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## Observation of degenerate zero-energy topological states at disclinations in an acoustic lattice

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Building upon the bulk-boundary correspondence in topological phases of matter, disclinations have recently been harnessed to trap fractionally quantized density of states (DoS) in classical wave systems. While these fractional DoS have associated states localized to the disclination's core, such states are not protected from deconfinement due to the breaking of chiral symmetry, generally leading to resonances which, even in principle, have finite lifetimes and suboptimal confinement. Here, we devise and experimentally validate in acoustic lattices a paradigm by which topological states bind to disclinations without a fractional DoS but which preserve chiral symmetry. The preservation of chiral symmetry pins the states at the mid-gap, resulting in their protected maximal confinement. The integer DoS at the defect results in two-fold degenerate states that, due to symmetry constraints, do not gap out. Our study provides a fresh perspective on the interplay between symmetry-protection in topological phases and topological defects, with possible applications in classical and quantum systems alike.

Although originally conceived to explain electronic 55 23 quantum phases of matter [1-5], it was later theoreti-56 24 cally shown by Haldane and Raghu that topological band 57 25 theory applies to wave phenomena [6]. Hence, it is rel-58 26 evant to a wide range of classical systems and has re-59 27 cently found fertile ground in acoustic [7, 8], mechani-60 28 cal [8], and photonic platforms [9]. For example, it pro-61 29 vides mechanisms for the generation of robust one-way 62 30 states [10, 11], topologically robust corner states [12–14], 63 31 symmetry-protected bound states in the continuum [15–64 32 17] in classical wave systems, which have the potential 65 33 in applications such as topological wave steering [18, 19], 66 34 topological lasers [20, 21] et al. 67 35

At the core of these phenomena is the existence of 36 robust in-gap states, which are protected by a bulk-37 boundary correspondence; if the bulk of the material is 38 topological, in-gap states robust against perturbations or 39 deformations will exist at its boundaries, as long as cer- $\frac{1}{72}$ 40 tain symmetries are preserved. An important extension  $\frac{1}{73}$ 41 of this principle applies to specific topological defects, 42 where the existence of topological states hinges on an in-43 terplay between the bulk topology of the lattice and the 44 topological charge of the defect [22–27]. Notable exam-45 ples include topological states bound to vortices [28–31], 46 dislocations [32–35], and disclinations [36–40]. 47 79

Topological defects allows binding topological states so within the bulk –as opposed to the boundaries– in pe-si riodic synthetic platforms. These states are particularly s2 beneficial if they lie at mid-gap, as this guarantees both s3 spectral isolation and maximal confinement, which in s4 turn maximizes nonlinear effects and wave-matter inter-s5 action for sensing purposes. In order to pin topolog-s6 ical states to mid-gap, chiral symmetry must be preserved. Unfortunately, in many classical systems, dislocations and disclinations often disrupt chiral symmetry as they destroy the bipartite nature of chiral-symmetric lattices. Consequently, topological states associated with these defects are not protected from deconfinement. This is the case of the recently realized disclination states of Refs. 37 and 38. In them, a topological fractional density of states protect states bound to disclinations. However, the reported associated states are either (i) hybridized with bulk states forming resonances [37] or (ii) bound states fine-tuned to be *in-gap* but not protected by symmetry to be at *mid-gap* [38].

In this work, we demonstrate in theory and experiments how states bound to the core of disclinations can be symmetry-protected to lie at mid-gap in certain obstructed atomic limit (OAL) topological phases, thus ensuring spectral isolation of these states from bulk states and maximizing their confinement to the defect's core. The underlying protection mechanism arises not from the interplay of bulk and defect topologies [37, 38], but from the interplay of chiral symmetry in the lattice at large, the point group symmetry of the topological defect, and the topological phase of the lattice. Said succinctly, the protection mechanism rests on the fact that zero energy states with opposite chiral charges –which can generally hybridize into the bulk- are prevented from doing so when they form a two-dimensional irreducible representation of some point group symmetry. The point group symmetry of the defect forces the states to be degenerate, and chiral symmetry forces them to be pinned at mid-gap.

To demonstrate this protection mechanism, we have 87 devised acoustic lattices that preserve a homogeneous 88 coupling strength across the lattice despite the curvature 89 induced by the disclinations. We implement our protec-90 tion mechanism in this acoustic system and present the 91 first experimental observation of degenerate, symmetry-92 protected, mid-gap states at the core of topological de-93 fects in synthetic platforms. Our ability to protect mul-94 tiple degenerate topological states at a single topologi-95 cal defect further advances the technological relevance of 96 these states, as it increases the density of states available 97 for lasing [20, 21] or coupling to external devices. 98

Our acoustic lattice relies on a coupled-cavity acous-99 tic model [41–43]. As shown in Fig. 1(a), two identical 100 cylindrical cavities with radius r = 0.5 cm are coupled 101 via a tube with a deep sub-wavelength cross-section. The 102 length of the tube plus the diameter of the cavity is  $a_0$ 103 and the height of the cavity is  $h_0 = 4$  cm. Here, the first-104 order resonance (4289Hz), which has a cosine-function 105 acoustic profile along the cavityâĂŹs axial direction with 106 one nodal plane in the middle, is used as the onsite or-107 bital. To produce a chiral symmetric system, the ratio 108 between  $a_0$  and  $h_0$  is set at an optimal value 0.75 based 109 on the eigenmode analysis using COMSOL Multiphysics, 110 as shown in Fig. 1(b) [43]. An acoustic honeycomb lattice 111 is then constructed as shown in Fig. 1(c). Our acoustic 112 model has two salient features that enable us to investi-113 gate the symmetry-protected disclination states. First, 114 the coupling tube can be coiled [Fig. 1(a)] while pre-143 115 serving its coupling strength. This feature stems from 44 116 the fact that only the fundamental mode is permitted<sup>45</sup> 117 in these subwavelength channels. It then follows that the 46 118 coupling is dictated by the total length of the tube rathen47 119 than the separation between two cavities. Such a coiling 48 120 mechanism is vital for studying deformed lattices since 49 121 it allows the arbitrary placement of *atoms* while main-150 122 taining a homogeneous coupling strength throughout the151 123 entire lattice. As such, this system is well-suited to imple-152 124 menting disclinations, which induce curvature singulari-153 125 ties that result in geometric distortions when projected 154 126 onto flat surfaces. Second, the coupling among cavities is155 127 proportional to the local acoustic amplitudes in the cav-156 128 ities, which follows a cosine function along the cavity's 57 129 axial length. Thus the ratio between couplings withins 130 a unit cell  $(c_{int})$  and couplings among neighboring unit<sub>159</sub> 131 cells  $(c_{\text{ext}})$  is tunable by the position of the external and 60132 internal coupling tubes [44]. We construct the honey-161 133 comb lattice with Kekule modulations of the couplings  $t_{0.62}$ 134 generate two obstructed atomic limit (OAL) topologicahes 135 phases, both of which are chiral symmetric [12, 45, 46]164 136 [Fig. 2(a) and 2(b)]. The Kekule modulation consists 137 of having two different couplings:  $c_{\rm int}$  within unit cells,166 138 and  $c_{\text{ext}}$  among neighboring unit cells. When  $c_{\text{int}} < c_{\text{ext}}$  167 139 the lattice is in an OAL phase with Wannier centers at 168 140 Wyckoff position 3c of the unit cell as shown in the inset 169 141 figure of Fig. 2(a) (See Supplementary Material [44] fonro 142



FIG. 1. (a) Top: the top view of a conventional straight tube coupled-cavity model and a coiled tube coupled-cavity model. Bottom: a 3D view of a coiled tube coupled-cavity model. (b) Frequency spectrum of the coupled cavity system with coiled coupling tubes shown in (a), bottom, as a function of the ratio between  $a_0/h_0$ . The blue markers represent the frequencies of the symmetric modes (lower frequency) and the antisymmetric modes (higher frequency). The average frequencies of the symmetric and anti-symmetric modes are marked with red circles. The symmetric and anti-symmetric modes are distributed symmetrically about the zero-energy level(4289Hz) at  $a_0/h_0=0.75$ , indicating chiral symmetry. (c) The top-view of the OAL(3c) honeycomb lattice with coiled coupling tubes, where the external coupling tubes are situated at the bottom of the cavity and the internal coupling tubes are located at  $h_0/4$  above the center of the cavity. The figure on the top right shows a single unit cell with coiled coupling tubes.

more details on the OAL(3c) lattice). On the other hand, when  $c_{\text{int}} > c_{\text{ext}}$ , the lattice is in an OAL phase with three Wannier centers at Wyckoff position 1*a* of the unit cell at *half-filling* as shown in the inset figure of Fig. 2(d). While in both phases the bulk polarization [47] vanishes due to the presence of  $C_6$  symmetry [48, 49], the OAL(3c) phase has nontrivial second-order topological index [45, 49]. At  $c_{\text{int}}=c_{\text{ext}}$ , the lattice is in the perfect honeycomb configuration.

We introduce a disclination to the honeycomb lattices by the Volterra process of removing a  $2\pi/3$  section of a hexagonal sample [44, 50]. Such a process generates a disclination with a Frank angle of  $2\pi/3$  and an overall  $C_{4n}$  symmetric structure, with the center of rotation at the core of the disclination. The curvature singularity deforms the lattices as shown in Figs. 2(a) and 2(d) for both OAL phases. To counter the effect of this deformation on the couplings, the coupling tubes are coiled at each site to ensure a uniform overall length (and thus coupling strength) across the entire lattice via the mechanism introduced earlier. Our configuration sacrifices a fractional density of states at the disclination in the OAL(3c) phase (which is obtained in the same lattice but with a  $\pi/3$ disclination [37, 38, 49] which was the first one to predict this fractionalization of the density of states), in favor of preserving chiral symmetry [44]. As we will show, the presence of chiral symmetry and either  $C_4$  and timereversal or  $C_{4v}$  symmetry protect two degenerate states



FIG. 2. (a) The OAL(3c) lattice with a  $2\pi/3$  disclination.<sup>211</sup> Each shade represents one unit cell. Two different sublattices12 are distinguished by red and blue circles. The inset figure113 shows a unit cell with its Wannier centers at half-filling at,14 Wyckoff position 3c. (b) Numerically computed eigenfrequen- $_{215}$ cies for the OAL(3c) structure. The topological corner states, edge states, and trivial corner states are represented by red, green, and brown circles, respectively. (c) The four degener-<sup>217</sup> ate topological corner states at 4304 Hz. (d) The OAL(1a)<sup>218</sup> lattice with a  $2\pi/3$  disclination. The inset figure shows a unit<sup>219</sup> cell with its Wannier centers at half-filling at Wyckoff posi-220 tion 1a (three-fold degenerate). (e) Numerically computed  $_{221}$ eigenfrequencies for the OAL(1a) structure. (f) The pair of  $_{222}$ degenerate disclination bound states at 4285 Hz. The dotted lines highlight the quadrants. Only the region surrounding  $^{223}$ 224 the lattice core is shown for better visualization.

171 at the core of the disclinations in only one of the  $two_{227}$ 172 OAL phases.

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Chiral-symmetric systems have Hamiltonians h that 229 173 obey  $\Pi h \Pi^{-1} = -h$ , where  $\Pi$  is the chiral operator. Foisso 174 every eigenstate  $\psi$  of h with energy  $\epsilon$  (such that  $h\psi =_{231}$ 175  $\epsilon\psi$ ), there is a second eigenstate  $\Pi\psi$  with energy  $-\epsilon$ . This 232 176 can easily be seen by operating  $h\Pi\psi = -\Pi h\psi = -\epsilon\Pi\psi_{233}$ 177 Thus, the energies in a system with chiral symmetry come<sub>34</sub> 178 in pairs  $(\epsilon, -\epsilon)$ , and their states are related by the chiral-235 179 symmetry operator Π. Our acoustic model is composed<sub>236</sub> 180 of a lattice with 4 unit cells per side. The OAL(3c) lattice<sub>37</sub> 181 hosts 4 topological corner states at zero-energy, as showness 182 in Figs. 2(b) and 2(c) and reported earlier in Ref. [12] 239 183 The symmetry of the spectrum indicates that the lat-240 184 tice with disclination preserves chiral symmetry. Further 185 confirmation comes from the fact that the corner states242 186 have support only on one sublattice at each corner, in-243 187 dicating that they are eigenstates of the chiral operator 188 with well-defined chiral charges and thus are zero-energy245 189

states. The OAL(1a) lattice, on the other hand, does not possess corner states. However, it possesses a pair of mid-gap degenerate states confined to the disclination core, as illustrated in Figs. 2(e) and 2(f). These states are originally presented in this work and are the main finding of our paper. Tight binding model (TBM) simulation results show similar mode distributions in the bandgaps, which corroborates our COMSOL simulation results [44]. These two states have support over both sublattices, indicating that their overall chiral charge is zero; however, these two states form a 2D irreducible representation (irrep) of  $C_4$  plus time-reversal symmetry (TRS) or  $C_{4v}$  (i.e.,  $C_4$  symmetry plus reflection symmetry), which prevents them from being lifted away from the zero-energy level. The 2D irrep of  $C_{4v}$  or  $C_4$  and TRS can be described by the basis  $\psi_+ = \frac{1}{2}(1, i, -1, -i)^T$ and  $\psi_- = \frac{1}{2}(1, -i, -1, i)^T$ , where the entries correspond to the disclination's sites at each quadrant, respectively, as shown in Fig. 2(f), top (the states in Fig. 2(f) are proportional to  $\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(\psi_{+}\pm\psi_{-}))$ . The states  $\psi_{\pm}$  are eigenstates of  $C_4$  and map to one another under TRS or reflection symmetry. Since  $\psi_{\pm}$  are a basis for the 2D irrep, they must remain degenerate in energy as long as the above-mentioned symmetries are preserved. This basis is convenient because, in the presence of chiral symmetry,  $\psi_{\pm}$  are chiral partners of each other, i.e.,  $\psi_{+} = \Pi \psi_{-}$  and vice versa, from which it follows that these two states should have energies of opposite sign,  $\epsilon, -\epsilon$ . Thus, under  $C_{4v}$  symmetry or  $C_4$  symmetry plus TRS, as well as chiral symmetry,  $\psi_{\pm}$  must both have  $\epsilon = 0$  identically. In contrast, the OAL(3c) phase does not enclose the 2D representation at the core (only at its corners), and thus it does not trap zero-energy states at the disclination core.

We have experimentally measured two samples corresponding to the OAL(1a) and OAL(3c) lattices containing the  $2\pi/3$  disclination. Only the results of the OAL(1a) lattice are discussed here, while the OAL(3c)results showing corner states can be found in the Supplementary Material [44]. An illustration of the OAL(1a) acoustic lattice is shown in Fig. 3(a). The internal and external coupling tubes are machined on two separate aluminum blocks as shown in Fig. 3(b) and then stacked together. We measure both the bulk and disclination responses of the acoustic lattice, and the results are shown in Fig. 3(c). Details of the experiment can be found in the Supplementary Material [44]. The bulk spectrum shows a gap around 4.3 kHz, while the disclination core response shows a single peak located at the mid-gap and two lower peaks within the bulk band frequencies. The symmetry of the two spectra around mid-gap is a signature of the well-preserved chiral symmetry in the acoustic lattice. We then raster-map the response profile in the entire lattice by measuring the pressure amplitude at the top of each cavity. The results show that the mid-gap peak indeed corresponds to the pair of degenerate, symmetryprotected disclination bound states as shown in Fig. 3(d).

These two states are at 4340 Hz, slightly off from the 246 numerically predicted frequency (4285 Hz) due to fab-247 rication variations. The degenerate disclination bound 248 states are orthogonal to one another, and thus they must 249 be separately excited. The other two lower peaks within 250 the bulk band frequencies are resulted from two states at 251 the disclination which are orthogonal to mid-gap ones, 252 and are not maximally localized. 253

Since the symmetry representations of the states 254 within a topological phase in the lattice are stable as 255 long as the symmetries are preserved, our protection 256 mechanism is robust to symmetry-preserving perturba-257 tions. In a chiral-symmetric lattice, our zero energy 258 states can be removed from the core only upon a topo-259 logical phase transition from the OAL(1a) phase to the 260 OAL(3c) phase, where a reconfiguration of the irreps 261 occurs (the 2D irrep of the zero states moves from the 262 disclination core to the corner states). To examine the 263 robustness of the disclination bound states, we have con-264 ducted additional simulations with different types of per-265 turbations to the disclination core, and the results can 266 be found in the Supplementary Material [44], along with 267 additional discussion on the protection mechanism of the 268 zero-energy disclination modes. 269

In conclusion, we have theoretically and experimen-270 tally studied a mechanism that protects the maximal 271 confinement of states at topological defects with chiral 272 symmetry. Our mechanism relies on the interplay of the 273 point group symmetry of the topological defect and the 274 topological phase of a lattice. The sonic mid-gap discli-275 nation states not only could inspire new routes for con-276 trolling acoustic local density of states for sound emis-277 sion control [51], but also paves the way of novel en-278 ergy transportation mechanisms via topological disclina-279 tion pumps [40]. In addition to acoustics, our theory 280 can be potentially applied to other waves such as elec-281 tromagnetic waves, and is equally applicable to quantum 282 systems in condensed matter physics. We finally note 283 that, the conclusion of this study can be extended to 284 other Frank angles. The simplest example is a disclina-285 tion with Frank angle  $-2\pi/3$ , which also possesses  $C_{4v}$ 286 symmetry [44]. More generally, chiral symmetry and a 287 point group symmetry with an N-dimensional represen-288

tation could protect N degenerate states at a topological defect. 302

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+4340Hz(2)

(a)

(c)

(d)

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FIG. 3. (a) (top panel) The acoustic OAL(1a) lattice. Only the inner 3 by 3 unit cells are shown here for better visualization. (bottom panel) A close-up view of three cavities in the dashed line box shows the position of the external and internal coupling tubes. The transparent cut-plane indicates the interface between the two layers used to construct the experimental acoustic sample. (b) Photographs of the OAL(3c) acoustic lattice sample with its cavities (the larger holes) and coupling channels. The two blocks are stacked and then sealed to form the coupled-cavity lattice. The smaller holes without tubes are for mounting purposes. (c) Spectra of the normalized pressure amplitude |p| of the disclination (purple) and bulk (grey) states. The degenerate disclination states are marked with the red star (two degenerate states at 4340 Hz). (d) The pressure distribution maps of the two disclination states at the frequency marked by the red star in (c). The area of the circle represents the amplitude of the pressure. Note that the entire lattice is measured, but the pressure amplitudes are too weak away from the disclination core.

★4340Hz(1)

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