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Tuning the dipole-dipole interaction in a quantum gas with a rotating magnetic field

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We demonstrate the tuning of the magnetic dipole-dipole interaction (DDI) within a dysprosium Bose-Einstein condensate by rapidly rotating the orientation of the atomic dipoles. The tunability of the dipolar mean-field energy manifests as a modified gas aspect ratio after time-of-flight expansion. We demonstrate that both the magnitude and the sign of the DDI can be tuned using this technique. In particular, we show that a magic rotation angle exists at which the mean-field DDI can be eliminated, and at this angle, we observe that the expansion dynamics of the condensate is close to that predicted for a non-dipolar gas. The ability to tune the strength of the DDI opens new avenues toward the creation of exotic soliton and vortex states as well as unusual quantum lattice phases and Weyl superfluids.

Recent advancements in laser cooling and trapping of highly magnetic lanthanide atoms such as dysprosium and erbium have introduced strong magnetic dipole-dipole interactions (DDI) into the toolbox of ultracold atomic physics [1–4]. When paired with the short-ranged Van der Waals s -wave interaction, the long-ranged and anisotropic DDI dramatically modifies the atomic gas properties and has enabled the exploration of a wide variety of phenomena. These range from novel quantum liquids [5–8] and strongly correlated lattice states [9–11], to exotic spin dynamics [12, 13] and the emergence of thermalization in a nearly integrable quantum gas [14].

An even wider array of physics could be explored were one able to control the dipolar strength independent of the relative orientation of the dipoles. For example, exotic multidimensional bright and dark dipolar solitons could be observed [15–17] as well as exotic vortex lattices, dynamics, and interactions [18–20]. Magnetorotons in spinor condensates [21] and the nematic susceptibility of dipolar Fermi gases [22–25] could be controlled by tuning the strength of the DDI. In optical lattices, one would be able to create tunable dipolar Luttinger liquids [26, 27] as well as novel quantum phases [28], including analogs of fractional quantum Hall states [29]. Intriguingly, Weyl superfluidity may be observable in dipolar Fermi gases by tuning the DDI [30]. **Tuning the DDI in 2D dipolar Bose-Einstein condensates (BECs) may allow for the probing of scale invariance in analogs of inflationary cosmology [31].** Setting the DDI strength to zero has application in improving the sensitivity of atom interferometers [32], while tuning the strength negative may find application in the simulation of dense nuclear matter through analogies with the tensor nuclear force [33].

We realize a method, first proposed for quantum gases in 2002 [34][35], to tune the DDI strength from positive to zero, and even to negative values. Although the static DDI between two spin-polarized atoms cannot be tuned, the time-averaged DDI can be tuned by quickly rotating the dipoles. This provides control of the ratio ϵ of the two

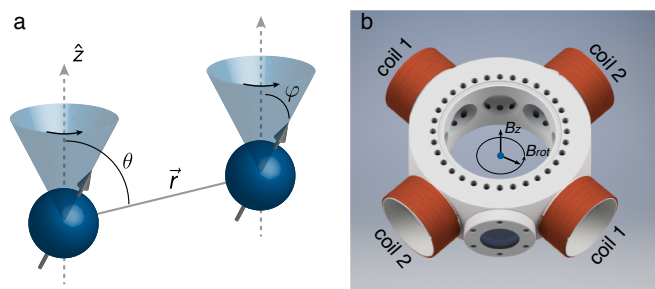


FIG. 1. Tuning the DDI strength by rotating the magnetic dipoles. (a) Geometry of the rotating field technique. The dipoles are rotated along a cone centered around the \hat{z} direction. (b) Schematic showing the trapping chamber and the two pairs of coils used for generating the rotating component of the magnetic field. Sizes are drawn to scale; diameter of coils is 7 cm. The coils for generating \hat{z} field and other vacuum chamber parts are not shown. The atoms are located at the center of the chamber.

dipolar mean-field energy to the mean-field contact energy without the use of a Feshbach resonance to control a_s , the s -wave scattering length [36][37]. This ratio is $\epsilon = \mu_0 \mu^2 m / 12\pi \hbar^2 a_s$, where μ is the magnetic moment, m is the mass, and μ_0 is the permeability of free space. The attractive component of the DDI can lead to dipolar collapse: $\epsilon = 1$ demarcates the boundary between mechanically stable and unstable homogeneous condensates at the mean-field level [17].

Figure 1(a) illustrates the geometry of the rotating dipoles. A rotating magnetic field in the \hat{x} - \hat{y} plane causes the dipoles to rotate at an angle φ with respect to a static magnetic field along the \hat{z} -axis. Assuming cylindrically symmetric trap frequencies $\omega_x = \omega_y$ for simplicity, the time-averaged DDI between two atoms is [34]

$$\langle U_{\text{DDI}}(\mathbf{r}, \theta, \varphi) \rangle = -\frac{\mu_0 \mu^2}{4\pi} \left(\frac{3 \cos^2 \theta - 1}{|\mathbf{r}|^3} \right) \left(\frac{3 \cos^2 \varphi - 1}{2} \right), \quad (1)$$

where \mathbf{r} is the relative position vector between the two

atoms, θ is the angle between \mathbf{r} and \hat{z} , and $\mu = 9.93\mu_B$ is the magnetic dipole moment for ^{162}Dy , the species of atom employed for this work [38]. This time-averaged DDI is simply the regular DDI modified by the term in the second parentheses. This term changes from 1 to -0.5 as φ is tuned from 0° to 90° by changing the ratio of the rotation to static field strengths. This enables the tuning of both the magnitude and the sign of the DDI. For $\varphi > \varphi_m$, even atoms sitting side-by-side experience an attractive averaged DDI due to the inversion of their dipoles by the rotating field. Moreover, the DDI vanishes for any θ , i.e., any pair of atoms in the gas, at the so-called magic angle $\varphi_m = 54.7^\circ$. We note that an alternative method for reducing the strength of the DDI—spin-polarizing in $|m_F| < F$ Zeeman substates—unfortunately leads to gas heating and/or atom loss from dipolar relaxation [39–41].

In this work, we prepare ^{162}Dy BECs with $2.0(2) \times 10^4$ atoms in the absolute ground Zeeman sublevel $m_J = -8$ ($J = 8$). The BECs are created by evaporative cooling in crossed 1064-nm optical dipole traps (ODT). The procedure is similar to that described in a previous publication [42]. The present experiment differs only in that instead of loading atoms from the magneto-optical trap using a spatially dithered circular ODT beam, we now use a stationary elliptical ODT with a horizontal waist, 130 of $73(3) \mu\text{m}$ and a vertical waist of $19(2) \mu\text{m}$.

The rapid rotation of the atomic dipoles is realized by rotating a bias magnetic field at $\omega_r = 2\pi \times 1 \text{ kHz}$. This is chosen to be fast compared to the trap frequencies $[\omega_x, \omega_y, \omega_z] = 2\pi \times [73(1), 37(2), 74(1)] \text{ Hz}$ to avoid parametric heating, but is slow compared to the Larmor frequency 1.55 MHz to ensure that the rotation is adiabatic. The rotating field consists of a static component along \hat{z} and a rotating component in the x - y plane generated by a pair of coils driven 90° out-of-phase using two bipolar current sources, as illustrated in Fig. 1(b). The total field as a function of time t can be written as $\mathbf{B}(t) = B_{\text{rot}} [\cos(\omega_r t + \pi/4)\hat{x} + \sin(\omega_r t + \pi/4)\hat{y}] + B_z \hat{z}$, where the total magnitude $B = \sqrt{B_{\text{rot}}^2 + B_z^2}$ is fixed at $0.89(2) \text{ G}$ [43], away from any Feshbach resonances [44], and the rotation angle is related to the magnitude of the two components by $\tan \varphi = B_{\text{rot}}/B_z$. The vertical field B_z is provided by a pair of coils in the \hat{z} direction and is not shown in Fig. 1(b). The angle φ is controlled using a calibration procedure that corrects for the effect of eddy currents. We now describe the calibration.

Because the coils generating the rotating component of the field are mounted outside the stainless steel vacuum chamber, the magnitude of the rotating component B_{rot} is reduced due to eddy currents compared to a static field B_s generated by driving the coils with the equivalent DC current. We calibrate the effect of eddy currents by measuring B_{rot} at different B_s . The field magnitude is measured using rf-spectroscopy, where we drive the atoms with a single-tone rf-field at frequency ω_{rf} . When

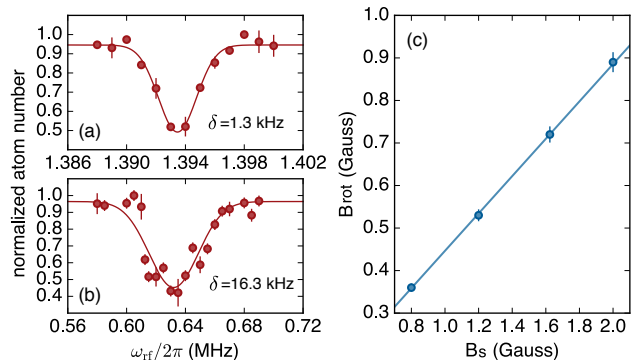


FIG. 2. (a) Atom-loss spectrum from a rf-spectroscopy measurement at a DC field $B_s = 0.802 \text{ G}$. (b) Atom-loss spectrum from a rf-spectroscopy measurement for a rotating field B_{rot} generated with AC current of the same amplitude. The resonance shifts to a lower frequency due to effects of eddy currents. The resonance width increases from 1.3 kHz (0.7 mG) to 16.3 kHz (9.4 mG) due to residual fluctuations of the rotating field amplitude. (c) Measured linear dependence between B_{rot} and B_s . Error bars represent one standard error.

ω_{rf} matches the Zeeman splitting, the atoms are transferred to higher Zeeman states and subsequently dipolar relax. This causes rapid atom loss, which heralds the resonance [39–41]. The Zeeman splitting is 1.7378 MHz/G for bosonic dysprosium [45]. The atom loss spectra of a typical set of rotating B_{rot} and static B_s fields are shown in Fig. 2. The magnitude of the field can be determined from the central location of the atom-loss resonance, and the stability of the field can be determined from the resonance linewidth. Figure 2(a) shows the spectrum for a static field. The resonance center is located at $\omega_{\text{rf}} = 1.393 \text{ MHz}$, corresponding to 0.802 G , and the linewidth, defined as the standard deviation of a Gaussian fit, is 1.3 kHz , equivalent to 0.7 mG . When the coils are driven with AC current of the same amplitude, the resulting rf-spectrum is shown in Fig. 2(b). The magnitude of this rotating field is reduced to $B_{\text{rot}} = 0.364 \text{ G}$ by eddy currents and the linewidth is broadened to 9.4 mG . This broadening provides a measure of the field’s amplitude fluctuations while the field rotates. The magnitude of the fluctuation in this case is 2.6% . We measured a total of four sets of B_s and B_{rot} , and the results are shown in Fig. 2(c). We observe a linear dependence within this field range: $B_{\text{rot}} = \alpha B_s$, where $\alpha = 0.445(6)$. By using this calibration, we are able to determine the amplitude of the AC current required to produce a given rotation angle φ .

To study the manifestation of the time-averaged DDI, we measure the change in the BEC mean-field energy due to the rotating field by observing the change in aspect ratio (AR) of the BEC. We first prepare a BEC in a static bias field along \hat{z} . We then ramp the currents in the \hat{z} -coil and coil 1 to rotate the field from \hat{z} to the $\mathbf{B}(0)$ configuration, setting the initial condition for the rotating field.

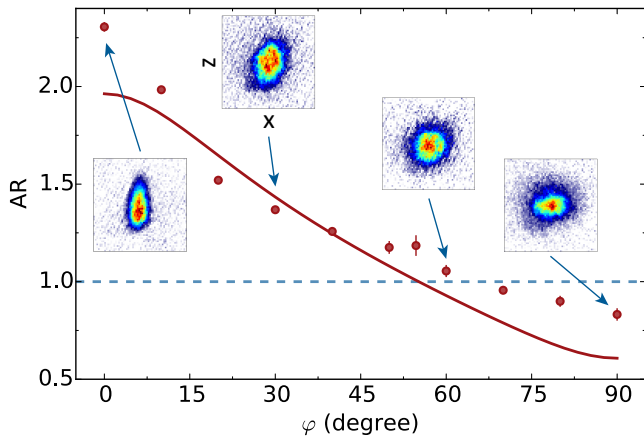


FIG. 3. Aspect ratio (AR) of the BEC after 19 ms of TOF expansion as a function of rotation angle φ . The theoretical AR, shown in solid line, is computed by solving the generalized time-dependent Gross-Pitaevskii equation [46]. Sample single-shot absorption images for $\varphi = 0^\circ, 30^\circ, 60^\circ, 90^\circ$ are shown in insets. The AR can be tuned from ~ 2.3 in a static \hat{z} field to below unity in a fully rotating field at $\varphi = 90^\circ$. The $\varphi = 0^\circ$ case corresponds to a static 1.580(5) G \hat{z} field. Error bars are standard error from three measurements.

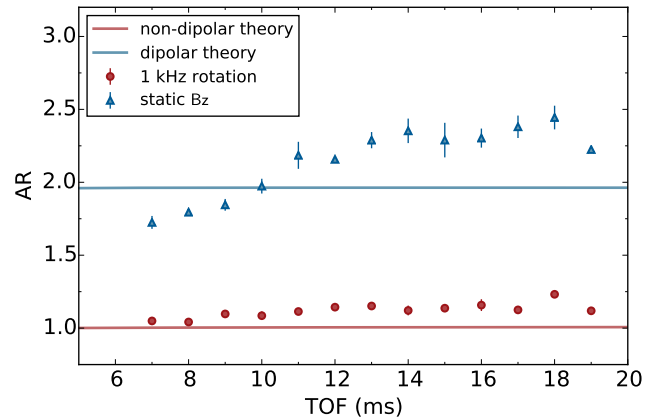


FIG. 4. AR of the BEC as a function of TOF. Triangle: expansion in a 1.580(5)-G static \hat{z} field (i.e., $\varphi = 0^\circ$). Circle: expansion in a 0.89(2) field rotating at the magic angle $\varphi_m = 54.7^\circ$. Upper, blue line: dipolar theory prediction [46]. Lower, red line: non-dipolar theory prediction, which is equal to unity at all times for cylindrically symmetric trap parameters. The employed trap is approximately cylindrically symmetric. Error bars are standard error from three measurements.

After 10 cycles of rotation, we suddenly (in $<200 \mu\text{s}$) turn off the ODTs and let the BEC expand. We continue to rotate the fields for the first 5 ms of the time-of-flight (TOF) expansion; afterwards, the density of the atomic gas is low enough that the interactions no longer affect expansion dynamics and we can safely turn off the rotating fields without affecting the gas AR. During this first 5-ms of TOF, the gas falls 125 μm under gravity. At this displacement, the gas experiences a transverse field generated by coils 1 and 2 that is only 0.1% of the axial field: the variation of the rotation angle φ is negligible during the initial 5 ms of TOF. We then perform absorption imaging on the resonant 421-nm transition along the \hat{y} -direction to measure the momentum distribution in the x - z plane. We fit 1D integrated density profiles along both \hat{x} and \hat{z} to integrated Thomas-Fermi distributions $n(r_i) \sim [\max(1 - r_i^2/R_i^2, 0)]^2$. The AR is defined as the ratio of the extracted Thomas-Fermi radii R_z/R_x .

The AR of the BEC after 19 ms of TOF is shown in Fig. 3 for different φ . We observe that the AR monotonically decreases from ~ 2.3 at $\varphi = 0^\circ$, corresponding to a static \hat{z} field where the DDI is maximally repulsive, to below unity at $\varphi = 90^\circ$. Sample single-shot absorption images for $\varphi = 0^\circ, 30^\circ, 60^\circ, 90^\circ$ are shown in insets of Fig. 3. We note that the Thomas-Fermi radius of a non-dipolar BEC evolves in a free expansion according to $R_i(t) = \lambda_i(t)R_i(0)$, where $R_i(0)$ is the in-trap Thomas-Fermi radius and the scaling factor λ_i can be found by solving $\ddot{\lambda}_i = \omega_i^2/(\lambda_i\lambda_x\lambda_y\lambda_z)$ with initial condition $\lambda_i(0) = 1$, where $i = x, y, z$ [47]. For the trap employed in this work, we have $\omega_x \approx \omega_z$ and therefore the BEC AR should simply be equal to one in the ab-

sence of the DDI. However, the fact that AR does not equal one in our experiment is due to the DDI [17]. The observed reduction of AR with rotation angle—even to below unity—is evidence that the DDI can be tuned, as expected from Eq. (1). Also plotted is a theory curve obtained from a time-dependent Gross-Pitaevskii equation simulation generalized to include the dipolar interaction; see Refs. [46, 48, 49]. As can be seen, this mean-field treatment of the dipolar BEC expansion does not adequately fit our data. Further work must be done to extend such treatments to account for beyond mean-field effects and/or hydrodynamic effects in the early expansion [5, 50].

We also compared the evolution of AR as a function of TOF for BECs in a static field and in fields rotating at the magic angle φ_m (at which the time-averaged DDI should be zero). The results are shown in Fig. 4 for TOFs spanning 7 ms to 19 ms at 1-ms intervals. Theory predictions with and without dipolar effects are shown as well. (The generalized time-dependent Gross-Pitaevskii equation is again employed for the dipolar theory prediction [46].) The BEC gas is too dense for reliable absorption imaging earlier than 7 ms of TOF. As expected for a dipolar gas in a symmetric trap, we observe that the BEC is highly anisotropic at 7 ms of TOF in a static \hat{z} field (i.e., $\varphi = 0^\circ$). The AR asymptotes to ~ 2.3 . However, the AR remains near unity when expanding in a field rotating at the magic angle. This concurs with expectations for a non-dipolar BEC, suggesting that the rotating field succeeds in nearly eliminating the dipolar mean-field energy at the magic angle. Equation (1) is derived under the as-

sumption of cylindrical symmetry about \hat{z} : The residual
 225 deviation from unity AR may be due to the lack of this
 cylindrical symmetry in the trap employed.

We observed that the $1/e$ population lifetime of our
 BEC reached a maximum of ~ 160 ms when we set the
 field rotation rate to be any frequency greater than a
 230 few hundred Hz, which is larger than the < 100 -Hz trap
 oscillation frequencies [51]. While this lifetime is suffi-
 235 ciently long for many experiments, it is one or two orders
 of magnitude shorter than a Dy BEC in static fields in
 our apparatus.

One possible explanation for the atom loss is a mechan-
 240 ical instability of the gas that can arise due to attractive
 dipolar interactions. A static magnetic field along the
 weakly trapped axis of a dipolar gas can lead to col-
 lapse if the attractive dipolar interaction is sufficiently
 245 strong with respect to the repulsive Van der Waals inter-
 action [17]. It is possible that our system transiently re-
 alizes this unstable configuration when the rotating field
 direction swings through the weakly confined \hat{y} -axis. To
 250 test this possibility, we align a *static* magnetic field along
 the \hat{y} -axis. We do not observe dipolar collapse; i.e., we
 observe no atom loss despite the alignment of the field
 along the prolate axis of the gas. We conclude that the
 255 dipolar interactions are not sufficiently strong to induce
 atom loss.

The atom loss is more likely due to residual field gra-
 260 dients that lead to a parametric motional excitation as-
 sociated with the rotating component B_{rot} . As shown in
 Fig. 1(b), drawn to scale, the two coils are not in strict
 310 Helmholtz coil configuration, leading to non-negligible
 field gradients. Eddy currents in the vacuum parts could
 also lead to heating, but this effect cannot be controlled
 or separately measured in our present apparatus. We ex-
 315 pect that by placing two pairs of orthogonal Helmholtz
 coils inside vacuum, or outside a glass cell, one could sig-
 265 nificantly improve the lifetime of the BEC in a rotating
 field.

In summary, we realized a scheme to tune the averaged
 320 DDI strength in a dipolar BEC. This was accomplished
 by rapidly rotating a magnetic field. We demonstrate
 that the AR of the BEC after long TOF can be tuned
 325 from 2.3 to below unity, confirming the expectation from
 Eq. (1), introduced in Ref. [34], that both the magnitude
 and sign of the DDI can be tuned by rotating the dipoles
 at different angles φ . Furthermore, at the magic rotation
 270 angle $\varphi_m = 54.7^\circ$, expansion dynamics of our dysprosium
 BEC is similar to that of a non-dipolar gas, demonstrat-
 ing that the DDI can be nearly turned off in rotating
 fields. This work shows that a new tool—the tuning of
 the DDI, and consequently, ϵ —is readily available to con-
 335 trol atomic interactions for the propose of creating exotic
 quantum many-body systems.

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