. 1(b) compares $U_5^{(4,0,0)}/(a/l)^4$ to the EFT prediction $c_5^{(4,0,0)} = -11.12$. In both cases, the EFT at order $K = 4$ predicts horizontal lines. Comparison to the numerics shows reasonable agreement, including the correct sign.

We can attempt to understand the deviations in Figs. 1(a) and 1(b) by looking at the $K = 5$ contributions. The effective four-body interaction contains terms proportional to $a^5$, $a^2V$, and $a_3g_3^{(0)}$. We have calculated the $a^2V$ correction from the EFT. The dashed line in Fig. 1(a) shows the contribution proportional to $c_4^{(2,1,0)}a^2V$, using the effective range volume $V$ for the Gaussian potential with $r_0 = 0.01l$. It can be seen that this effective range volume correction to the solid line is negligible in the regime for which our numerical data is reliable. Note that as $V \propto -a$ for very small $|a|$, the correction diverges as $|a| \to 0$. We conjecture that the deviation between the EFT predictions for the effective four-body interaction and the numerical data for $|a/l| \gtrsim 0.01$ is due to both the $(a/l)^5$ and $a_3g_3^{(0)}$ contributions. Moreover we expect that $a_3g_3^{(0)}$ depends nontrivially on $a/l$ (see also Sec. 4).

The effective five-body interaction at order $K = 5$ has only an $(a/l)^5$ contribution. As we have not calculated this contribution using EFT, the numerical data in Fig. 1(b) is fit to a line [see dotted line in Fig. 1(b)] with coefficients given in the caption of Fig. 1. From the slope we extract an estimate for $c_5^{(5,0,0)}$.

IV. THE NON-UNIVERSAL THREE-BODY INTERACTION

Unlike the four- and five-body terms, $U_3^{(4,0,0)}$ contains a logarithmic divergence that is not renormalized by $g_3^{(0)}$. To shed light on this behavior, Figs. 2(a)-2(d) diagrammatically represent the diverging sums $D_a$, $D_b$, $D_c$, and $D_d$ that enter into $U_3^{(4,0,0)}$. Note that these are modified Rayleigh-Schrödinger perturbation theory diagrams, using the formalism described in Refs. [16, 17], and not Feynman diagrams. For brevity, we do not show the diagrams corresponding to convergent sums. Solid lines represent particles in the single-particle ground state. Dotted lines represent particles in single-particle excited states. Vertices represent interactions. The dot represents the two-body interaction with coupling constant $g_2^{(0)}$, while the circled dot represents the two-body counterterm with coupling constant $g_{2,ct}^{(0)}$. We evaluate these
the two-body counterterm diagram \(\frac{1}{2}(\Lambda \hbar \omega)^2\) diverge as \(\frac{\Lambda}{\hbar \omega}\). We find that the diagrams shown in Figs. 2(a), 2(b), and 2(c) diverge as \(\frac{1}{2}(\Lambda \hbar \omega)^2\), \(\log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)\), and \(\log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)^2\), respectively. The diagram shown in Fig. 2(c) contains terms that diverge as \(\log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)^2\) and \(\log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)^3\).

The power-law divergences contained in the diagrams \(D_a\) and \(D_c\) [see Figs. 2(a) and 2(c)] are renormalized by the two-body counterterm diagram \(D_4\) [see Fig. 2(d)]. The \(\log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)\) divergences contained in the diagrams \(D_b\) and \(D_c\) remain, however, and the properly weighted diagrams \(D_2-D_4\) evaluate to a term of the form \(q_0 + q_1 \log(\Lambda \hbar \omega)\), where \(q_0\) and \(q_1\) are constants. This signals that a non-universal, local three-body interaction with cutoff dependent coupling constant \(g_3^{(0)}\), represented diagrammatically in Fig. 3, is needed [11,12]. Specifically, renormalization requires a three-body interaction energy \(U_3^{(0,0,1)}\), generated by \(g_3^{(0)}\), which cancels the logarithmic divergence in \(U_3^{(4,0,0)}\). The corresponding \(c_3^{(0,0,1)}\) value can be found in Table 1.

The above discussion motivates us to define a renormalization-scheme-independent three-body contribution (see also Refs. [11,12])

\[
\tilde{U}_3^{K=4} = U_3^{(4,0,0)} + U_3^{(0,0,1)}.
\]  

As \(g_3^{(0)}\) is a new, undetermined parameter in the Hamiltonian, the EFT does not make a unique prediction for \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) based on the values of \(g_3^{(0)}\) and \(g_2^{(2)}\). Instead, \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) depends on the short-range features of the true, “intrinsic” underlying interaction potentials. The interaction energy \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) must therefore either be obtained by measurement or by accurate numerical simulation of an \(N\)-body system \((N > 2)\). We can extract the value of \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\), to order \(l^{-4}\), using the numerically determined \(N\)-body ground state energies \(E_N\),

\[
\begin{align*}
\left(\begin{array}{c}
N \\
3
\end{array}\right) \tilde{U}_3^{K=4} &= \frac{E_N}{\hbar \omega} - \frac{3}{2} N \\
- \left(\begin{array}{c}
N \\
2
\end{array}\right) \sum_{k=1}^{4} U_{2}^{(k,0,0)} + U_{2}^{(0,1,0)} + U_{2}^{(1,1,0)} \\
- \left(\begin{array}{c}
N \\
3
\end{array}\right) \sum_{k=2}^{3} U_{3}^{(k,0,0)} + U_{3}^{(1,1,0)} \\
- \left(\begin{array}{c}
N \\
4
\end{array}\right) \sum_{k=3}^{4} U_{4}^{(k,0,0)} - \left(\begin{array}{c}
N \\
5
\end{array}\right) U_{5}^{(4,0,0)} + O(l^{-5}).
\end{align*}
\]  

The key point is that the \(U_{p}^{(k_2,0,k_2,2,k_3,0)}\) quantities on the right hand side of Eq. (16) are known from the EFT (see Table 1). This implies that we can calculate \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) for \(N = 3, 4, 5 \cdots\), provided the \(E_N\) are known.

Figure 4 shows \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}/(a/l)^4\) as a function of \(a/l\) determined from Eq. (16) for \(N = 3, 4, 5\) collapse, to a good approximation, to a single curve. This confirms that the extracted value of \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) scales with the number of trimers in the system, i.e., that the physics seen is indeed a three-body effect. Second, the fact that \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}/(a/l)^4\) is not independent of \(a\) shows that \(U_4^{K=4}\) is not simply proportional to \(a^4\). This, combined with other analysis, indicates that the three-body physics at order \(K = 4\) is not fully described by the two-body s-wave scattering length and two-body effective range volume.

To investigate the dependence of the non-universal three-body interaction on the short-range interaction scale of the Gaussian model interaction, we additionally calculated \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}/(a/l)^4\) for \(r_0 = 0.005l, 0.0075l,\) and 0.0125l. We find that the \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) for fixed \(a\) but different \(r_0\) differ on the negative scattering length side where one expects the formation of three-body bound states to be sensitive to the details of the underlying two-body interaction model. On the positive scattering length side, the \(\tilde{U}_3^{K=4}\) shows a comparatively weak dependence on \(r_0\). We believe that this can be attributed to the fact that
the purely repulsive Gaussian interaction model behaves similar to a hard core potential, especially for relatively “large” $a/l$. For the hardcore potential, $U_3^{K=4}$ has been shown to scale as $a^4$ [10].

If non-perturbative numerical $N$-body energies are not available, we can still make rough, order-of-magnitude, estimates of $U_3^{K=4}$ by evaluating the logarithmically diverging sums in the EFT up to the characteristic energy scale of the two-body system, i.e., up to $\Lambda = \hbar^2/(ma^2)$. In practice, one might want to use the scale corresponding to the van der Waals length as suggested in Ref. [8].

In the present work, however, it seems more appropriate to use the energy scale corresponding to the Gaussian potential. For $r_0 = 0.01l$, this corresponds to $\Lambda = 10,000\hbar\omega$. Because we are unable to numerically evaluate the necessary sums in diagrams $D_a$, $D_b$, $D_c$ and $D_d$ of the EFT to a value of $\Lambda$ this large, we instead extrapolate to $\Lambda = 10,000\hbar\omega$ using numerically determined estimates with smaller $\Lambda$ and the expected power-law and logarithmic divergences. This approach yields $U_3^{K=4}/(a/l)^4 \approx -8.6$. Comparison with Fig. 4 shows that this estimate gives the correct sign and order of magnitude of the true $U_3^{K=4}$ for the Gaussian model potential with $r_0 = 0.01l$.

Finally, we note that at order $K = 4$, the effective three- and two-body interactions $U_3^{(1,1,0)}$ and $U_2^{(1,1,0)}$ also depend on the effective range volume. These universal contributions have been determined analytically and are given in Table I. Following the convention introduced in Sec. I we refer to $U_3^{(1,1,0)}$ and $U_2^{(1,1,0)}$ as universal as they are fully determined by the low-energy two-body scattering properties, expressed in harmonic oscillator units.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we utilized a quantum field theory approach to derive the ground-state energy for a small number of bosons in a spherically-symmetric harmonic trap up to order $l^{-4}$, where $l$ is the harmonic oscillator length. We showed that the ground-state energy at this order depends on two two-body parameters (the scattering length $a$ and effective range volume $V$) and one emergent non-universal three-body interaction strength ($g_3^{(0)}$). In the spirit of effective field theory, these parameters can be determined by performing measurements at two trap frequencies of the ground-state energy of the two-body system and one measurement on the three-body system. Using these three data points as input, the ground-state energy up to order $l^{-4}$ is then known for any trapping frequency and any number of particles.

The emergence of the non-universal three-body interaction derived here for harmonically-trapped atoms has been discussed for other systems. For few-boson systems confined to a periodic box [10–12], the ground-state energy can be organized, similar to the harmonically-trapped system, in terms of powers of $1/L$ and $p$-body interactions, where $L$ is the length of the cubic box. Interestingly, the leading order three-, four-, and five-body energy contributions for $N$ bosons in the periodic box are proportional to $a^3$, $a^4$, and $a^5$, respectively [10–13], rather than the leading order contributions $a^2$, $a^3$, and $a^4$ for bosons in a harmonic trap. Just as for the harmonically trapped system, the non-universal three-body interaction is renormalization scheme dependent. Similar physics has also been observed in the homogeneous system [8]. Our analysis extends the EFT approach to non-universal few-body interactions of harmonically trapped bosons.

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