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# Enhanced spin coherence of a self-assembled quantum dot molecule at the optimal electrical bias

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## Abstract:

A pair of coupled dots with one electron in each dot can provide improvements in spin coherence, particularly at an electrical bias called the “sweet spot”, but few measurements have been performed on self-assembled dots in this regime. Here, we directly measure the  $T_2^*$  coherence time of the singlet-triplet states in this system as a function of bias and magnetic field, obtaining a maximum  $T_2^*$  of 60 ns, more than an order of magnitude higher than an electron spin in a single quantum dot. Our results uncover two main dephasing mechanisms: electrical noise away from the sweet spot, and a magnetic field dependent interaction with nuclear spins due to a difference in g-factors.

## Main text:

The electron spin in an InGaAs self-assembled quantum dot (QD) is a promising candidate for quantum applications due to bright, spin-dependent optical transitions, fast optical control, integration, and potential scalability [1]. QDs are readily grown by molecular beam epitaxy and can be integrated into nanophotonic structures containing both electronic [2] and photonic circuit elements [3,4]. However, the electron spin in a QD is prone to decoherence, primarily due to interactions with the nuclear spin bath [5–7]. Without advanced spectroscopy techniques [8–14] to limit the effect of these interactions, the coherence time of a QD single spin is very short, i.e. a few nanoseconds [8,15,16], which severely limits its use.

One way to extend the coherence time in the semiconductor QD is to utilize the two electron spins in the coupled quantum dot system, which consists of the top and bottom dot separated by a tunneling barrier. The electrons hybridize and form the bonding and anti-bonding states, hence the name quantum dot molecule (QDM) [17–22]. The two electrons interact strongly with each other via the electron-electron exchange, which splits the energy degeneracy between the singlet (S) and triplet ( $T_0$ ,  $T_+$ ,  $T_-$ ) ground states. The  $m_s = 0$  S and  $T_0$  states are in principle insensitive to fluctuating magnetic fields from nuclear spins [23], but the exchange splitting does depend on the electric field, making it sensitive to electric field fluctuations [24]. As a function of electrical bias, the QDM features a sweet spot which is the location of minimum exchange interaction where the S- $T_0$  subspace is first order immune to

both electric and magnetic field fluctuations [23,25,26]. Indeed, operating at the sweet spot has proved to be a viable strategy to extend the coherence time of the electron spin. In one optically active QDM,  $T_2^*$  was shown to have an upper limit of about 200 ns which was measured in the frequency domain using the coherent population trapping (CPT) technique [23]. Extracting  $T_2^*$  from the CPT measurement, however, involves modelling a complicated eight-level system with a number of fitting parameters. This procedure has given a wide range of  $T_2^*$  being reported [23].

In this letter, we measure  $T_2^*$  directly at the sweet spot using Ramsey interferometry, a time domain technique. Extracting  $T_2^*$  only involves a simple curve fit to the data leading to much improved uncertainty and more reliable results. We demonstrate a  $T_2^*$  coherence time of 60 ns, the longest value for an optically active QD that has been measured directly. We uncover two main dephasing mechanisms by examining  $T_2^*$  as a function of electrical bias as well as the external magnetic field. The dephasing rate from electric field fluctuations is proportional to the derivative of the exchange interaction with respect to the electrical bias. This suggests that the slow electrical noise gives rise to fluctuations in the exchange splitting and limits the coherence away from the sweet spot [24]. Near the sweet spot, the coherence time is limited by the hyperfine interaction with nuclear spins, which has a strong effect at very low magnetic fields, due to mixing of triplet states, and also a strong effect at high magnetic fields, due to an effective magnetic field gradient [27] stemming from the g-factor difference between the two dots. This gives rise to a maximum  $T_2^*$  at a modest magnetic field of 50 mT. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report that measures  $T_2^*$  directly, and shows a huge enhancement at the sweet spot in the InGaAs QDM.

Our device, which is schematically depicted in Fig. S1, is grown epitaxially and is embedded in a Bragg cavity with the n-i-p-i-p diode structure that allows the QDM to be deterministically charged with two electrons [28,29]. The sample is positioned at the center of a superconducting magnet  $\sim 3$  K which exerts an external magnetic field in the Faraday geometry. With one electron residing in each dot, the spin singlet (S) and spin triplet ( $T_0$ ,  $T_+$ ,  $T_-$ ) ground states together with the trion excited states ( $R_{\pm}$ ,  $R_{\pm\pm}$ ) form an eight-level system as shown in Fig. 1(a). To achieve electron tunneling, our QDM sample is designed so that the bottom dot transition energy is blue-shifted compared to that of the top dot [18,29]. Thus, we denote the blue (red) arrow as the bottom (top) dot spin [Fig. 1(a)]. The single (double) arrow refers to electron (hole). Due to the optical selection rules, there are six allowed transitions with two pairs of them  $1,1^*$  and  $3,3^*$  being nearly degenerate. The energy splitting between  $1$  and  $1^*$  ( $3$  and  $3^*$ ) can only be resolved under high magnetic field [Fig. S7]. We label and color code the transitions from 1 to 4 in the order of increasing energy.

Fig. 1(b) depicts the bias map of the resonance fluorescence (RF) spectra taken at 1 T magnetic field showing the corresponding transitions 1 to 4. The two electron charge state is found to be stable for a

bias range of 0.7 to 0.76 V. The RF signal is suppressed in the middle of the stable bias range due to optical spin pumping [30–33] where the spin is excited out of one spin state and shelved in the other after a few recombination cycles. The transition 1\* and 3\* are still relatively bright in the optical pumping region due to the fact that  $T \leftrightarrow R--$  and  $T+ \leftrightarrow R++$  are cycling transitions [34]. The exchange interaction i.e. the energy splitting between S and  $T_0$  states, denoted by  $J$  can be measured directly by taking the energy difference between transition 2 and 1 or transition 4 and 3. The change in relative energy levels of the electron residing in each dot with respect to the electric field leads to a  $J$  that is dependent on the gate voltage. In this sample, we find the minimum  $J$  ( $\sim 45 \mu\text{eV}$ ) (the sweet spot) to be at the center of the optical pumping region (0.725 V).

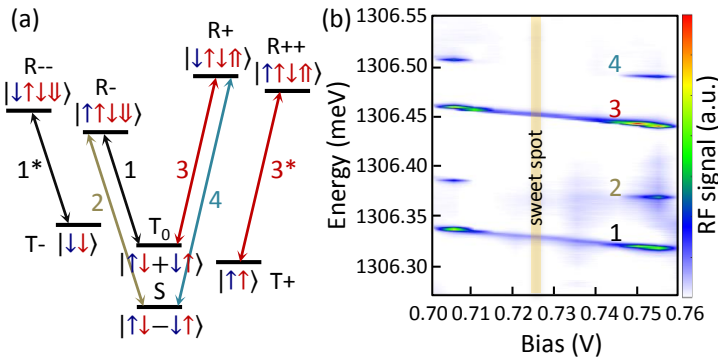


FIG. 1 (color online). (a) Detailed energy-level diagram of the two-electron charged QDM in the Faraday external magnetic field with numbering scheme depicting individual transitions. The spin configuration for each state is also indicated. Here, blue (red) arrow refers to the bottom (top) dot. Single (double) arrow refers to electron (hole). (b) Measured resonance fluorescence spectra as functions of bias. The transitions are identified with numbering and colors that match part (a). The sweet spot is at the center of the optical pumping region (about 0.725 V bias).

To perform electron spin control, we utilize the  $\Lambda$  system  $T_0 \leftrightarrow R \leftrightarrow S$  as shown in Fig. 2(a). The linearly polarized initialization laser (70 ns duration) resonant with  $T_0 \leftrightarrow R-$  and  $T- \leftrightarrow R--$  transitions pumps the spin into the S state [35]. Then, a circularly polarized rotation laser detuned from the excited state ( $\Delta_L \sim 250$  GHz) coherently rotates the spin between S and  $T_0$  states, depending on the pulse duration and peak power. Finally, the  $T_0$  population is detected by monitoring the emission from the Raman transition  $S \leftrightarrow R-$ . Please see the Supplemental Material for detailed signal filtering and data acquisition [29]. We modulate the rotation laser by a microwave source via an electro-optic modulator (EOM) biased to zero transmission, which creates two side bands in the laser spectrum [12,36]. The side bands energy spacing is twice the modulation frequency, and thus can be varied to detune from the  $ST_0$  exchange splitting a variable amount  $\delta$ . We note that the energy levels in Fig. 2(a) are not drawn to scale. In reality,  $\Delta_L \sim 250$  GHz is about three order of magnitude larger than  $\delta$  which is only tens to hundreds of MHz. Fig. 2(b)

shows the evolution of the  $T_0$  population which is normalized to 1 for increasing rotation pulse duration at four different rotation peak powers. Here, the microwave modulation is slightly detuned from the spin resonance. Thus, the linear fit to the Rabi frequency vs. peak power yields  $\sim 28.5$  MHz y-intercept [Fig. 2(c)]. Low laser peak power and the relatively large laser detuning  $\Delta_L \sim 250$  GHz ensures that we are largely in the adiabatic limit where the excited states population is negligible [12,37].

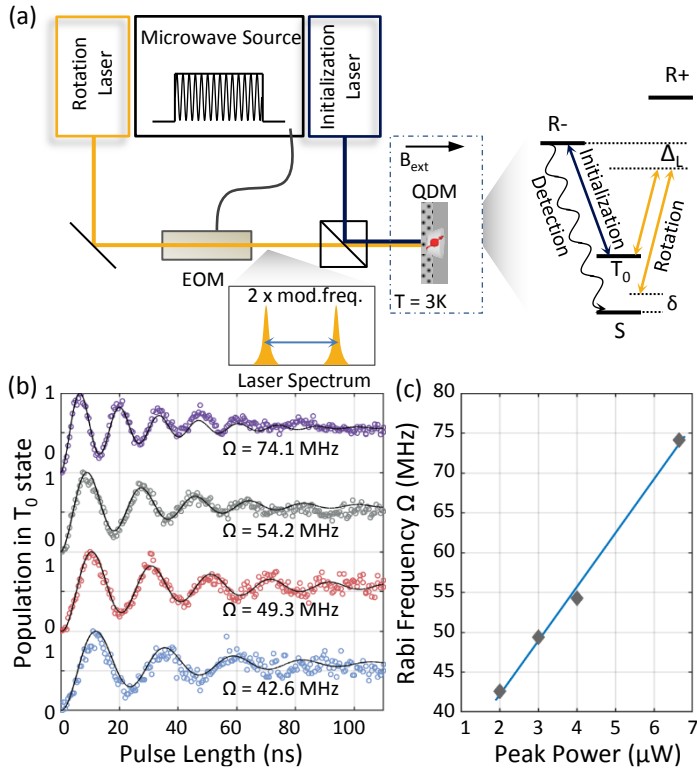


FIG. 2 (color online). (a) Experimental schematic: Intensity modulation of the rotation laser by a microwave source via the electro-optical modulator (EOM) creates two laser side bands whose energy difference is twice the modulation frequency. The rotation laser is detuned  $\Delta_L \approx 250$  GHz from the excited state, and the side band energy spacing is detuned  $\delta$  from the  $S$ - $T_0$  resonance. The initialization laser is resonant with  $T_0 \leftrightarrow R^-$  transition. The  $T_0$  state population is then detected via Raman scattering  $S \leftrightarrow R^-$ . (b) Rabi oscillations between  $S$  and  $T_0$  spin states at four different Rabi frequencies. (c) The dependence of the Rabi frequency on the peak power of the rotation laser.

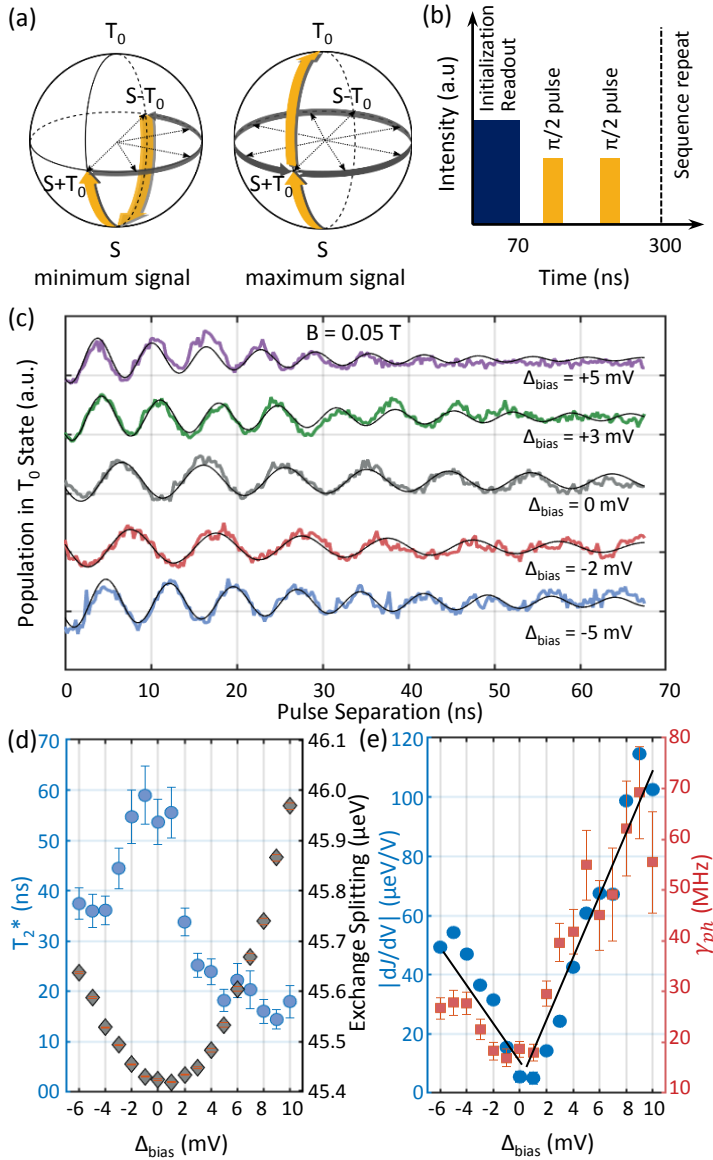


FIG. 3 (color online). (a) Bloch sphere representation of spin control of the  $ST_0$  subspace. (b) The pulse sequence for Ramsey measurement which consists of a 70 ns initialization pulse, and two  $\pi/2$  rotation pulses (2.5 ns duration) with variable separation between them. The sequence is repeated after every 300 ns. (c) Ramsey interference obtained at  $B = 0.05$  T and at various biases  $\Delta_{\text{bias}}$  relative to the sweet spot. The data is fitted with exponential oscillation decay (black solid lines). (d)  $T_2^*$  (left vertical axis) and S- $T_0$  energy splitting (right vertical axis) are extracted from the Ramsey interference data and are plotted as functions of the bias offset from the sweet spot. (e) The dephasing rate ( $\gamma_{\text{ph}}$ ) and magnitude of the derivative of the exchange splitting with respect to bias ( $|dJ/dV|$ ) are plotted against the bias offset from the sweet spot showing a linear correlation between the two quantities.

To measure the coherence time  $T_2^*$ , we employ the Ramsey interferometry technique which is schematically shown in Fig. 3(a-b). The spin is initialized to the S state (south pole). The first  $\pi/2$  rotation pulse (2.5 ns) creates the coherent superposition of S and  $T_0$  states which then precesses and decays in a characteristic time scale  $T_2^*$ . A second  $\pi/2$  rotation pulse converts the coherence into a population difference, which is read out by the initialization/readout pulse. As the separation between the two rotation pulses increases, the phase difference between the superposition and the second  $\pi/2$  pulse increases, leading to a final state oscillating between  $T_0$  (maximum signal) and S (minimum signal). Fig. 3(c) shows the Ramsey interference curves for five different bias offsets  $\Delta_{bias}$  from the sweet spot at a relatively low magnetic field 0.05 T. In these measurements, we deliberately red-detune the microwave modulation frequency away from the  $ST_0$  energy splitting by a few hundred megahertz. The detuning  $\delta$  gives rise to oscillations in the Ramsey signal that are fit to precisely determine  $\delta$ . The exchange splitting  $J$  is then computed from  $\delta$  and the microwave modulation frequency  $\omega_m$  by the formula:  $J = 2\omega_m + \delta$ . Although in principle  $J$  can be measured directly from the RF data in Fig. 1(b), optical pumping makes it difficult to determine  $J$  around the sweet spot. Using the Ramsey interference oscillations, we can extract  $J$  and  $T_2^*$  precisely [Fig. 3(d)] with  $T_2^*$  given by the exponential decay of the fringe contrast.

We see a dramatic enhancement of  $T_2^*$  in the vicinity of the sweet spot [Fig. 3(d)] with the maximum value of almost 60 ns. This value is comparable to that of the electrostatically confined GaAs QDM [9,24] taken at much lower temperature. An important question remains: what factors limit the coherence in our sample? As the spin relaxation time  $T_1$  exceeds 1.5  $\mu$ s in the optical pumping bias range,  $T_1$  decay is not an important source of decoherence [29]. As mentioned previously, dephasing will occur from fluctuations in the bias voltage  $\Delta V_{noise}$  (from the source or the local environment) that lead to fluctuations in  $J$  [26,38,39]. To first order in the bias fluctuations, the dephasing rate is given by  $\gamma_{elec} = (dJ/dV) \Delta V_{noise}$ . Indeed, we see a strong linear correlation between the dephasing rate denoted  $\gamma_{ph} = 1/T_2^*$  and the derivative of  $J$  with respect to the bias voltage  $V$  as shown in Fig. 3(e). From fitting this data, we extract  $\Delta V_{noise} = 1.836 \pm 0.0262$  mV, which signifies the voltage fluctuation in our QDM. A bias-independent offset is included in the fit, with a value of  $14.83 \pm 3.732$  MHz, to account for other sources of dephasing. This linear correlation strongly suggests that voltage noise is the primary dephasing mechanism away from the sweet spot [24,40]. This noise is expected to have a low frequency spectrum compared to the dephasing rate. We also attempt to partially bypass this noise source by apply a spin-echo pulse sequence and indeed measure much longer  $T_2$ , up to 500 ns as shown in the Supplemental Material [29,41,42].

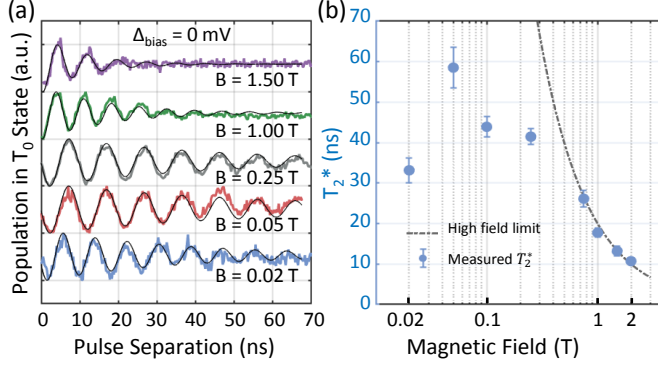


FIG. 4 (color online). (a) Ramsey interference data obtained at the sweet spot at various magnetic field strength. (b) Semilog plot of  $T_2^*$  against the magnetic field. Dotted curve denotes the expected change of  $T_2^*$  at high field regime.

We suspect that the dephasing rate at the sweet spot is due to fluctuations in the nuclear spin environment. To investigate this possibility, we measure  $T_2^*$  for a series of magnetic fields and plot the results at the sweet spot in Fig 4. The coherence time peaks at 0.05 T and decreases precipitously once the field deviates from it. At the low field regime, the nuclear polarization can exceed the Zeeman splitting between triplets ( $T_0$ ,  $T_+$ ,  $T_-$ ) and thus, strongly mix them leading to rapid dephasing [23]. On the other hand, high fields cause mixing between S and  $T_0$  due to an effective field gradient stemming from the difference in g-factor between two dots. It leads to the dependence of the exchange splitting on B which has been explored theoretically [27] and experimentally [43]. In fact, if the gradient field is much stronger than the exchange interaction, the eigenstates would become the product states  $|\uparrow\downarrow\rangle$  and  $|\downarrow\uparrow\rangle$  of the two independent spins, in which we would exactly recover the dephasing of the single spin. The exchange splitting of the new eigenstates is modified by:  $J' = \sqrt{J^2 + 4(\Delta g\mu_B B)^2}$ . Here,  $J$  is the exchange splitting at zero field;  $\mu_B$  is the Bohr magneton;  $\Delta g$  is the g-factor difference which can be measured directly by looking at the energy difference between  $T_0 \leftrightarrow R_+$  and  $T_+ \leftrightarrow R_{++}$  or  $T_0 \leftrightarrow R_-$  and  $T_- \leftrightarrow R_{--}$  at high magnetic field. In Fig. S7, we measure PL at 6 T and extract the average  $\Delta g\mu_B$  of 0.3 GHz/T which is about 5% of the electron spin g-factor in an isolated dot [44].

Similar to the case of bias fluctuations, we expect the dephasing rate from nuclear spin fluctuations in the high field regime to be given by  $\gamma_{\text{nuc}} = \frac{dJ'}{d(\Delta g\mu_B B)} \Delta E_{\text{nuc}} \cong \frac{4\Delta g\mu_B B}{J} \Delta E_{\text{nuc}}$ , where  $\Delta E_{\text{nuc}}$  is the fluctuation in the difference in nuclear field energies between the two dots. The typical Overhauser field in QD is 20 mT [5–7] which gives  $\Delta E_{\text{nuc}}$  of 120 MHz. We thus expect  $\gamma_{\text{nuc}}/B = 13$  MHz/T which is an order of magnitude in agreement with the measured dephasing rate at high fields i.e.  $\gamma_{\text{ph}}/B \cong 50$  MHz/T at 2 T. This rough estimate of the expected dephasing contribution is plotted in Fig. 4(b), which



matches quite well with the trend of the rapid dephasing at high fields after multiplying by a scaling factor. At moderate fields, the measured  $T_2^*$  is much shorter than expected from this contribution, due to low field mixing of triplet states. The maximum  $T_2^*$  occurs in an intermediate regime that balances dephasing from triplet mixing and dephasing from singlet-triplet mixing, due to  $\Delta g$ .

In summary, we present a systematic study of the coherence time  $T_2^*$  in self-assembled QDM and demonstrate more than an order of magnitude improvement over electron spins in single QDs. We find that the electrical fluctuations mainly limit the spin coherence at biases away from the sweet spot. At the sweet spot, the nuclear spin fluctuations are largely responsible for dephasing in both low and high magnetic field regimes. Decreasing the impact of the nuclear spin fluctuations requires operating at magnetic fields larger than the nuclear fields that mix triplet states but not so large that differences in the g-factors give rise to singlet-triplet mixing. This singlet-triplet mixing can be avoided by reducing  $\Delta g$ , perhaps through growth of QDs with more similar thicknesses, and by increasing  $J$ . By reducing the tunnel barrier thickness or height,  $J$  can be increased to several meV, but this must be balanced against the decreased spin relaxation times typically observed in these structures [23,40,45,46]. Improved spin coherence times for self-assembled QDs should enable a variety of applications in quantum photonics that require a quantum memory, such as photonic cluster state generation [47,48] and single photon switches and transistors [49].

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