Skyrmion superconductivity: Numerical evidence and application to moiré graphene platforms

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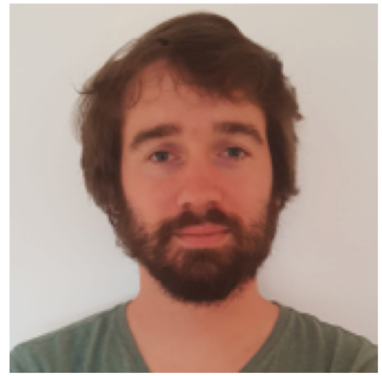
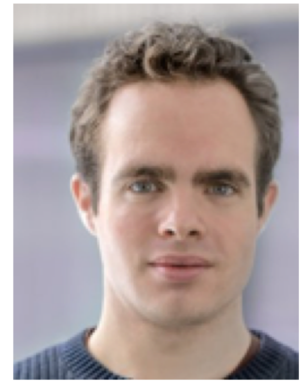


Nick Bultinck
UC Berkeley → Oxford



Mike Zaletel
UC Berkeley

SC, N. Bultinck, M. P. Zaletel, PRB **101**, 165141 (2020)

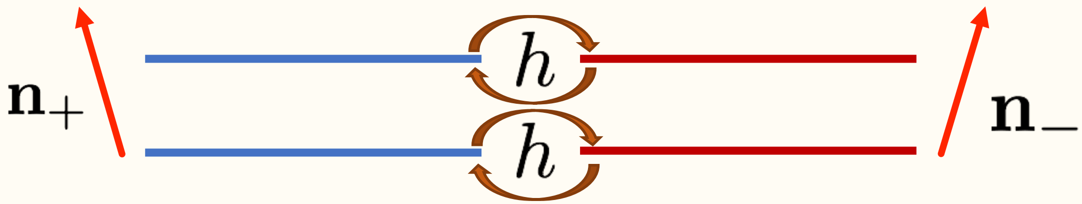
N. Bultinck*, E. Khalaf*, S. Liu, SC, A. Vishwanath, M. P. Zaletel, PRX **10**, 031034 (2020)

E. Khalaf, SC, N. Bultinck, M. P. Zaletel, A. Vishwanath, arXiv:2004.00638 (to appear in Sci. Adv.)

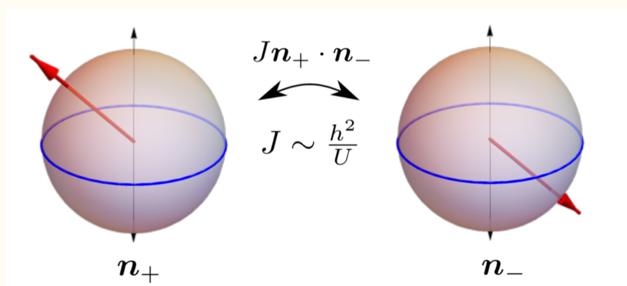
SC, M. Ippoliti, M. P. Zaletel, arXiv:2010.01144

Setting: Coupled spinful Chern bands

- Setting: Interacting electrons in tunnel-coupled (nearly flat) spin-ful Chern bands with opposite Chern numbers



- In each Chern sector: Interaction driven quantum-Hall ferromagnet
- Tunnel-coupling leads to an antiferromagnetic (super-)exchange
- Ground state at half-filling (2 of 4 bands) is an AF insulator

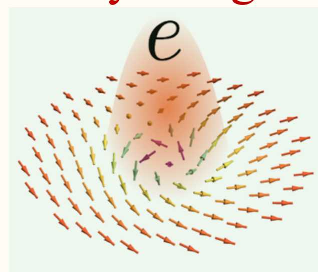


Bultinck *et al*, PRX (2020)
Repellin *et al*, PRL (2020)

Setting: Coupled spinful Chern bands

- In addition to particle-hole excitations, have topological textures: skyrmions in each Chern sector/*layer* carry charge

$$Q_{physical} = CQ_{topological}$$



Sondhi *et al*, PRL (1993)
Moon *et al*, PRB (1994)
Parameswaran *et al*, PRB (2012)

1. Assuming the charge e skyrmions are energetically relevant (low spin-stiffness) – can they bind together into 2e pairs?

2. Can these 2e pairs give rise to superconductivity on doping the half-filled insulator?

3. If there is superconductivity, what is T_c for the BKT transition?

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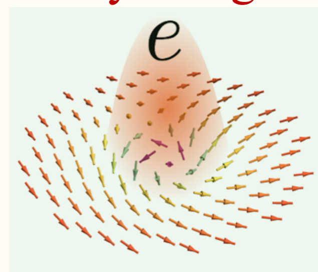

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Appeal to semi-classics

Setting: Coupled spinful Chern bands

- Can these 2e pairs give rise to superconductivity on doping the half-filled insulator?

- Superconductivity from 2e skyrmion condensation has been proposed in doped QSH insulators, and seen in sign-problem free Quantum Monte Carlo

Abanov and Weigeman, PRL (2001)
Grover and Senthil, PRL (2008)
Christos *et al*, PNAS (2020)
Khalaf *et al*, arXiv:2012.05915
Wang *et al*, arXiv: 2006.13239

- What is the phase diagram at T = 0 in presence of Coulomb repulsion?

- Can we rule out Wigner crystals of 2e bosons?

Need alternate numerical methods: DMRG

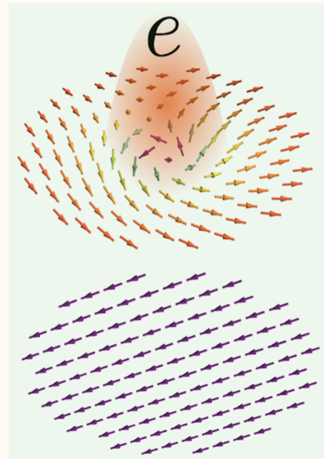
Skyrmion-pairing mechanism

- Consider a skyrmion in one QH layer and an anti-skyrmion in the opposite layer

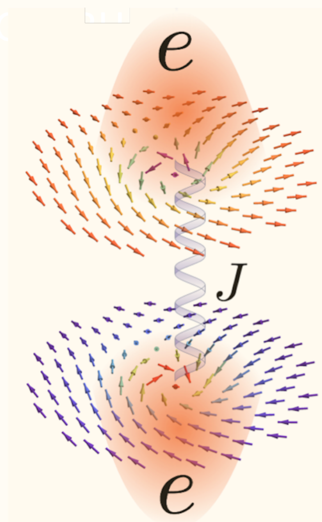
$$Q_{physical} = CQ_{topological}$$

- Both carry same charge: Repelled by Coulomb but attracted by local antiferromagnetism J
- *All electronic pairing mechanism* without phonons/retardation/bosonic fluctuations

SC, N. Bultinck, M. Zaletel, PRB 2020
E. Khalaf, SC *et al*, arXiv:2004.00638



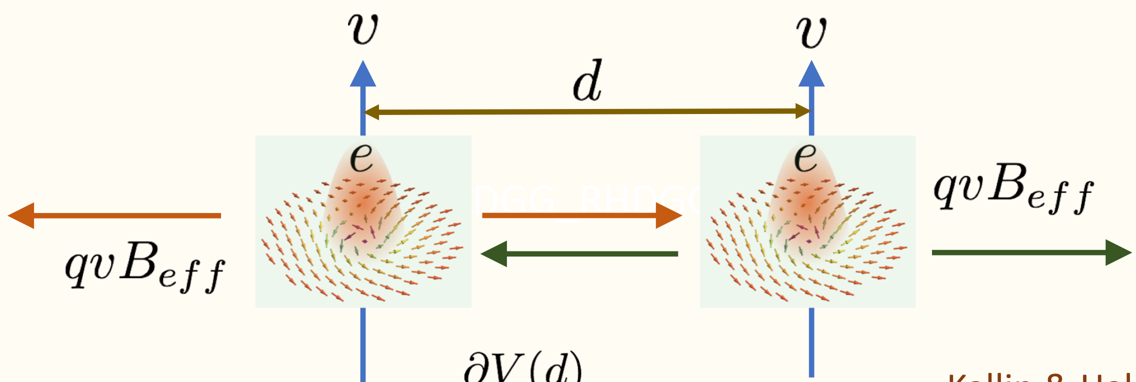
Single skyrmion pays a large exchange penalty



Sk-Ask pair can spread out to minimize Coulomb without losing exchange

Skyrmion-pairing mechanism

- For charge e textures, kinetic energy quenched by magnetic field
- Charge 2e skyrmion with charge e in each layer sees *no net magnetic field*, can therefore be mobile



$$\frac{\partial V(d)}{\partial d} = aJd$$

Kallin & Halperin, PRB (1984)
K. Yang, PRL (2001)

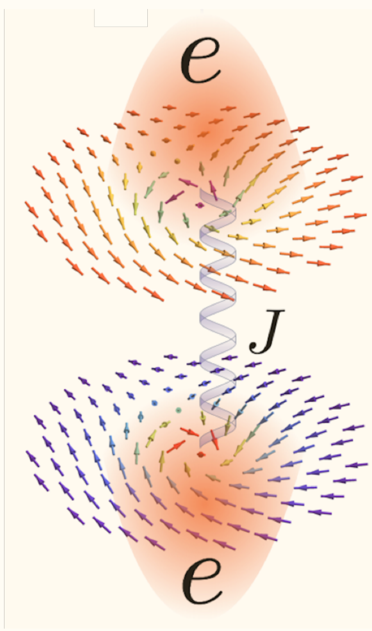
$$E = V_0 + aJd^2/2 = V_0 + \frac{(qB_{eff})^2}{2aJ}v^2$$

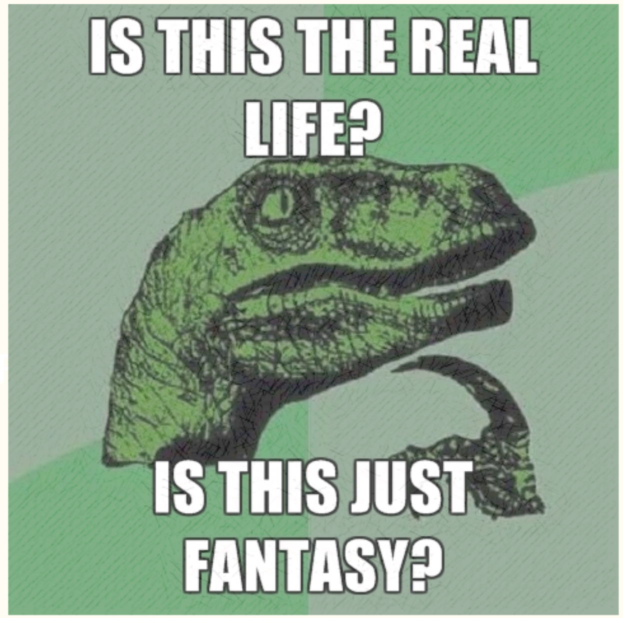
$T_c \sim 1/M_{pair} \sim J \sim 1$ K in MAG

E. Khalaf, SC *et al*, arXiv:2004.00638

Skyrmion-pairing mechanism

Skyrmion-pairing superconductivity



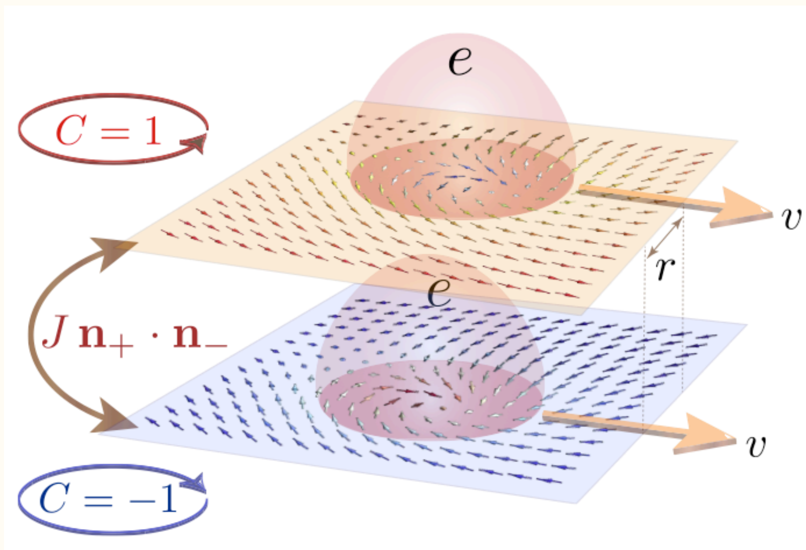


Quote: Queen, Figure credits:
http://creatememe.chucklesnetwork.com/memes/16712

DMRG: Model and phase diagram

- Essential ingredients:

1. Spinful (nearly) flat bands with opposite Chern number ±1
2. AF interaction between the Chern sectors, in addition to Coulomb repulsion



- Test: AF couple spinful lowest Landau levels, amenable to DMRG

Zaletel *et al*, PRL (2013)

DMRG: Model and phase diagram

- iDMRG for coupled Landau level model on a cylinder ($L_y = 8\text{-}12\ \ell_B$)

Ippoliti *et al*, PRB (2018)

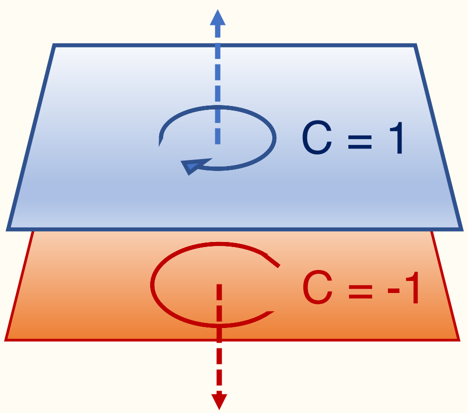
$$H = \psi^\dagger \frac{(\mathbf{p}+e\gamma^z\mathbf{A})^2}{2m}\psi + \frac{1}{2}\int :n(r)V_C(r-r')n(r'): - E_C \ell_B^2 \sum_{i=x,y,z} J_i :\left(\psi^\dagger\gamma^z\eta^i\psi(r)\right)^2:$$

Kinetic term

Coulomb repulsion

AF super-exchange

γ = layer, η = spin



$$J_x = J_y = J + \lambda,\ J_z = J - \lambda$$

Easy plane/easy axis anisotropy

Isotropic super-exchange

2/4 filling: AF insulator, preserves $T' = i\,\gamma^x\,\eta^y\,K$

Related work: Kang and Vafek, PRB (2020)
Soejima, Parker *et al*, PRB (2020)
Eugenio and Dag, arXiv: 2004.10363

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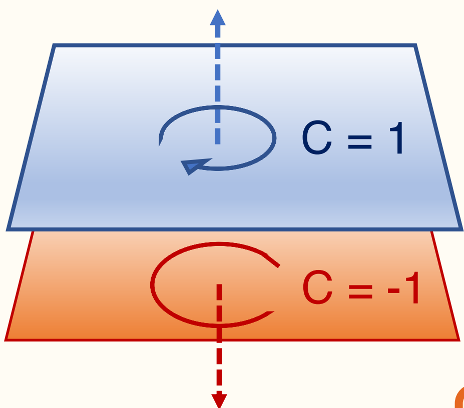


$$J_x = J_y = J + \lambda,\ J_z = J - \lambda$$

→ Easy plane/easy axis anisotropy

↓ Isotropic super-exchange

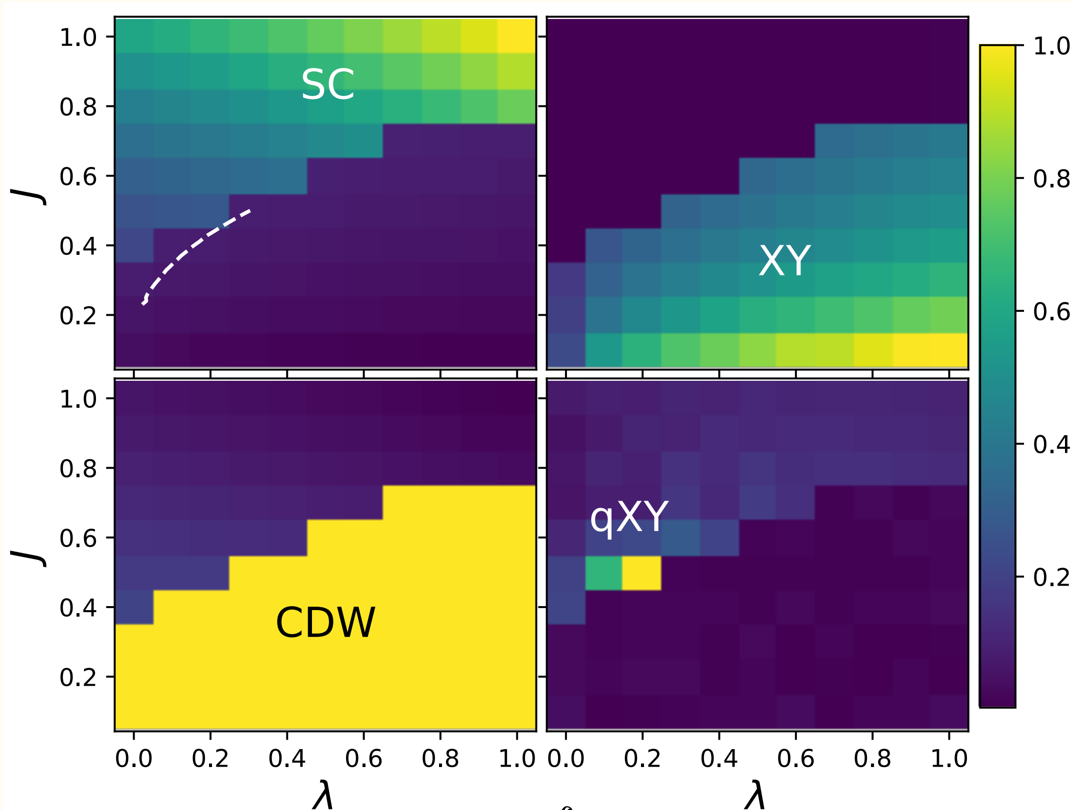
$$V_{+\uparrow,-\downarrow}(r) = V_C(r) - 2JE_C\ell_B^2\ \delta(\mathbf{r})$$

Smeared by LLL projection

Purely repulsive model for J < 3.24 ($d_s = 3\ell_B$)

DMRG: Model and phase diagram

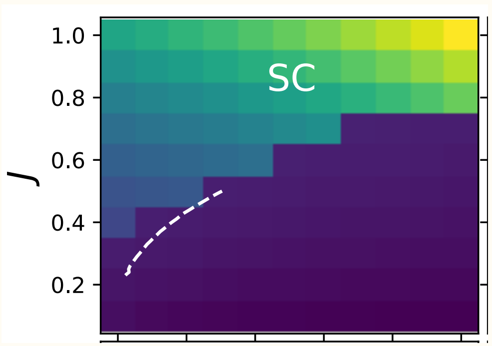
Phase diagram at doping 2 + 1/4



$$S_{XY/SC}(\mathbf{q}=0) = \int d^2r \langle O^\dagger(\mathbf{r}) O(\mathbf{r}) \rangle$$

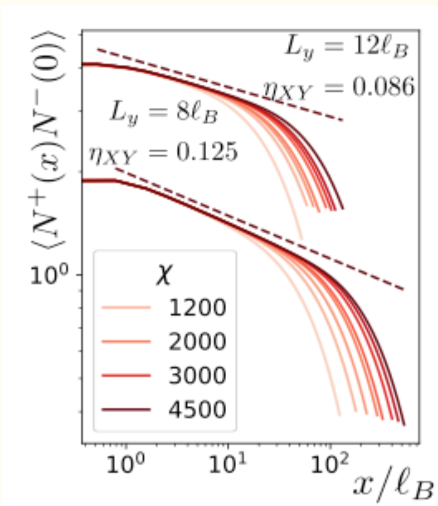
DMRG: Model and phase diagram

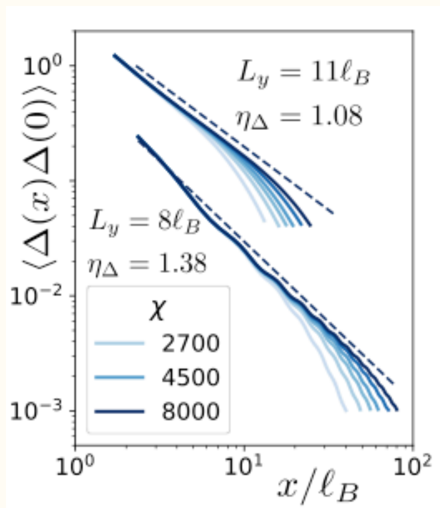
Phase diagram at doping 2 + 1/4



- Superconductor at large J (layer-unpolarized) – Kramers-pairing ($T' = i\,\gamma^x\,\eta^y\,K$)

- Single particle excitations have gap ~ E_C





- Algebraic decay of Kramers-pair correlations

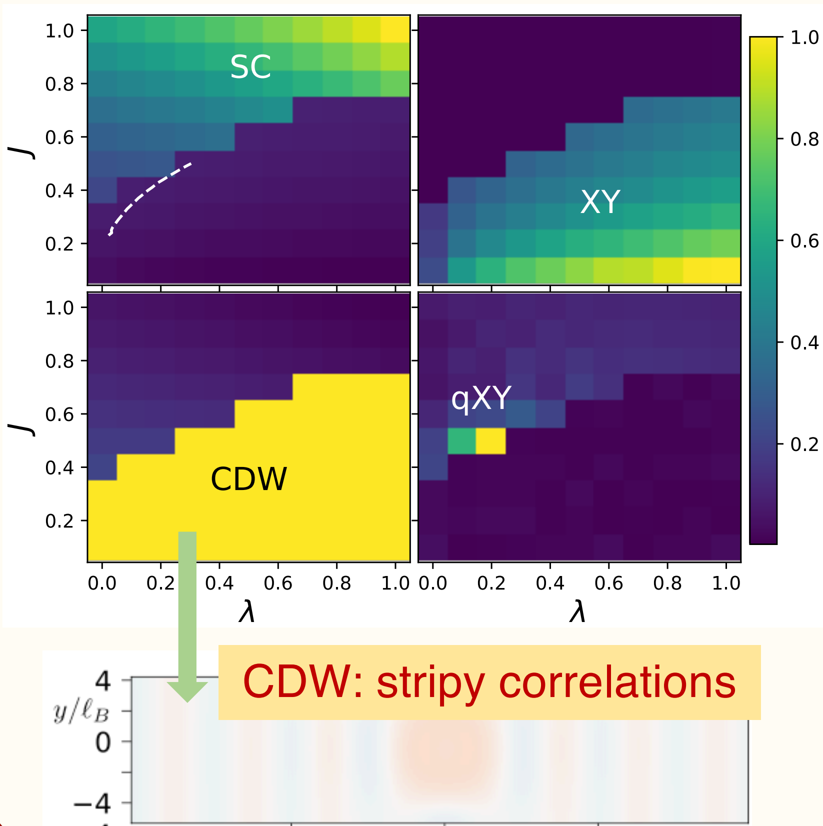
$$\langle \Delta^\dagger(x,0)\Delta(0,0)\rangle \propto x^{-\eta_{SC}}$$

$$\eta_{SC} \propto L_y^{-1}$$

- Scaling analysis shows true long range SC order in 2d limit ($L_y \to \infty$)

DMRG: Model and phase diagram

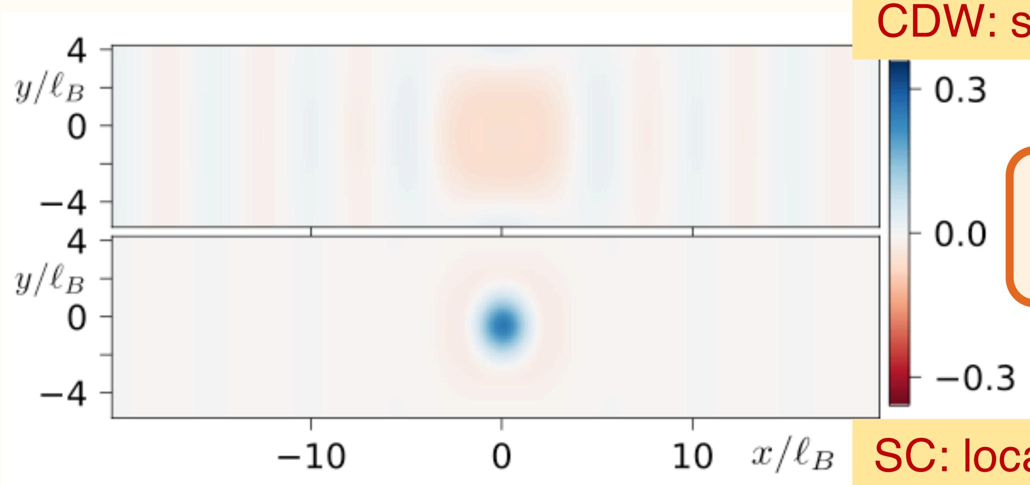
Phase diagram at doping 2 + 1/4



- Coexisting XY-AF and CDW at small J (layer-polarized)
- Transition (first order) between CDW and SC as J is increased
- Small region of coexistence of SC and XY-AF order at finite q_* (tied to the doping)
- The competing state is layer-polarized, but depends on the filling (CDW at 2+1/4, CFL at 2+1/2, IQHE at 2+1)

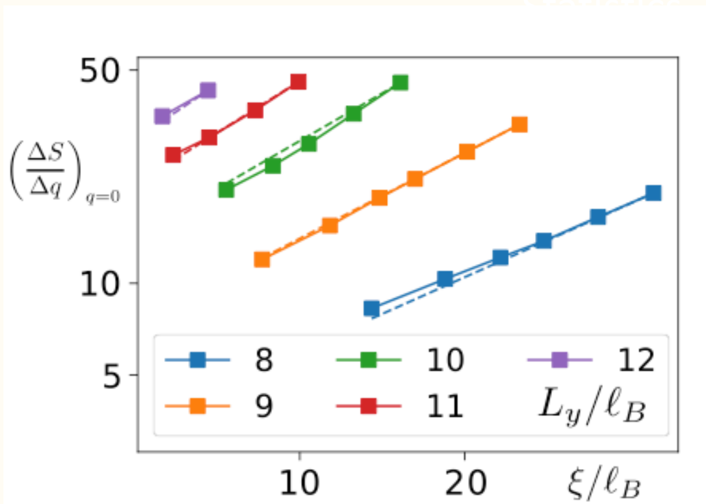
DMRG: Model and phase diagram

CDW: stripy correlations



Density-density correlation function

SC: local attractive correlations

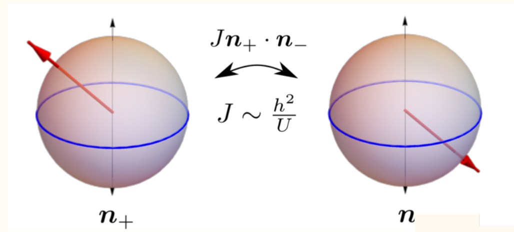


Scaling function shows algebraic scaling of SC order (2+1/4)

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

What is the mechanism of SC? Are skyrmions relevant?

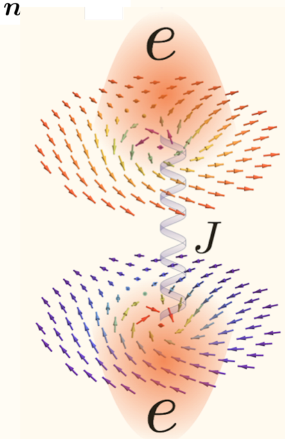
Intuition from NLSM:
Yes, for small anisotropy



$$\mathcal{L} = \int_r \sum_\gamma \left[\frac{1}{2A_M} \mathcal{A}_\gamma \cdot \partial_\tau \mathbf{n}_\gamma + \frac{g}{2} (\nabla \mathbf{n}_\gamma)^2 + \mathbf{A}_\mu \cdot \mathbf{j}^\mu_\gamma \right]$$

$$+ \frac{1}{2} \int_{r,r'} \sum_{\gamma,\gamma'} \rho_\gamma(r) V_C(r - r') \rho_{\gamma'}(r') - \bar{J}^i \int_r (\mathbf{n}^i_+ - \mathbf{n}^i_-)^2$$

$$\mathbf{j}^\mu_\pm = \pm \frac{e}{8\pi} \epsilon^{\mu\nu\rho} \mathbf{n}_\pm \cdot (\partial_\nu \mathbf{n}_\pm \times \partial_\rho \mathbf{n}_\pm)$$

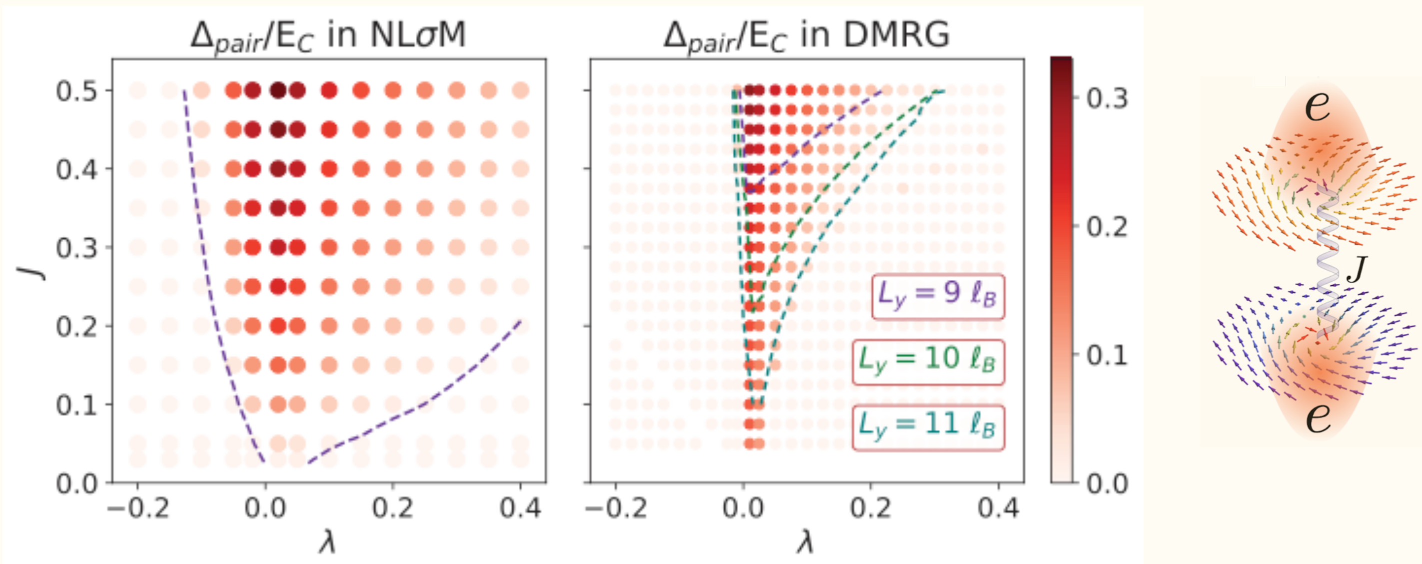


Both NLSM and DMRG give energy of charged excitations above insulator

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

- NLSM + Segment DMRG to determine energy of charged excitations

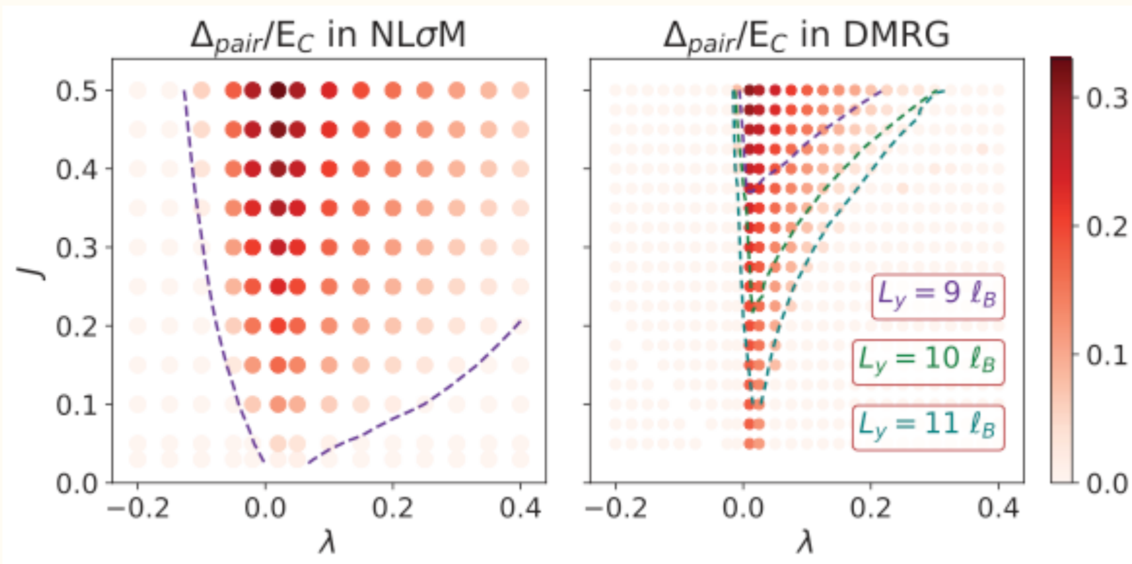
$$\Delta_{pair} = 2\,E_{1e} - E_{2e}$$

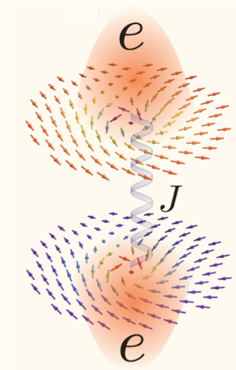


- Numerics for quantum system confirm classical expectations!

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

- Critical $J_*(\lambda) \to 0$ as $\lambda \to 0$, indicative of collective pairing mechanism
- Pairing is much more favorable in the easy plane case (good for MAG!)





Typical RMS radius: 3 ℓ_B

- Good qualitative agreement between quantum and classical numerics

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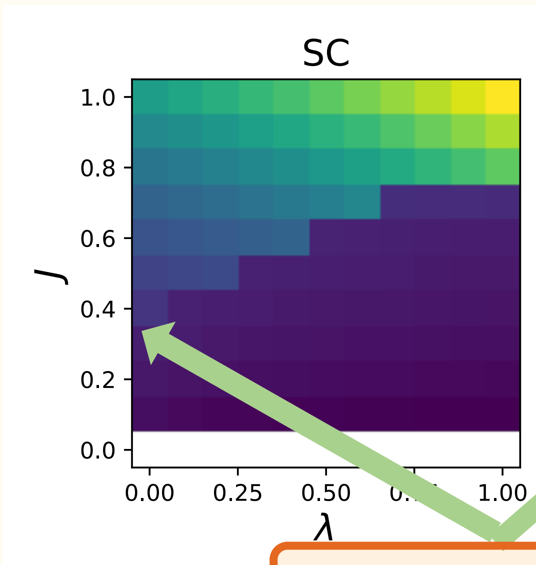
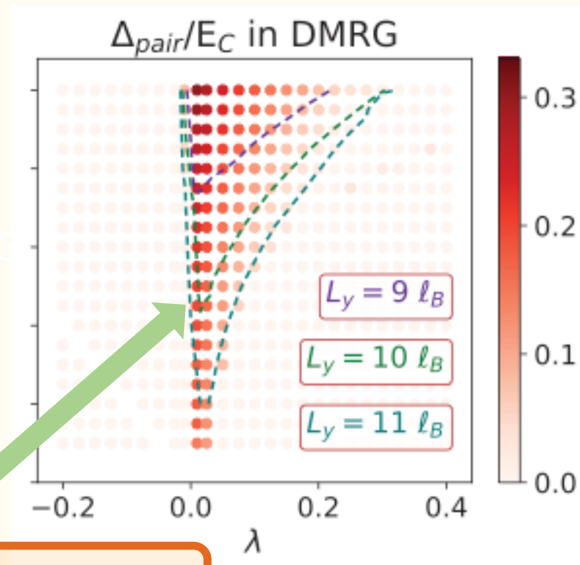
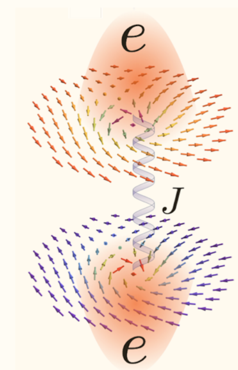




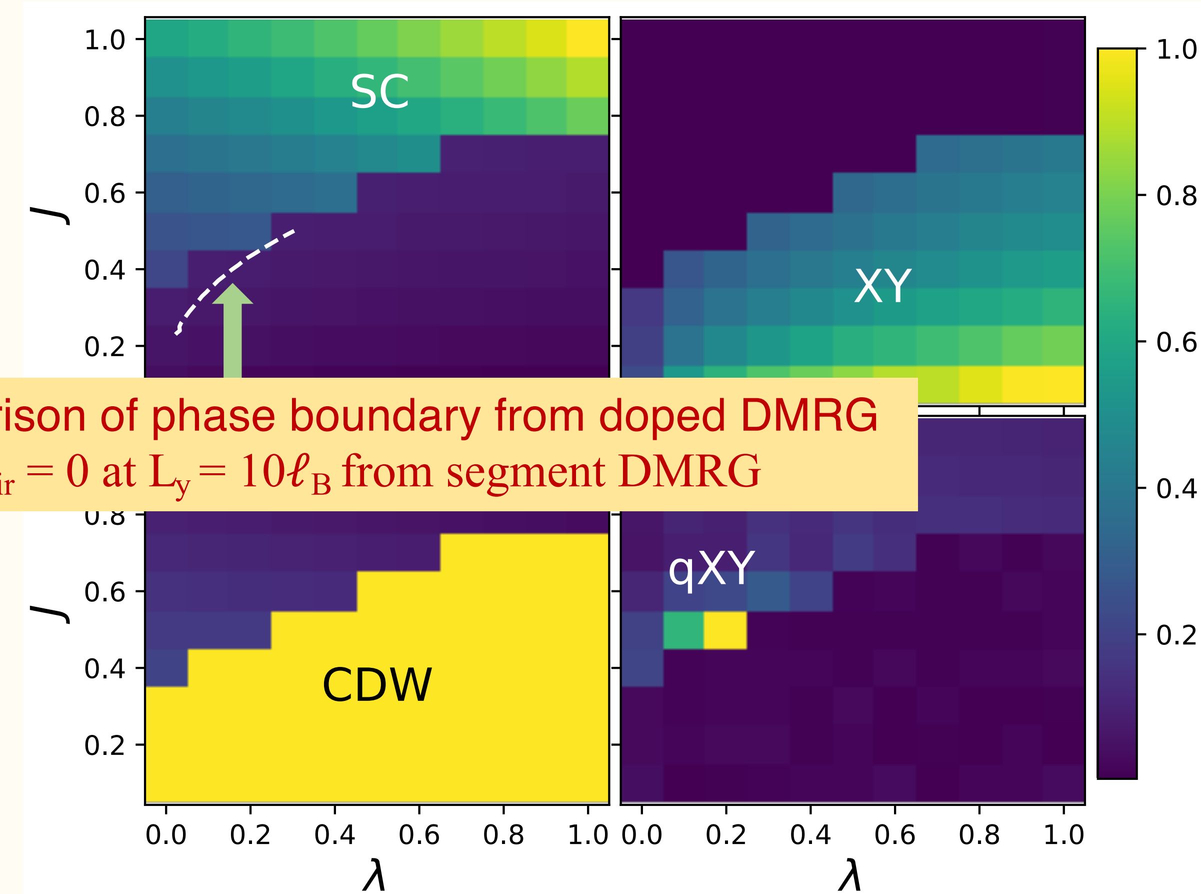


$J_*(\lambda=0,\ L_y = 10\ell_B) \cong 0.3$

- Good qualitative agreement between quantum and classical numerics

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

Phase diagram at doping 2 + 1/4



Comparison of phase boundary from doped DMRG with $\Delta_{\text{pair}} = 0$ at $L_y = 10\ell_B$ from segment DMRG

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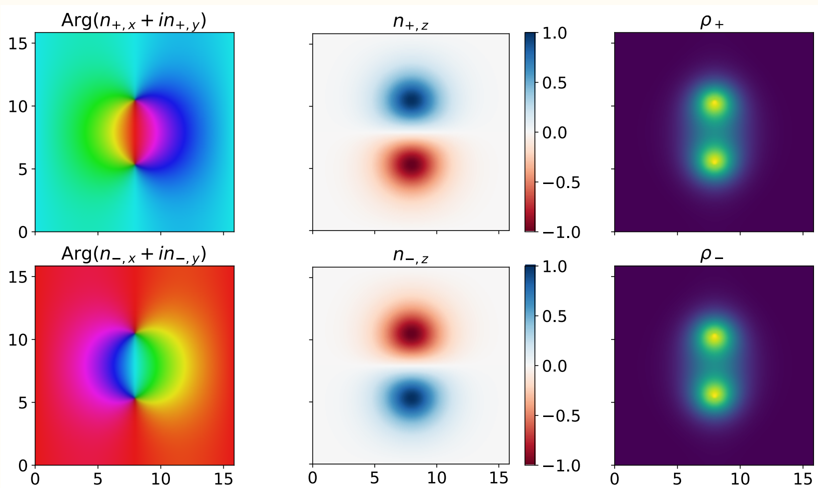
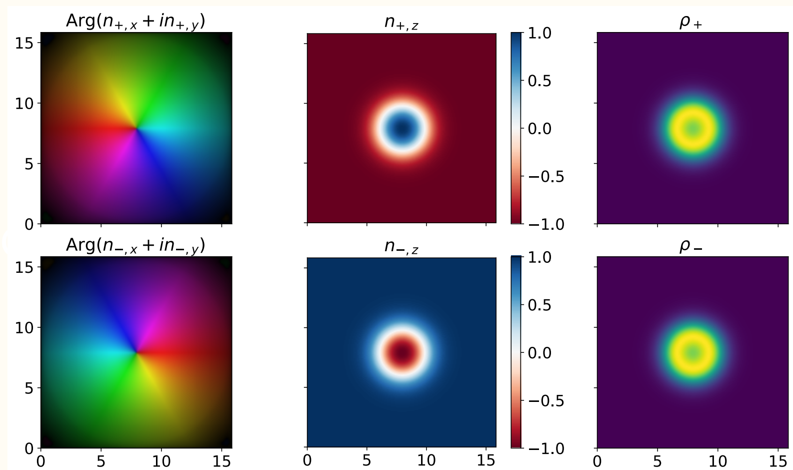


Easy plane: Charges deform into topologically equivalent meron pairs



Easy axis: Charge density remains radially symmetric, incurs larger Coulomb penalty

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

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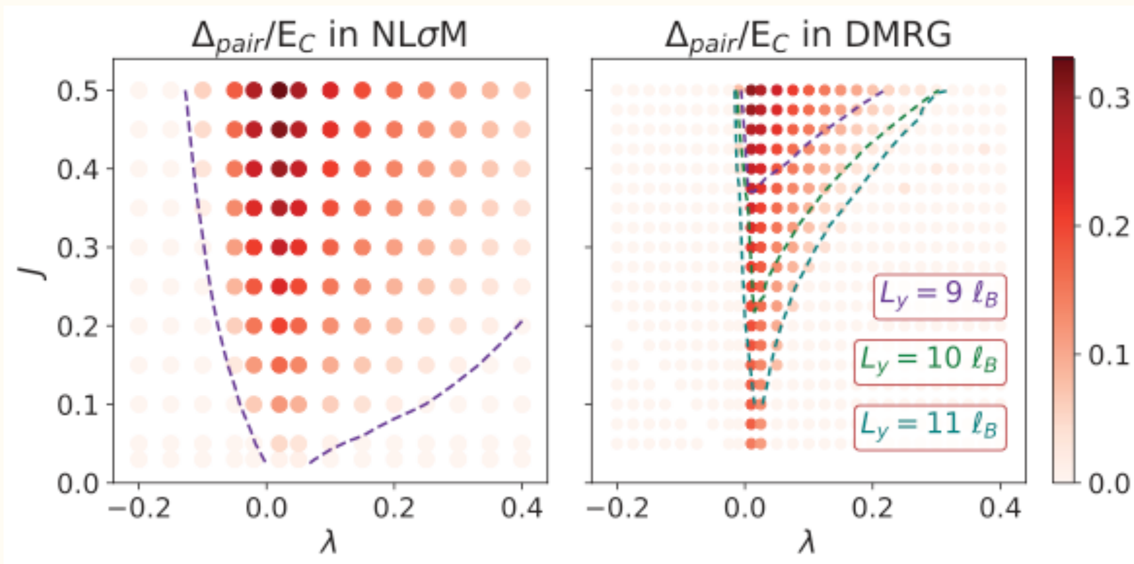
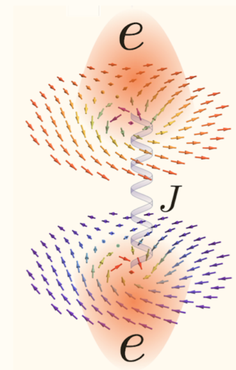
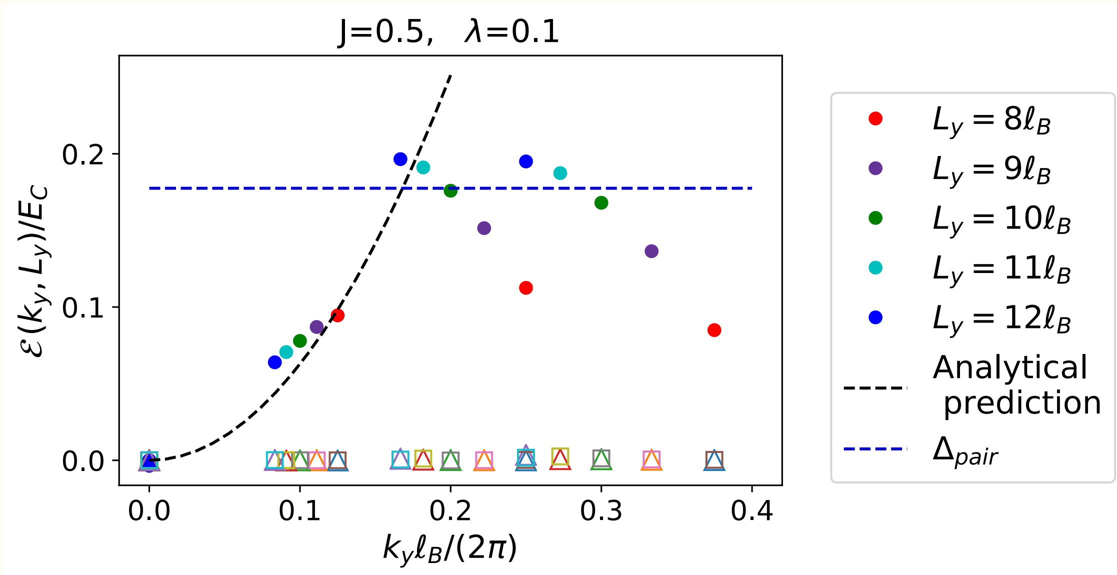




- Quantum zero-point fluctuations ∝ J raise the energy of 2e skyrmions

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing

- As $\lambda \to 0$, effective mass $M_{2e} \propto J^{-1}$ as expected from semiclassical study
- At larger momenta k_y, charges from opposite layers get separated, with Chern resolved dipole moment $\propto k_y$: paying AF exchange penalty



Zaletel *et al*, PRB (2018)

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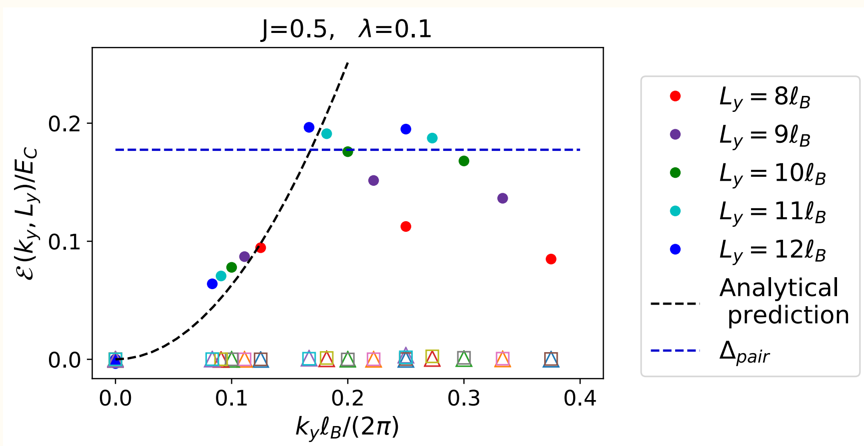
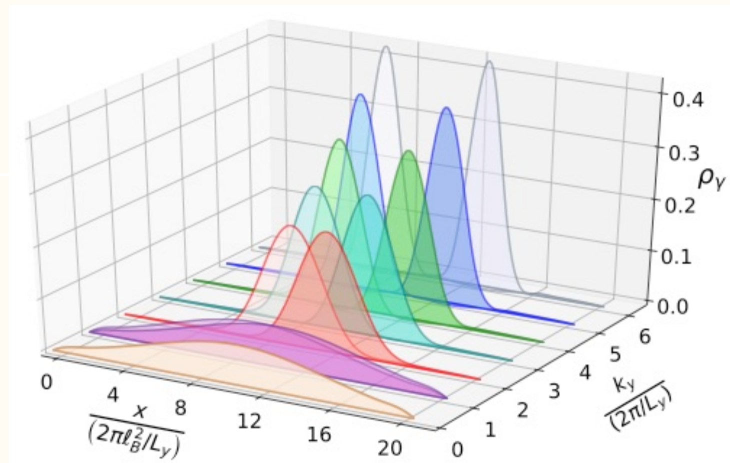
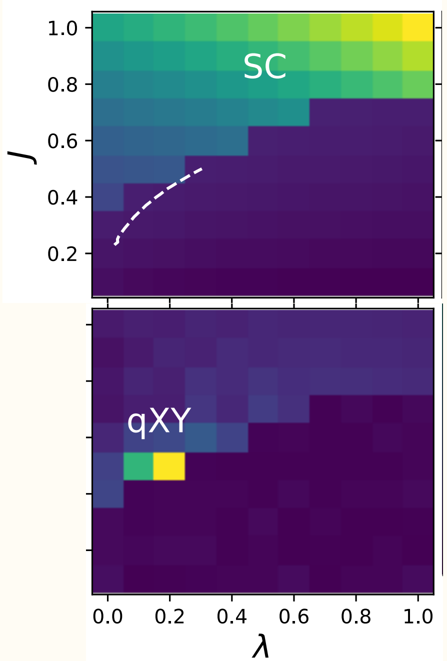




- Again, numerics for quantum system confirm classical expectations!

Evidence for skyrmion-pairing



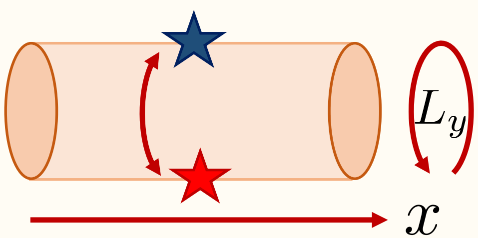
- When XY-AF order coexists with SC, it has finite momenta q_* tied to doping

$$\langle N^+(x,0)N^-(0,0)\rangle \sim x^{-\eta_{XY}} \cos(q_* x)$$

- Phase θ(x) of XY order jumps by π every-time it crosses 2e charge (on top of insulator)

- Easy-plane anisotropy: 2e skyrmion deforms into meron-antimeron pair

- To avoid Coulomb repulsion, meron and anti-meron lie half-way apart on the cylinder

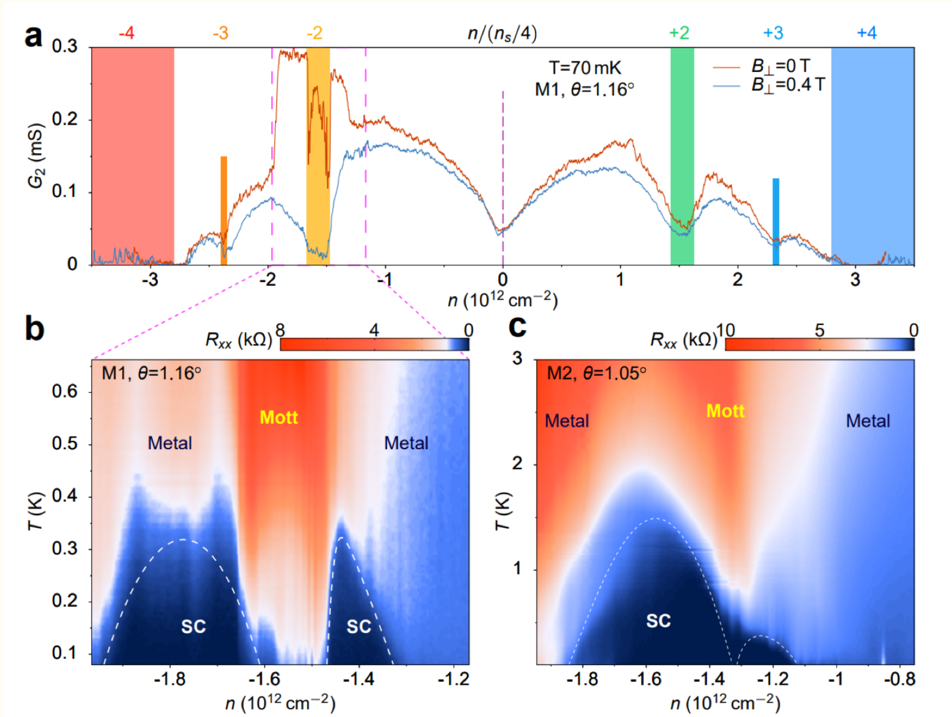


$$\theta = \arg\left[\sinh(2\pi(z-z_0)/2L_y)\sinh(2\pi(\bar{z}-\bar{z}_1)/2L_y)\right]$$

$$\Delta\theta = \theta(x=\infty,y)-\theta(x=-\infty,y) = 2\pi(y_1-y_0)/L_y$$

- Further evidence of skyrmion mechanism!

Application to moire graphene: MATBG

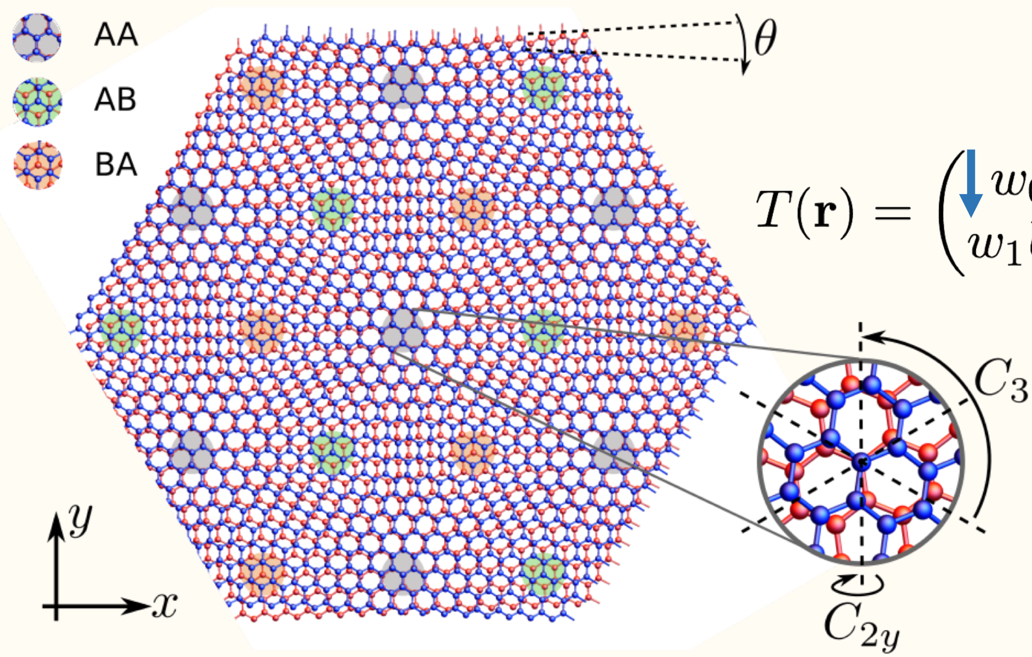


Experiments:
Cao *et al,* Nature (2018), Lu *et al,* Nature (2019), Yankowitz *et al*, Science (2019), Several others…

Theory:
Po *et al* , Yuan *et al*, Isobe *et al*, Zou *et al*, Kang *et al*, lots of others…

Application to moire graphene: MATBG

- Approach from a quantum Hall perspective: the chiral limit



A$_1$ B$_1$ A$_2$ B$_2$

$$T(\mathbf{r}) = \begin{pmatrix} w_0 U_0(\mathbf{r}) & w_1 U_1(\mathbf{r}) \\ w_1 U^*(-\mathbf{r}) & w_0 U_0(\mathbf{r}) \end{pmatrix}$$

w_0/w_1 goes down due to lattice relaxation

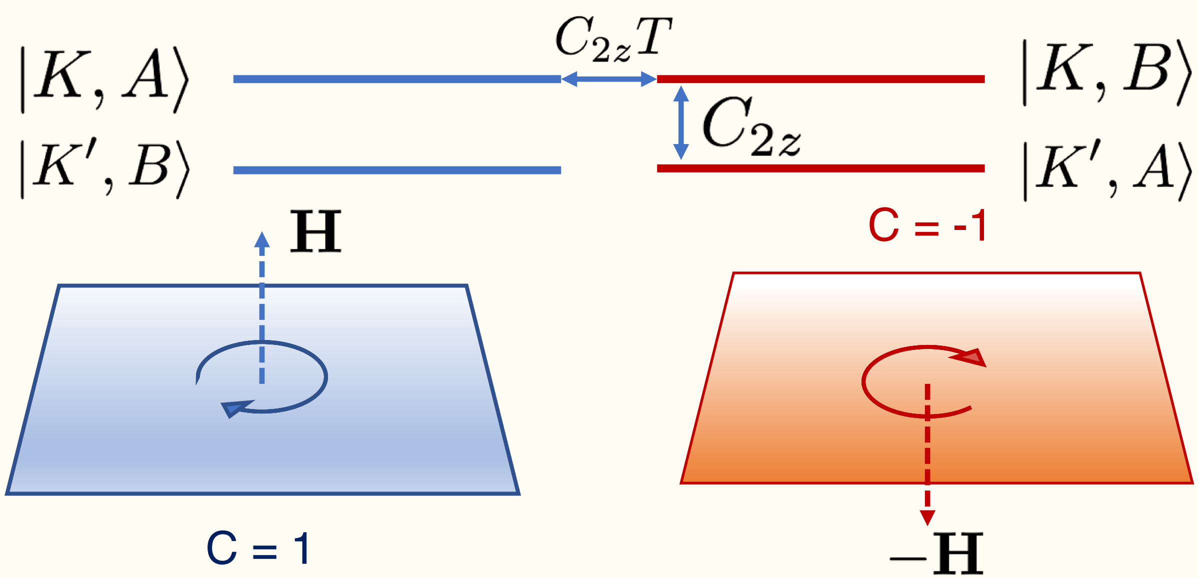
Bistritzer, MacDonald PNAS (2011),

Application to moire graphene: MATBG

- Chiral limit (turn off w_0 = AA hopping between layers): Additional chiral symmetry allows for sublattice and valley polarized basis

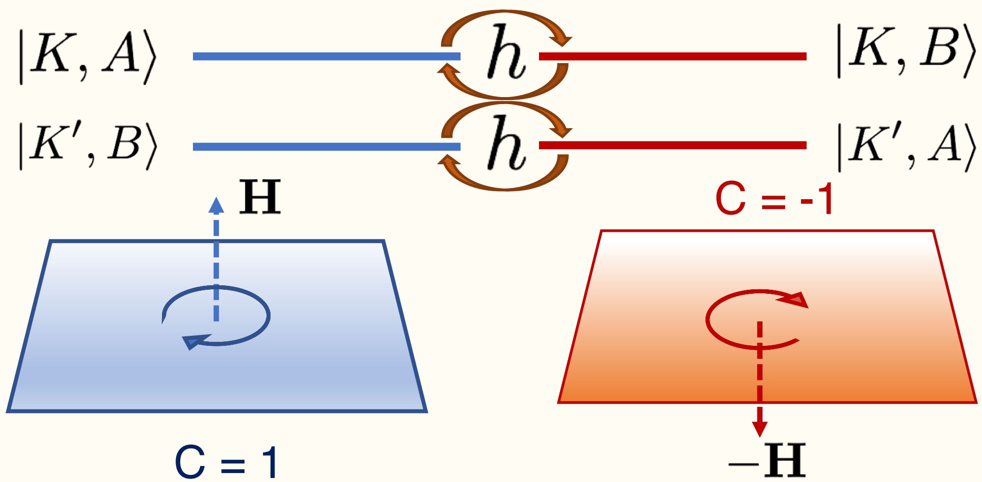
Jose et al, PRL (2012), Tarnopolsky *et al*, PRL (2019), J. Liu *et al*, PRB (2019)

- Exactly flat Chern bands: each band behaves like a lowest Landau level, but different bands see opposite effective magnetic fields



Application to moire graphene: MATBG

- Adding dispersion introduces AF super-exchange between Chern sectors

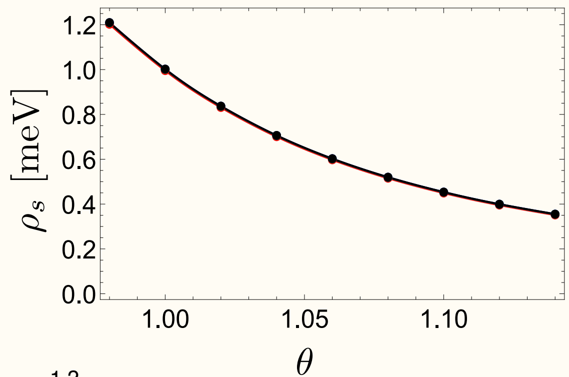


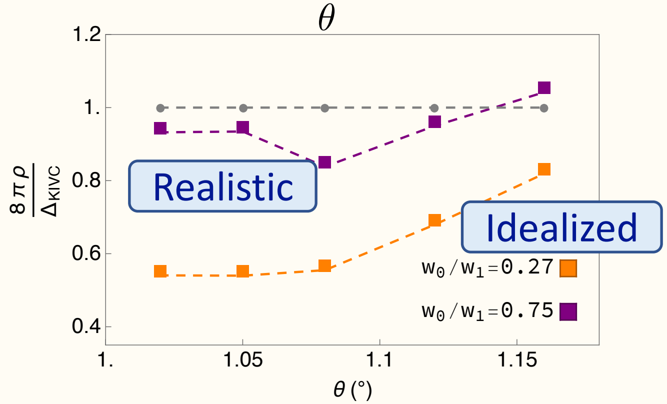
- Effective Hamiltonian resembles weakly dispersive iso-spinful Chern bands with antiferromagnetic exchange between opposite Chern sectors

Bultinck *et al*, PRX (2020), Kang & Vafek, PRL (2020)
Lian, Bernevig et al, arXiv:2009:13530

Application to moire graphene: MATBG

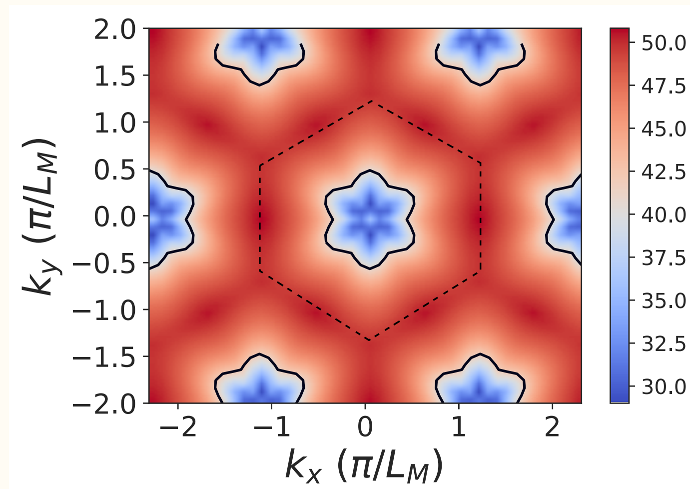
- Are skyrmions energetically relevant to MAG?
- Need stiffness to be small





Δ_{KIVC} = gap from HF numerics

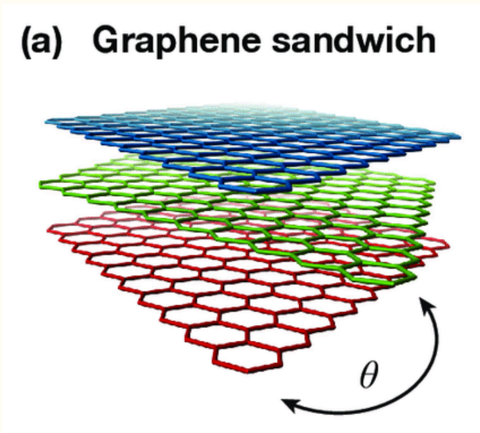
Small critical doping beyond which charges enter as 2e skyrmions



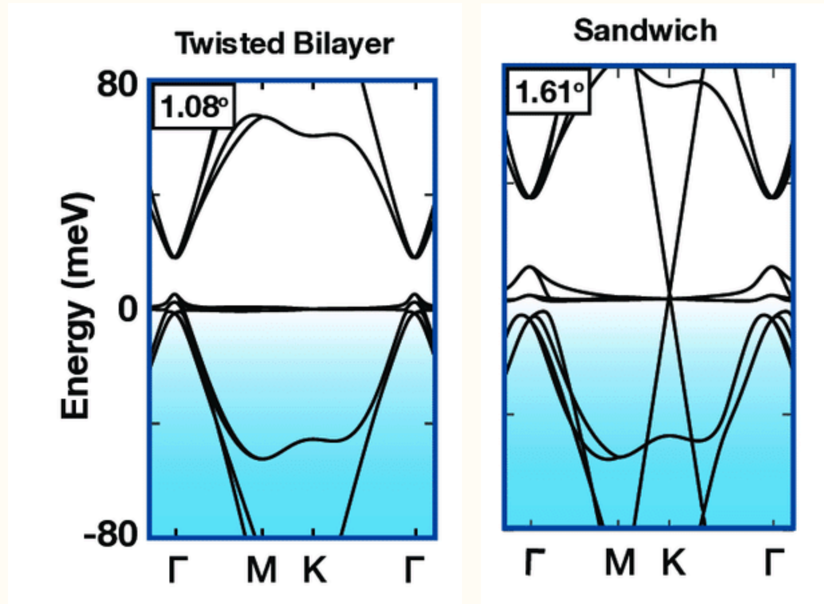
Khalaf, SC *et al*, arXiv:2004.00638

Application to moire graphene: MATLG

- Alternating angle twisted trilayer graphene = TBG flat bands + highly dispersive Dirac cone (like monolayer graphene)



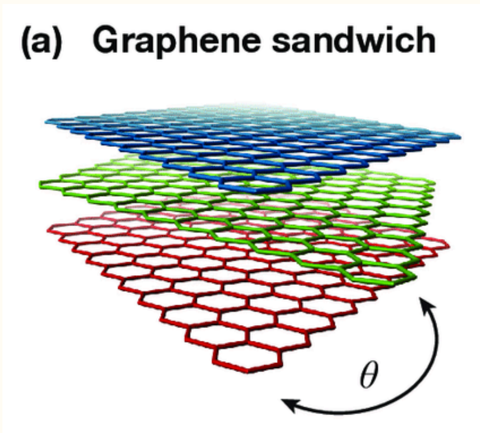
Khalaf *et al*, PRB (2019).
Carr et al, Nano Letters (2020)



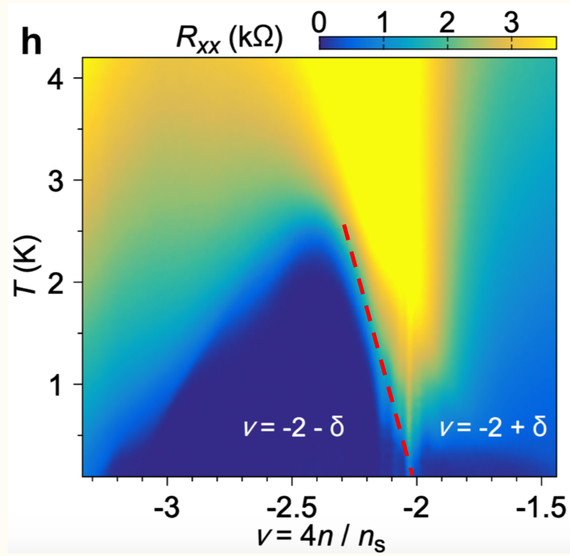
$$\theta^{\mathrm{M}}_{\mathrm{TLG}} = \sqrt{2}\,\theta^{\mathrm{M}}_{\mathrm{TBG}}$$

Application to moire graphene: MATLG

- Recently, robust superconductivity has been observed in MATLG, with multiple evidences in favor of a strong-coupling origin



Khalaf *et al*, PRB (2019).
Carr et al, Nano Letters (2020)



Park *et al*, Nature (2021)
Hao *et al*, Science (2021)

- T_c appears to be proportional to doping ν

Khalaf, SC *et al*, arXiv:2004.00638

Conclusions and Outlook

- Numerically established skyrmion-antiskyrmion pair condensation as a viable mechanism for superconductivity

- Band topology plays a crucial role (not seen in bands with same C in a *control* experiment)

- MATBG has the right physical ingredients to realize this mechanism: required band topology and low iso-spin stiffness ~ 1 meV, perhaps mirror symmetric MATLG too

Saito *et al*, Nature (2021)
Park *et al*, Nature (2021)
Hao *et al*, Science (2021)

- Open questions --- Effects of:

1. Non-uniform Berry curvature
2. Disorder
3. Spin-orbit coupling   Arora *et al*, Nature (2020)

Thank you for your attention!