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Universal spin-polarization fluctuations in one-dimensional wires with magnetic impurities

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We study conductance and spin-polarization fluctuations in one-dimensional wires with spin-5/2 magnetic impurities (Mn). Our tight-binding Green function approach goes beyond the mean field thus including s-d exchange-induced spin-flip scattering. In a certain parameter range, we find that spin-flip suppresses conductance fluctuations while enhancing spin-polarization fluctuations. More importantly, spin-polarization fluctuations attain a universal value 1/3 for large enough spin-flip strengths. This intrinsic spin-polarization fluctuation may pose a severe limiting factor to the realization of steady spin-polarized currents in Mn-based one-dimensional wires.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Spin-related effects in solid state heterostructures give rise to a rich variety of fascinating physical phenomena. These spin-dependent properties also underlie a potential technological revolution in conventional electronics.1 This paradigm is termed “Spintronics.” A particularly interesting theme within this emerging field is spin-polarized transport in semiconductor heterostructures. This topic has attracted much attention after the fundamental discovery of exchange-induced spin-flip scattering.2

Theoretically, a number of works have addressed issues connected with spin-polarized transport. These include, for instance: spin filtering,3 spin waves,4 and quantum shot noise,5—all in ballistic semimagnetic tunnel junctions—and mesoscopic conductance fluctuations in Rashba wires.6,7 Spin-dependent phenomena in connection with localization effects should bring about exciting interesting physics.

Here we investigate conductance and spin-polarization fluctuations in one-dimensional wires with spin-5/2 magnetic impurities, e.g., Mn-based II-VI alloys such as ZnSe/ZnMnSe/ZnSe. The experimental feasibility of these wires has already been demonstrated.8,9 In these systems, the conduction electrons interact with the localized d electrons of the Manganese via the s-d exchange coupling.10 UCF in Mn-based submicron wires was first experimentally studied in Ref. 8. We describe transport within the Landauer formalism11 and calculate the relevant transmission coefficients via noninteracting tight-binding Green functions.12

We treat the s-d interaction beyond the usual mean-field theory thus accounting for spin flip scattering. In a certain parameter range we find that spin-flip scattering suppresses conductance fluctuations13 (below the UCF value for strictly one-dimensional wires) while enhancing the corresponding spin-polarization fluctuations. Moreover, we show that the spin-polarization fluctuations attain a universal value \( <(\delta \xi)^2> = 1/3 \) for strong spin-flip scattering. This large spin-polarization fluctuation may pose a fundamental obstacle to attaining steady spin-polarized currents in Mn-based wires.

II. HAMILTONIAN MODEL

We consider a one-dimensional tight-binding chain (see Fig. 1), of N spin \( s = 5/2 \) magnetic impurities coupled to ideal leads (sites \( n < 1 \) and \( n > N \)). We separate the electronic and impurity-spin degrees of freedom and treat the latter classically (static scatterers). The two-component electron wave function, \( \psi = (\psi_1, \psi_2) \), is then governed by the Schrödinger equation with a Hamiltonian

\[
H = H_0 + H_{11} + H_{12},
\]

where \( H_0 = \sum_{n=-N}^{N} (E_n)^2 \) is the single-electron Hamiltonian, \( H_{11} = -t \sum_{n=-N}^{N} \sum_{\sigma} c_{n+1,\sigma}^\dagger c_{n,\sigma} \) is the s-d exchange interaction, and \( H_{12} = \sum_{n=-N}^{N} \sum_{\sigma} t_1 c_{n+1,\sigma}^\dagger c_{n,\sigma} \) is the d-process hopping term.

**FIG. 1.** One-dimensional tight-binding chain with \( N \) magnetic \( s = 5/2 \) impurities (mutually uncorrelated, each spin equally distributed among the six spin states) coupled to ideal impurity-free leads (sites \( n < 1 \) and \( n > N \)).
Here $H_0$ is spin independent, with elements\(^{12}\)

$$\{H_0\}_{nm} = 2\gamma\delta_{nm} - \gamma\delta_{nm+1} - \gamma\delta_{nm-1} + V_n\delta_{nm},$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $V_n$ is the potential at site $n$ and $\gamma = \hbar^2/2ma^2$, with $a$ being the “lattice constant.” In the leads $H_0$ itself gives rise to the usual dispersion relation $\varepsilon(k) = 2\gamma(1 - \cos ka)$.

In the following, $\sigma = \uparrow = 1/2$ and $\sigma = \downarrow = -1/2$. We restrict ourselves to zero magnetic field so that the block matrices $H_{\sigma\sigma'}$ have elements given by

$$\{H_{\sigma\sigma'}\}_{nm} = \delta_{nm}J_{\sigma,\sigma}S_{n,z}$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

which is a Heisenberg-like interaction of the spin of the electron ($\sigma$) with the $z$-component spin of the impurity $S = (S_x, S_y, S_z)$. The off-diagonal block matrix $H_{\downarrow\uparrow} = H_{\uparrow\downarrow}$ contains the interaction of the electron spin with the $x$ and $y$ components of the impurity spins which leads to spin-flip:

$$\{H_{\downarrow\uparrow}\}_{nm} = \delta_{nm}[J_{\uparrow,\downarrow}S_{n,x}-iJ_{\downarrow,\uparrow}S_{n,y}]/2.$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

We consider a sufficiently weak coupling between the impurity spins so that they can be considered mutually uncorrelated, i.e., no magnetic ordering. The $z$-component of each spin is equally distributed among the six spin states and the $x$ and $y$ components are uniformly distributed with the constraint $S^2 = S_x^2 + S_y^2 + S_z^2 = s(s+1)$; see Fig. 1.

### III. TRANSPORT PROPERTIES

We study transport in the low-temperature linear response limit within the Landauer formalism\(^{11}\):

$$g = \frac{e^2}{h} \sum_{\sigma'\sigma} T_{\sigma\sigma'}(\varepsilon_F).$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

Here $T$ is a $2 \times 2$ matrix with the elements $T_{\sigma\sigma'}$ being the transmission probability of an electron from a state with spin $\sigma'$ in one lead to a state with spin $\sigma$ in the other lead. From Eq. (5) we now define the degree of spin polarization

$$\zeta = \frac{I_1 - I_{\downarrow}}{I_1 + I_{\downarrow}} = \frac{T_{\uparrow\uparrow} + T_{\downarrow\downarrow} - T_{\uparrow\downarrow} - T_{\downarrow\uparrow}}{T_{\uparrow\uparrow} + T_{\downarrow\downarrow} + T_{\uparrow\downarrow} + T_{\downarrow\uparrow}},$$  \hspace{1cm} (6)

which we will focus on in this paper.

**Green function method.** The transmission matrix $T$ is related to the retarded Green function

$$G(\varepsilon) = [\varepsilon \cdot 1 - \mathbf{H} - \Sigma(\varepsilon)]^{-1}$$  \hspace{1cm} (7)

via the Fisher-Lee relation\(^{14}\)

$$T_{\sigma\sigma'}(\varepsilon) = \left[\hbar v(\varepsilon)\right]^2 \left\{G_{\sigma\sigma'}(\varepsilon)\right\}_{N1},$$  \hspace{1cm} (8)

where $v = \hbar^{-1}\Delta\varepsilon/\Delta k$ is the group velocity in the leads. In Eq. (7) the $2N \times 2N$ matrix $\mathbf{H}$ is the Hamiltonian truncated to the $N$ lattice sites with magnetic impurities. The effect of coupling to the leads is contained in the $2N \times 2N$ retarded self-energy matrix with elements\(^{12}\)

$$\{\Sigma_{\sigma\sigma'}(\varepsilon)\}_{nm} = -\gamma e^{ikm}a\delta_{\sigma\sigma'}\delta_{nm}(\delta_{1n} + \delta_{Nn}).$$  \hspace{1cm} (9)

\(N=1\) case. A chain with a single impurity is a simple illustrative example where analytical progress is possible. After performing the straightforward matrix inversion in Eq. (7) we find

$$\zeta(\varepsilon) = -\frac{V J_s S_z}{V^2 + \varepsilon(4\gamma - \varepsilon) + (JS)^2},$$  \hspace{1cm} (10)

where $J = (J_x, J_y, J_z)^T$. In zero magnetic field $\langle S_z \rangle = 0$ and $\langle S_z^2 \rangle = 35/12$. This implies that $\zeta = 0$ both with and without spin-flip, whereas the fluctuations are finite. The analytical averaging is of course complicated by the presence of $S_z$ in the denominator, but for isotropic coupling $J_x = J_y = J_z = J_0$, we have $(JS)^2 = J_0^2 s(s+1)$ so that $S_z$ only shows up in the numerator, i.e.,

$$\langle(\delta\zeta)^2\rangle = \frac{35}{12} \frac{V^2 J_0^2}{[V^2 + \varepsilon(4\gamma - \varepsilon) + J_0^2 s(s+1)]^2}.$$  \hspace{1cm} (11)

In the absence of spin-flip ($J_x = J_y = 0$) the fluctuations are enhanced due to the replacement of $s(s+1) \rightarrow s^2 < s(s+1)$ in the denominator (the final expression for the fluctuations is much more complicated) and this means that spin-flip will lower the fluctuations of $\zeta$. Of course this trend is strictly valid for $N=1$, but in a limited parameter range this trend is still true for larger $N$ values.

**Finite N case.** For a finite number of impurities the problem is not analytically tractable and we study the problem numerically by generating a large ensemble (typically $10^5$ members) of spin configurations. For each spin configuration we calculate Eqs. (7) and (8) numerically. In our simulations we use the following parameters: $\varepsilon_F = \gamma$, $J_z = \gamma/2$, $V_n = 0$ (i.e., we neglect spatial disorder), and varying spin-flip coupling strengths $0 \leq J_x = J_y \leq \gamma$.

![Figure 2: Distributions $P(\zeta)$, $P(T_{\sigma\sigma'})$, and $P(T_{\sigma\sigma'})$ for different spin-flip scattering strengths $J_x = J_y$ in the case of $N=10$. The dash-dotted line in the lowest panel indicates the uniform limit $P(\zeta) = 1/2$ (note the magnification of $P(\zeta)$ by of factor of 5) attained for strong enough spin-flip scattering.](image)
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 2 shows the distributions $P(\xi)$, $P(T_{\sigma\sigma})$, and $P(T_{\sigma\sigma'})$ for $N=10$ and increasing strengths of the spin-flip coupling $J_z = J_x$. The distribution $P(\xi)$ is symmetric around $\xi = 0$, which implies that on average there is no spin filtering. The distribution $P(\xi)$ first gets narrower for spin-flip in the $[0,0.15\gamma]$ range (not shown) and then broadens as spin-flip further increases. For sufficiently strong spin-flip scattering the distribution approaches that of the uniform limit $P(\xi) = 1/2$. In this limit $P(T_{\sigma\sigma})$ and $P(T_{\sigma\sigma'})$ coincide, and so do all average transmission probabilities $\langle T_{\sigma\sigma'} \rangle$. As we discuss below, the initial narrowing and subsequent broadening of $P(\xi)$ with spin flip gives rise to a minimum in the fluctuations of $\xi$ (Fig. 3).

Universal spin-polarization fluctuations. In the limit of a short spin-flip length $\lambda_{\sigma}\ll L$ we in general find a uniform distribution $P(\xi) = 1/2$ (Fig. 2). This uniform distribution yields the universal value $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle = 1/3$ for the spin-polarization fluctuations. Figure 3 clearly shows that this universal value is attained for increasing spin-flip strengths and is indeed independent of $N$. Interestingly, Fig. 3 also shows a minimum at around $J_z = J_x = 0.15\gamma$. This minimum can be attributed to two competing energy scales: the longitudinal ($\sim J_z$) and the transverse ($\sim J_x, J_y$) parts of the $s$-$d$ exchange interaction [Eqs. (3) and (4), respectively]. A simple “back-of-the-envelope” calculation shows that these two competing scales are equal for $J_z = J_x = \sqrt{s(5s+1)/3}\gamma = 0.208\gamma$. The vertical dashed line in Fig. 3 indicates this value. Observe that $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle$ becomes larger for increasing $N$. This happens because $P(\xi)$ broadens for larger $N$’s (the traversing electrons see a wider region with random spins). This is similar to the broadening due to increasing spin flip strength.

We should mention that the distribution $P(\xi)$, and consequently $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle$, change dramatically for $\epsilon_F < J_z$. In this regime, $P(\xi)$ becomes U shaped (not shown) because of the dominant filtering due to the “end states” with $S_{jz} = \pm 5/2$. This qualitatively different $P(\xi)$ yields a monotonically decreasing $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle$ as a function of spin-flip strength. Here the universal $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle = 1/3$ value is approached from above for large spin-flip strengths ($J_z = J_x \sim 5\gamma$).

**Suppression of conductance fluctuations.** Whereas the fluctuations in the spin polarization $\xi$ remain finite in the strong spin-flip scattering regime (Fig. 3), we find that the fluctuations of the conductance $g$ are strongly suppressed in this limit. This is illustrated in Fig. 4 which shows the average conductance and its fluctuations as a function of spin-flip scattering for $N=10, 20, 30$. Note that $\langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2}$ is much more sensitive to spin-flip than $\langle g \rangle$. In addition, for all $N$ we essentially have $\langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2} = \langle g \rangle$ for $J_z = J_x \sim 0$ and $\langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2} \ll \langle g \rangle$ for $J_z = J_x \sim \gamma$. Figure 4 clearly shows the conductance fluctuations get suppressed for increasing $N$. The horizontal dashed line shows the UCF value (0.73/2 = 0.365, see, e.g., Ref. 15) for a one-dimensional wire in the metallic regime. The spin-related conductance fluctuations do not approach a finite value for increasing spin-flip scattering. It actually seems to go to zero. This is in contrast to the spin-polarization fluctuations (Fig. 3), which attain a universal value $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle^{1/2} = 1/\sqrt{3}$ for strong spin-flip scattering. Incidentally, we observe that $\langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2}$ and $\langle (\delta\xi)^2 \rangle^{1/2}$ also present contrasting behavior for increasing $N$ (and $\epsilon_F > J_z$): the former is suppressed while the latter is enhanced (cf. Figs. 3 and 4).

**Spin disorder as spatial disorder.** To some extent, the s-$d$ site interaction considered here plays the role of spatial disorder in the system with a mean free path $\ell$. Let us consider first the case with no spin-flip (i.e., $J_z = J_x = 0$). In this case, the term $J_z \sigma S_{z\sigma}$ acts as a “random” spin-dependent potential along the chain (here the site potential has some internal structure). As shown in Fig. 4 the conductance fluctuations for zero spin-flip scattering are larger than, slightly above, and slightly below, the UCF value for $N=10, 20, 30$, respectively. For increasing $N$ we go from the metallic regime ($L=Na \ll \ell / J_z$) with vanishing fluctuations and a Gaussian $P(g)$ strongly peaked near $g \sim 2e^2/\hbar$ to the strongly localized regime ($L \gg \ell / J_z$) where it is well known that $P(g)$ is strongly peaked near $g \sim 0$ with a log-normal distribution so that fluctuations can be comparable to the...
mean value.\textsuperscript{16} This is in accordance with numerical studies with different continuous distributions of the “on-site” potential (e.g., Gaussian or uniform distributions).\textsuperscript{17} In Fig. 4 the “small” mean values \( \langle g \rangle \), for \( N = 10, 20, \) and \( 30 \), indicate the onset of localization with fluctuations comparable to the mean value. As \( N \) becomes larger conductance fluctuations are as expected suppressed.\textsuperscript{16,18}

Role of spin-flip scattering. Spin-flip clearly suppresses conductance fluctuations (Fig. 4). This can be understood from Eq. (4) being a \textit{complex} number with a random phase which makes spin-flip act as a source of “decoherence” (the total wave function is, of course, fully coherent). Furthermore, spin-flip mixes all the \( S_{n,z} \) components on each site thus smoothing the potential seen by the traversing electron and hence reducing conductance fluctuations. This is true for both \( \epsilon_F > J_z \) [except for the window \((0,0.15\gamma)\) in which \( P(\zeta) \) narrows] and \( \epsilon_F < J_z \).

“Truly” universal fluctuations. Why is \( \langle (\delta \zeta)^2 \rangle^{1/2} \) universal even for short spin-flip lengths \( \zeta < L \) (strong spin-flip scattering) while \( \langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2} \) is clearly suppressed below the usual UCF value in this limit? It is well known that conductance fluctuations are suppressed in the incoherent limit.\textsuperscript{15} More specifically, in one-dimensional wires with \( \zeta \ll L \), \( g \) is some “dephasing length,” the suppression factor is \( \sqrt{L}\zeta \) (see Ref. 12). Interestingly, we can likewise understand the suppression of \( \langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle^{1/2} \) seen in our simulations by viewing spin-flip scattering as producing “dephasing” with \( g \sim 1/J \text{,} \textsuperscript{19} \) For the spin-polarization fluctuations, however, the picture is slightly different: here we divide our system into \( N_L = L/\zeta \) segments. To each of these we can associate an average spin polarization \( \langle \zeta_i \rangle = 0 \) (i: \( 1..N_L \)) and a corresponding spin-polarization fluctuation \( \langle (\delta \zeta_i)^2 \rangle \). Neither \( \langle \zeta_i \rangle \) nor \( \langle (\delta \zeta_i)^2 \rangle \) are additive quantities like \( g \) and \( \langle (\delta g)^2 \rangle \) (“extensive versus intensive” properties). Sensible \textit{global} averages for the whole system are then \( \zeta = (1/N_L) \sum_i \langle \zeta_i \rangle = 0 \) and \( \langle (\delta \zeta)^2 \rangle = (1/N_L) \sum_i \langle (\delta \zeta_i)^2 \rangle \). We should expect \( \langle (\delta \zeta)^2 \rangle = \langle (\delta \zeta_i)^2 \rangle \) if the system is \textit{ergodic}. Hence universal spin-polarization fluctuations are not suppressed for large spin-flip scattering in contrast to conductance fluctuations.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spin-flip scattering in Mn-based wires reduces conductance fluctuations while enhancing spin-polarization fluctuations in a limited parameter range. Remarkably, spin-polarization fluctuations reach a universal value 1/3 for large spin-flip scattering in which the conductance fluctuations vanish. This universal value should manifest itself in time- and polarization-resolved photoluminescence measurements. More important, these sizable spin fluctuations may limit the possibilities for steady spin injection in these systems.

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