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Generating Entanglement and Squeezed States of Nuclear Spins in Quantum Dots

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We present a scheme for achieving coherent spin squeezing of nuclear spin states in semiconductor quantum dots. The nuclear polarization dependence of the electron spin resonance generates a unitary evolution that drives nuclear spins into a collective entangled state. The polarization dependence of the resonance generates an area-preserving, twisting dynamics that squeezes and stretches the nuclear spin Wigner distribution without the need for nuclear spin flips. Our estimates of squeezing times indicate that the entanglement threshold can be reached in current experiments.

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Entanglement generation and detection are two of the most sought-after goals in the field of quantum control. Besides offering a means to probe some of the most peculiar and fundamental aspects of quantum mechanics, entanglement in many-body systems can be used as a tool to reduce fluctuations below the standard quantum limit [1]. Recently, squeezing of the collective spin state of many atoms [2] was achieved using atom-light or atom-atom interactions [3–6], allowing unprecedented precision of measurements in atomic ensembles [7]. Similarly, future progress in spin-based information processing hinges on our ability to find ways of precisely controlling the dynamics of nuclear spins in nanoscale solid-state devices [8,9]. In particular, electron spin coherence times [10,11] can be improved by driving the nuclear spin bath into reduced-entropy “narrowed” states [12–17], as seen in experiments [18]. Furthermore, with quantum control, a nuclear spin bath can be turned into a resource, serving as a long-lived quantum memory [19–21], or a medium for high-precision magnetic field sensing [22].

Here we describe a coherent spin squeezing mechanism for gate-defined quantum dots [23], see Fig. 1(a). With suitable modification, our approach can also be applied to other systems which can be approximately described by a central-spin model. We consider a single electron in a quantum dot, in contact with a large group of nuclear spins, \{I_n\}. The electron and nuclear spins are coupled by the hyperfine interaction \(H_{HF} = \sum n A_n \mathbf{S} \cdot \mathbf{I}_n\), where \(\mathbf{S}\) is the electron spin, and each coupling constant \(A_n\) is proportional to the local electron density at the position of nucleus \(n\). The electron spin is driven by an applied rf field with frequency close to the electron spin resonance (ESR) in the presence of an externally applied magnetic field. Because the electron spin evolves rapidly on the time scale of nuclear spin dynamics, the nuclear spins are subjected to an effective hyperfine field (the “Knight field”) produced by the time-averaged electron spin polarization. Nuclear spin squeezing results from the dependence of the electronic hyperfine field on the detuning from the ESR condition, which in turn depends on the nuclear polarization; see Fig. 1(b).

In a system composed of many spins \{I_n\}, such as a quantum dot or an atomic ensemble, the collective total spin \(\mathbf{I} = \sum n \mathbf{I}_n\) is a quantum mechanical angular-momentum variable. Because different vector components

![Diagram of Nuclear Spin Squeezing](image-url)

FIG. 1 (color online). Nuclear spin squeezing in a quantum dot. (a) An electron in a quantum dot, with the electron spin \(\mathbf{S}\) coupled to a large group of nuclear spins \(\{I_n\}\). Electron spin resonance is excited by microwave radiation applied in the presence of an external magnetic field. (b) Flowchart describing the squeezing mechanism. (c) Schematic depiction of twisting dynamics on the Bloch sphere, shown in a rotating frame where the mean polarization is stationary. We focus on dynamics between the initial time \(t_0\) and an intermediate time \(t_1\), during which the phase space (Wigner) distribution is squeezed within a small, flat region of the Bloch sphere, see Eqs. (7) and (8). At longer times, indicated by \(t_2\), the distribution extends around the Bloch sphere.
of $\hat{I}$ do not commute, they are subject to the Heisenberg uncertainty relations

$$\Delta I_x \Delta I_z \approx \frac{\hbar}{2} |\langle \hat{I} \rangle|,$$

(1)

and its cyclic permutations [2,24] (without loss of generality, we focus on the spin 1/2 case). Squeezing is achieved by reducing fluctuations in one spin component below the "standard quantum limit," $\Delta I^x = \sqrt{\hbar/\langle \hat{I} \rangle}$. As we discuss below, depending on the application, a variety of criteria can be used for identifying "useful" levels of squeezing (seeRefs. [2,7,24]).

Typically, the inequality in Eq. (1) is far from saturated in quantum dots under ambient conditions. In equilibrium, the typical nuclear polarization and the uncertainties $\Delta I^x$ are all of order $\sqrt{N}$ (see, e.g., Ref. [25]), where $N \sim 10^6$ is the number of nuclear spins in the quantum dot. Here we consider an initial state prepared by polarizing nuclear spins to a fraction $p$ of the maximal polarization, and then rotating this polarization into the equatorial plane of the Bloch sphere such that the mean spin points along $x$, $\langle \hat{I} \rangle = pN \hbar/2$. Experimentally, nuclear spin polarizations of up to 40% have been reported for electrically driven systems [26], and up to 60% in optically pumped systems [27].

To quantify the degree of squeezing for arbitrary polarization, Wineland et al. [7] introduced the parameter $\xi = \sqrt{N} \Delta I^x / |\langle \hat{I} \rangle| \approx 2 \Delta I^x / (\hbar \sqrt{N})$, which characterizes the angular resolution of the squeezed state relative to that of an uncorrelated product state. Different physical effects are described by three different conditions:

(1) $\xi < 1/p$, (2) $\xi < 1/\sqrt{p}$, (3) $\xi < 1$. (2)

Condition 1 is sufficient to achieve ESR narrowing in a quantum dot in a large magnetic field, where the electron Zeeman energy is sensitive to the Overhauser shift, proportional to $\Delta I^x$. Condition 2 indicates that the standard quantum limit has been surpassed. Finally, the most stringent condition ($\xi < 1$) is sufficient to imply entanglement of the constituent spin-1/2 particles (cfr. Ref. [24]) and enhanced resolution for atomic clocks.

Below we demonstrate that with realistic values of $p$, all three conditions (2) can be met. Compared with the ideal case $p = 1$, we find that incomplete initial polarization, $p < 1$, and fluctuations in the prepared value of $p$ should not hamper efforts to obtain useful squeezing (all three conditions are close for $p$ of order 1).

In Ref. [28], Fernholz et al. achieved squeezing of the internal spin variables of individual composite particles, cesium atoms with total spin $F = 4$. In contrast, here we describe a mechanism for squeezing the collective spin state of a large ensemble of spatially distributed spins which can in principle be selectively addressed.

To describe the coupled electron-nuclear spin dynamics, we model the system with the microscopic Hamiltonian (below we set $\hbar = 1$)

$$H = \omega_z \hat{S}^z + \omega_0 \hat{F}^z + A \hat{F}^x \hat{S}^x + \frac{A}{2} (\hat{F}^+ \hat{S}^- + \hat{F}^- \hat{S}^+) + H_{el}. $$

(3)

where $\omega_z$ is the electron Zeeman energy in the magnetic field, $\omega_0$ is the nuclear Larmor frequency, and $H_{el}$ describes the driving of the electron spin and its coupling to an environment, which leads to fast dephasing and relaxation. For simplicity, here we consider a single species of nuclear spin, and take all hyperfine coupling constants to be equal, $A_n = A$. The latter condition amounts to the assumption that electron density is approximately constant inside the dot, and zero outside. In this case, the electron spin couples directly to the total nuclear spin $\hat{I} = \sum \hat{I}_n$, with the square of the total nuclear spin, $\hat{F}^2$, conserved by the dynamics. The effects of nonuniform couplings will be discussed at the end.

We begin by writing the Heisenberg equation of motion for the total nuclear spin operator $\hat{I}$, $d\hat{I} / dt = [\hat{I}, H]$:

$$\frac{d\hat{I}}{dt} = \left[ \hat{I}, H \right] = b \times \hat{I}, \quad b = \omega_0 \hat{z} + A \hat{S}. $$

(4)

In the motional-narrowing regime where electron dynamics are fast compared to the nuclear spin evolution, we use Eq. (3) to adiabatically eliminate the electron spin from the right-hand side of Eq. (4). Because of the large mismatch between the electron and nuclear Zeeman energies, $\omega_z/\omega_0 \gg 1$, averaging over fast oscillations of the electron allows us to replace $\hat{S}$ by an operator-valued semiclassical mean polarization $S(\hat{F})$ which depends on the nuclear polarization $\hat{F}$ through the Overhauser shift of the ESR frequency, cf. Ref. [29]:

$$S^z = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\delta \omega - A \hat{F}^2}{2 (\delta \omega - A \hat{F}^2)} + \frac{\gamma^2}{\gamma^2 - \Omega^2} \right), \quad S^x = \gamma^2 + \frac{\gamma}{\Omega^2}. $$

(5)

where $\delta \omega$ is the detuning between the driving frequency and $\omega_z$, $\Omega$ is the driving strength, $\gamma = 1/\tau_2$ is the electron spin dephasing rate, and $\Gamma_1$ is the electron spin relaxation rate. Linearizing Eq. (5) in $A \hat{F}$ around the optimal detuning $\delta \omega_0 = \gamma/\sqrt{3}$ where $S^z$ is most sensitive to nuclear-polarization-dependent frequency shifts, see Fig. 2, and substituting into Eq. (4), we obtain an effective Hamiltonian for the collective nuclear spin:

$$H = \omega_0 \hat{F}^z + \frac{1}{2} \lambda (\hat{F}^z)^2, \quad \lambda = A \frac{\partial S^z}{\partial \hat{F}^z} \bigg|_{\hat{F} = 0}, $$

(6)

with $\hat{F}^2 = I(I+1), I \leq N/2$, conserved by the dynamics. Note that here we have absorbed a constant shift into the nuclear Larmor frequency $\omega_0$. The Hamiltonian in Eq. (6) is of the canonical squeezing Hamiltonian form [2]. It is
diagonalized in a suitably chosen orthonormal basis \( y \) from the ESP frequency. The average electron spin polarization depends on \( \tilde{F} \) through the dependence of the detuning on the Overhauser shift, as indicated by the shaded region. (b) Contour plot representation of the Wigner distribution of a large collective spin on a locally flat patch of the Bloch sphere, in the rotating frame where \( \omega_0 = 0 \). The mean spin points along \( x \). Before squeezing, the Wigner distribution is isotropic (blue circles). After squeezing, the Wigner distribution, Eq. (7), is squeezed along an axis \( z' \), and stretched along an orthogonal axis \( y' \) (red ellipses).

Semiclassically, Eq. (6) induces precession of the total spin vector about the steady state \( \tilde{S} \), we now analyze the evolution of the nuclear spin Wigner distribution. For a large initial polarization \( p \), where \( I = pN/2 \), and short to intermediate times \( 0 \leq t \leq t_1 \) [see Fig. 1(c)], the “uncertainty region” associated with the nuclear state is small on the scale of the total spin and we can consider evolution in a locally-flat patch of the Bloch sphere. Here the operators \( \tilde{F} \) and \( \tilde{F}^* \) approximately obey canonical commutation relations, and the initial nuclear spin state (polarized along \( x \)) is described by an isotropic 2D Gaussian Wigner distribution with width set by the initial transverse fluctuations, \( \Delta \tilde{I} = \Delta_{0}^{\tilde{y}} \).

Semiclassically, Eq. (6) induces precession of the total spin vector about the \( z \) axis with a polarization-dependent Larmor frequency \( \eta = \partial H / \partial \tilde{F} = \omega_0 + \lambda \tilde{F} \). Correspondingly, the Gaussian Wigner distribution evolves as

\[
\rho_I(P, F) = \mathcal{A} \exp \left( -\frac{(P - \lambda \tilde{F})^2 + (P + \lambda \tilde{F})^2}{2 \Delta I^2} \right),
\]

where without loss of generality we set \( \omega_0 = 0 \). The initial (isotropic) and evolved (squeezed) distributions are shown in Fig. 2(b).

The quadratic form in the exponential in Eq. (7) is diagonalized in a suitably chosen orthonormal basis \( y' \), \( z' \) [30]. As shown in Fig. 2(b), stretching in one direction \( (y') \) is accompanied by squeezing in the perpendicular direction \( (z') \), such that the phase space volume of the Wigner distribution is exactly preserved if fluctuations of the electron spin are ignored. For times \( t \geq t_s = (|A| I)^{-1} \), the uncertainty \( \Delta I \) of the squeezed component decreases as

\[
\Delta I(t) = \Delta I \frac{t_s}{t}, \quad t_s = \frac{16\delta_1 y^3}{3\sqrt{3A^2} \gamma \Omega^2}.
\]

Squeezing proceeds until long times when the phase space distribution begins to extend around the Bloch sphere, see Fig. 1(c). The curvature of the Bloch sphere imposes a limit on the maximum achievable squeezing [2].

For an order-of-magnitude estimate of the squeezing time, we set \( \Omega = \Gamma_1 = \frac{1}{2} \gamma \). This choice selects the regime of moderately strong electron spin dephasing where the resonance is broader than the minimum value \( \gamma = \frac{1}{2} \Gamma_1 \). In this practically relevant regime, the motional-averaging approximation can be safely applied. Taking the “intrinsic” width of the resonance to be twice larger than the typical Overhauser field fluctuations, \( \gamma = \frac{\Delta}{2N} \), we obtain

\[
t_{s,\text{min}} = 20 \sqrt{N} / I \delta.
\]

Using a typical value of the hyperfine coupling for GaAs, \( A = 0.1 \mu s^{-1} \), we obtain \( t_{s,\text{min}} = 200 \mu s \sqrt{N} / I \). The estimate for \( t_{s,\text{min}} \) can be improved slightly by optimizing the expression for \( t_s \) in Eq. (8) with respect to driving power \( \Omega \). The fast relaxation rate \( \Gamma_1 \sim \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{N} \) can be achieved by working in a regime of efficient electron spin exchange with the reservoirs in the leads. We see that the squeezing time is inversely proportional to the initial length of the nuclear spin vector, i.e., the degree of nuclear polarization before squeezing.

To derive the squeezing time \( t_s \) in Eq. (9), a coherent nuclear spin state with \( \Delta I = \sqrt{3/2} \) was used. As discussed above, however, when classical uncertainty in the nuclear spin state is included, the initial width of the Wigner distribution is given by \( \Delta I = \sqrt{N}/2 \). Given that the width \( \Delta I \) of the squeezed component decays as \( 1/t \), see Eq. (8), the effect of the classical transverse fluctuations is simply to increase the time required to reach a desired level of fluctuations by an order-one factor \( \sqrt{N}/2\Delta I = \sqrt{1/p} \).

Besides fluctuations in the transverse components of the initial polarization, the dynamical nuclear polarization process used to prepare the initial nuclear spin state will also leave behind uncertainty in the length \( I \) of the net spin (typically with a scale much smaller than \( I \) itself). However, because the rate of angular precession depends only on the \( z \) component of the total spin, Eq. (7), sections of the phase space distribution with constant \( I \) but varying Bloch sphere radii will rigidly precess. Therefore fluctuations in the initial polarization \( I \) do not pose a significant threat to squeezing.

In addition to uncertainty in the initial nuclear spin state, we must also consider the effect of time-dependent fluctuations of the electron spin about its mean-field value \( \tilde{S} \),
spin resonance was achieved by excitation using micro-
vortex double quantum dots [31]). It should thus be
of classical fluctuations in the initial state, the first
ent control of single electron spins [23,33,34], have been
controlled rotations using NMR pulses [31,32], and coher-
squeezing, i.e., dynamical nuclear polarization [26,27],
decohere due to dipole-dipole interactions, etc.
possible to squeeze the nuclear spin state faster than it
dynamics, which squeezes fluctuations as
diffusion is indeed suppressed by motional averaging. At
long times, the competition between coherent twisting
dynamics, which squeezes fluctuations as 1/t, and phase
diffusion, which tends to increase fluctuations as \(t^{1/2}\), slows
down squeezing to \(\Delta t \sim t^{-1/2}\), but does not prevent it.
These results are based on a mean-field treatment of
Eq. (4), which we supplement by including phase diffu-
sion driven by electron spin fluctuations. This intuitive
approach is quantitatively supported by a lengthier calcula-
tion based on the full density matrix of the combined
electron-nuclear system, to be presented elsewhere. The
more powerful density-matrix approach can also be used to
study squeezing in the coherent driving regime of electron
spin dynamics where large correlations can build up be-
tween the electron and nuclear spins.
Is the approximation of uniform hyperfine coupling
justified? The hyperfine interaction in a quantum dot is
strong near the center, where electron density is high, and
weak at the edges. Notably, the atomic systems [4] display
a similar level of spatial inhomogeneity, since there is a full
modulation of coupling between zero and maximum cou-
ping in a standing wave of light. The observation of robust
squeezing in atomic clouds of size comparable to the
wavelength of light indicates that spatial variation of the
coupling does not compromise the effect.
For \(p = 20\%\), squeezing sets in after \(t_5 \sim 2\ \mu s\), and
fluctuations are suppressed by a factor of 10 within ap-
proximately 20 \(\mu s\) (neglecting phase diffusion). Because
of classical fluctuations in the initial state, the first
\(\sqrt{1/p}\)-fold (1/p-fold) squeezing goes toward reaching
the standard quantum limit (entanglement threshold).
Taking into account phase diffusion, we arrive at time
scales that are at least 10 times shorter than typical nuclear
decohherence times (recently measured to be \(\sim 1\ \text{ms in vertical}
double quantum dots [31]). It should thus be
possible to squeeze the nuclear spin state faster than it
decoheres due to dipole-dipole interactions, etc.
All elements required for achieving and demonstrating
squeezing, i.e., dynamical nuclear polarization [26,27],
controlled rotations using NMR pulses [31,32], and coher-
et control of single electron spins [23,33,34], have been
realized. In particular, we note that in Ref. [23] electron
spin resonance was achieved by excitation using micro-
wave magnetic fields, with driving amplitudes comparable
to the random nuclear field acting on the electron spin, \(\Delta \delta I\). The corresponding transition rates are of the order of
10 MHz. In order to reach the motional-averaging regime,
the electron spin relaxation rate \(\Gamma_1\) must be comparable to the
transition rate \(W\), which can be easily accomplished by
allowing cotunneling to the electron reservoirs next to the
dot. The degree of squeezing \(\xi\), see Eq. (2), can be ascer-
tained by the combination of two separate measurements
on the final state: (1) an NMR pulse [31,32] which rotates
the minimum uncertainty axis (\(z'\)) into the \(z\) axis followed
by an electron spin dephasing measurement [35] of \(\Delta I^z\)
and (2) an NMR pulse which rotates the net polarization
\((\Gamma')\) into to the \(z\) axis, followed by a measurement of the
average nuclear field along \(z\).
In summary, squeezed and entangled states of nuclear
spins in quantum dots driven near the ESR are generated by
unitary evolution which does not involve incoherent spin
flips. Our estimates of the time scales for various effects
that compete with squeezing indicate that squeezing is
feasible and can be realized with current capabilities.
Such schemes may potentially open the door to unprece-
dented levels of quantum control over collective degrees of
freedom in nanoscale systems with mesoscopic numbers
\((N \sim 10^4 \text{ to } 10^5)\) of nuclear spins.

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