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Gluon polarization in the proton

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We combine heavy-Quark renormalization group arguments with our understanding of the nucleon’s wave function to deduce a bound on the gluon polarization $\Delta g$ in the proton. The bound is consistent with the values extracted from spin experiments at COMPASS and RHIC.

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Polarized deep inelastic scattering (pDIS) experiments have revealed a small value for the nucleon’s flavor-singlet axial charge, $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{pDIS}} \sim 0.3$, suggesting that the quarks’ intrinsic spin contributes little to the proton’s spin. The challenge to understand the spin structure of the proton has inspired a vast program of theoretical activity and new experiments. Why is the quark spin content a vast program of theoretical activity and new experiments. Why is the quark spin content such a small value for the nucleon’s flavor-singlet axial charge? In terms of the flavor dependent axial charges $\lambda_i$ we know of the proton’s wave function. We suggest a bound on the glue in the nucleon, both in terms of its contribution to the quark and gluon spin structure function measures a linear combination of the nucleon’s scale-invariant axial charges $g_A^{(3)}$, $g_A^{(8)}$, and $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{lim}}$ plus a possible subtraction constant $\beta_\infty$ in the dispersion relation [1]

$$\int_0^1 dx \frac{1}{12} g_A^{(3)} + \frac{1}{36} g_A^{(8)} + c_{NS}[\alpha_s(Q^2)] + c_S[\alpha_s(Q^2)] + \beta_\infty. \qquad (1)$$

Here $c_{NS}$ and $c_S$ are the nonsinglet and singlet Wilson coefficients. In terms of the flavor dependent axial charges $2M s_\mu \Delta q = (p, s)\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 q(p, s)$ the isovector, octet, and singlet axial charges are $g_A^{(3)} = \Delta u - \Delta d - 2\Delta s$, and $g_A^{(8)}|_{\text{lim}} = g_A^{(0)}(Q^2) = \Delta u + \Delta d + \Delta s$. Here $E(\alpha_s) = \exp \int_0^\beta d\alpha_s / \alpha_s(\Delta g)$ is a renormalization group factor which corrects for the (two-loop) nonzero anomalous dimension $\gamma(\alpha_s)$ of the singlet axial-vector current [7], $J_{\mu,s} = u\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 s u + d\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 s d + s\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 s s$, which is close to one and which goes to one in the limit $Q^2 \to \infty; \beta(\alpha_s) = -(11 - \frac{2}{3} f(\alpha_s^2/2\pi) + \cdots$ is the QCD beta function and $f(\alpha_s) = f(\alpha_s/\pi)^2 + \cdots$, where $f$ is the number of active flavors. The singlet axial charge, $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{lim}}$, is independent of the renormalization scale $\mu$ and corresponds to $g_A^{(0)}(Q^2)$ evaluated in the limit $Q^2 \to \infty$. The flavor nonsinglet axial charges are renormalization group invariants.

The isovector axial charge is measured independently in neutron $\beta$ decays ($g_A^{(3)} = 1.270 \pm 0.003$ [8]) and the octet axial charge is commonly taken to be the value extracted from hyperon $\beta$ decays assuming a two-parameter SU(3) fit ($g_A^{(8)} = 0.58 \pm 0.03$ [9]). The uncertainty quoted for $g_A^{(8)}$ has been a matter of some debate [10,11]. There is considerable evidence that SU(3) symmetry may be badly broken and some have suggested that the error on $g_A^{(8)}$ should be as large as 25% [10]. Indeed, prompted by the work of Myhrer and Thomas [12], which showed that the effect of the one-gluon-exchange hyperfine interaction [13] and the pion cloud [14] of the nucleon was to reduce $g_A^{(8)}$ calculated in the cloudy bag model to near the experimental value, a reevaluation of these effects on $g_A^{(3)}, g_A^{(8)}$, and $g_A^{(0)}$ including kaon loops led to the value $g_A^{(8)} = 0.46 \pm 0.05$ [15]. Here the reduction from the SU(3) value came primarily from the pion cloud.

Assuming no twist-two subtraction constant, polarized deep inelastic scattering experiments have been interpreted in terms of a small value for the flavor-singlet axial charge: $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{pDIS}} Q^2 = 0.33 \pm 0.03$ (stat.) $\pm 0.05$ (syst.) [16] if one uses the SU(3) value for $g_A^{(8)}$. On the other hand, using the value $g_A^{(8)} = 0.46 \pm 0.05$ from SU(3) breaking, the corresponding experimental value of $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{pDIS}}$ would increase to $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{pDIS}} = 0.36 \pm 0.03 \pm 0.05$. In the naive parton model $g_A^{(0)}|_{\text{pDIS}}$ is interpreted as the fraction of the proton’s spin which is carried by the intrinsic spin of its quark and antiquark constituents.

Historically, the wish to understand the suppression of $g_A^{(0)}$ relative to $g_A^{(8)}$ led to considerable theoretical efforts to understand the flavor-singlet axial charge in QCD. QCD theoretical analysis leads to the formula [17–20]

$$g_A^{(0)} = \left( \sum q \Delta q - \frac{3} {2\pi} \Delta g \right)_{\text{partons}} + C_\infty. \qquad (2)$$
Here $\Delta g_{\text{partons}}$ is the amount of spin carried by polarized gluons in the polarized proton ($\alpha_s, \Delta g \sim \text{constant as } Q^2 \to \infty$ [17,18]) and $\Delta g_{\text{partons}}$ measures the spin carried by quarks and antiquarks carrying "soft" transverse momentum $k_T^2 \sim p_T^2, m^2$ where $P$ is a typical gluon virtuality and $m$ is the light quark mass. The polarized gluon term is associated with events in polarized deep inelastic scattering where the hard photon strikes a quark or antiquark generated from photon-gluon fusion with $k_T^2 \sim Q^2$ [19,20]. It corresponds to the QCD axial anomaly in the flavor-singlet axial-vector current. $C_{\text{vac}}$ denotes a potential nonperturbative gluon topological contribution [1] associated with the possible subtraction constant in the dispersion relation for $g_1$ and possible spin contributions at Bjorken $x = 0$, that is outside the range of polarized deep inelastic scattering experiments. The measured singlet axial charge is $g_A^{(0)} = g_A^{(0)} - C_{\text{vac}}$.

In the parton model $\Delta g_{\text{partons}}$ is associated with the forward matrix of the partially conserved axial-vector current $J_{\text{inv}}^{\alpha_T}$ evaluated in the light-cone gauge $A_+ = 0$ and corresponds to the quark spin contribution extracted from experiments using the JET or AB factorization schemes [21]. For each flavor $q$, this term and the possible topological term $C_{\text{vac}}$ are renormalization group invariants [1]. All of the renormalization group scale dependence induced by the anomalous dimension, $\gamma(\alpha_s)$, is carried by the polarized gluon term:

$$\left\{ \frac{\alpha_s}{2\pi} \Delta g \right\}_{Q^2} = \left\{ \frac{\alpha_s}{2\pi} \Delta g \right\}_{\infty} - \frac{1}{f} \left[ \frac{1}{E(\alpha_s)} - 1 \right] g_A^{(0)} |_{\text{inv}},$$

(3)

where all quantities in this equation are understood to be defined in the $f$-flavor theory. Flavor nonsinglet combinations of the $\Delta g$ are renormalization group invariant so that each flavor evolves at the same rate, including heavy-quark contributions ($q = c, b, t$). The growth in the gluon polarization $\Delta g \sim 1/\alpha_s$ at large $Q^2$ is compensated by growth with opposite signs in the gluon orbital angular momentum. The quark and gluon total angular moments in the infinite scaling limit are given by [22] $J_\perp(\infty) = \frac{1}{2} \{3f/(16 + 3f)\}$ and $J_\parallel(\infty) = \frac{1}{2} \{16/(16 + 3f)\}$. There is presently a vigorous program to disentangle the different contributions involving experiments in semi-inclusive polarized deep inelastic scattering and polarized proton-proton collisions [3,23].

Heavy-quark axial charges have been studied in the context of elastic neutrino-proton scattering [24,25] and heavy-quark contributions to $g_1$ at $Q^2$ values above the charm production threshold [26–29]. Charm production in polarized deep inelastic scattering is an important part of the COMPASS spin program at CERN [30].

Following Eq. (2) we can write the charm-quark axial-charge contribution as

$$\Delta c(Q^2) = \Delta c_{\text{partons}} = \left\{ \frac{\alpha_s}{2\pi} \Delta g \right\}_{Q^2, f = 4},$$

(4)

where $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$ corresponds to the forward matrix element of the plus component of the renormalization group invariant charm-quark axial current with just mass terms in the divergence (minus the QCD axial anomaly), viz. $(\bar{c}\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 c)_{\text{con}} = (\bar{c}\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 c) - k_\mu$ with $k_\mu$ the gluonic Chern-Simons current, and we neglect any topological contribution.\footnote{Any topological contribution will be associated with some of the $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$ being shifted to Bjorken $x = 0$. In general, topological contributions are suppressed by powers of $1/m_c^2$ for heavy-quark matrix elements [31].} For scales $Q^2 \gg m_c^2$, $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$ corresponds to the polarized charm contribution one would find in the JET or AB factorization schemes.

The heavy-quark contributions to the nonsinglet neutral current axial charge measured in elastic neutrino-proton scattering have been calculated to next-to-leading order (NLO) in Ref. [24]. For charm quarks, the relevant electroweak doublet contribution at leading order (LO) is

$$(\Delta c - \Delta s)_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 4)} = -\frac{6}{27\pi} \alpha_s(m_c^2) g_A^{(0)} |_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 3)} + O(1/m_c^2).$$

(5)

For the LO contribution this is made up from

$$\Delta c_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 4)} = \Delta c_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 3)} + \left( \frac{6}{27\pi} \alpha_s(m_c^2) g_A^{(0)} |_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 3)} \right),$$

$$\Delta c_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 4)} = -\frac{6}{25\pi} \alpha_s(m_c^2) g_A^{(0)} |_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 3)} + O(1/m_c^2).$$

Here $\Delta c_{\text{inv}} = \Delta c(Q^2)$ evaluated in the limit $Q^2 \to \infty$, where the charm-quark axial-charge contribution is $2M_S c = \frac{\bar{c}s(c\gamma_\mu \gamma_5 s) p, s}$. The change in $\Delta c_{\text{inv}}$ between the four- and three-flavor theories in Eqs. (6) comes from the different number of flavors in $E(\alpha_s)$ for the four- and three-flavor theories.

Equations (6) contain vital information about $\{(\alpha_s/2\pi) \Delta g\}_{\infty}$ in Eq. (4) if we know the renormalization group (RG) invariant quantity $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$. Indeed, if the latter were zero and if we ignore the NLO evolution associated with the two-loop anomalous dimension $\gamma(\alpha_s)$, then Eqs. (6) would imply (at LO)

$$\Delta s_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 4)}(Q^2) = \frac{12}{25} \frac{\alpha_s^{(f = 3)}(m_c^2)}{\alpha_s^{(f = 4)}(Q^2)} g_A^{(0)} |_{\text{inv}}^{(f = 3)},$$

(7)

or $\Delta g \sim 0.23$ when $\alpha_s(Q^2) \sim 0.3$. The following discussion is aimed at assessing the possible size of $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$ plus the NLO evolution associated with $\gamma(\alpha_s)$, and hence the error on this value.

Canonical (anomaly free) heavy-quark contributions to the proton wave function are, in general, suppressed by powers of $1/m_c^2$, so we expect $\Delta c_{\text{partons}} \sim O(1/m_c^2)$. The RG invariant quantity $\Delta c_{\text{partons}}$ takes the same value at all momentum scales. We may evaluate it using quark-hadron duality in a hadronic basis with meson cloud methods [32]. Experimental studies of the strange quark content of the nucleon over the past decade have given us considerable confidence that both the matrix elements of the vector and scalar charm-quark currents (which are anomaly free) in the proton are quite small [33,34]. This gives us confidence in estimating the polarized charm contribution through its suppression relative to the corresponding polarized strangeness $-0.01$ [15] by the factor.
\( \sim (m_X - m_N + m_K)^2 / 4m_N^2 < 0.1 \) so that \( |\Delta c_{\text{partons}}| < 0.001 \).

QCD four-flavor evolution and Eqs. (6) then enable an estimate of \( \Delta g \) at scales relevant to experiments at COMPASS and RHIC.

In perturbative QCD the LO contribution to heavy-quark production through polarized photon-gluon fusion yields

\[
\int_0^1 dx \ g_1^{(g-g-hh)} \sim 0, \quad Q^2 \gg m_h^2,
\]

where \( m_h \) is the heavy-quark mass \((h = c, b, t)\). The anomalous \(-\alpha_s/2\pi \) term is canceled against the canonical term when \( m_h^2 \gg P^2 \) (the typical gluon virtuality in the proton) [19]. If the gluon polarization were large so that \(-\alpha_s/2\pi \Delta g \) made a large contribution to the suppression of \( g_A^{(0)} \), at this order one would also find a compensating large canonical polarized charm contribution in the proton. To understand this more deeply, we note that the result in Eq. (8) follows from the complete expression [20]

\[
\int_0^1 dx \ g_1^{(g-g)} = -\frac{\alpha_s}{2\pi} \left[ 1 + \frac{2m_c^2}{P^2} \ln \left( \frac{1 + 4m_c^2/P^2}{1 + 4m_c^2/P^2 + 1} \right) \right].
\]

Here \( m \) is the mass of the struck quark and \( P^2 \) is the gluon virtuality. We next focus on charm production. The first term in Eq. (9) is the QCD anomaly and the second, mass-dependent, canonical term gives \( \Delta c_{\text{gluon}} \) for a gluon “target” with virtuality \( P^2 \). Evaluating Eq. (9) for \( m_c^2 \gg P^2 \) gives the leading term \( \int_0^1 dx \ g_1^{(g-g)} \sim -\frac{\alpha_s}{2\pi} \frac{P^2}{8m_c^2} \), hence the result in Eq. (8).

It is interesting to understand Eqs. (8) and (9) in terms of deriving the QCD axial anomaly via Pauli-Villars regularization (instead of the usual dimensional regularization derivation used in [19]). The anomaly corresponds to the heavy Pauli-Villars “quark,” which will cancel against the heavy charm quark for a charm-quark mass much bigger than gluon virtualities in the problem (there are no other mass terms to set the scale). When the axial-vector amplitude is evaluated at the two-loop level there will be gluon loop momenta between \( m_c \) and the ultraviolet cut-off scale generating a small scale dependence so that the cancellation between canonical heavy-quark and anomalous polarized glue terms is not exact in full QCD. This scale dependence corresponds to the two-loop anomalous dimension \( \gamma(\alpha_s) \) in \( E(\alpha_s) \). The result in Eq. (8) was previously discussed in Refs. [10,27] in the context of the phenomenology that would follow if there were large gluon polarization in the proton. Nonperturbative evaluation of \( \Delta c_{\text{partons}} \) allows us to constrain the size of \( \Delta g \) given what we know about charm and strangeness in the nucleon’s wave function.

There is a further issue that the derivation of Eqs. (6) involves matching conditions where the spin contributions are continuous between the three- and four-flavor theories at the threshold scale \( m_c \) modulo \( O(1/m_c^2) \) corrections, which determine a theoretical error for the method. Using QCD evolution with the renormalization group factor \( E(\alpha_s) \), the results in Eqs. (6) are equivalent to the leading twist term \( \Delta c(m_c^2) \) vanishing at the threshold scale \( m_c \) modulo \( O(1/m_c^2) \) corrections, viz. \( \Delta c(m_c^2) = O(1/m_c^2) \) [10]. The leading \( O(1/m_c^2) \) term is estimated using effective field theory in Refs. [10,25,27]. For polarized photon-gluon fusion, this is the \( -\alpha_s(2\pi)(5/8)(P^2/m_c^2) \) leading term in the heavy-quark limit of Eq. (9). The heavy charm quark is integrated out at threshold to give the matrix element of a gauge-invariant gluon operator with dimension 5 and the same quantum numbers as the axial-vector current, viz. \( \Delta c(m_c^2) \sim O[\alpha_s(m_c^2)/4\pi \{ M^2/m_c^2 \}] \) [27] or \( \Delta c(m_c^2) \sim O[\alpha_s(m_c^2)^2/\Lambda_{\text{QCD}}^2/m_c^2] \sim 0.017 \) [10]. Taking this as an estimate of the theoretical error gives \( \Delta c(m_c^2) = 0 \pm 0.017 \).

We next combine this number for \( \Delta c(m_c^2) \) with our estimate of the size of the polarized gluon contribution \( |\Delta c_{\text{gluon}}| < 0.001 \) in quadrature to obtain a bound including theoretical error on the size of the polarized gluon contribution: \( | -\alpha_s(2\pi)\Delta g(m_c^2) | \lesssim 0.017 \) or

\[
|\Delta g(m_c^2)| \lesssim 0.3,
\]

where \( \alpha_s(m_c^2) = 0.4 \). Values at other values of \( Q^2 \) are readily obtained with Eq. (3) or \( \alpha_s \Delta g \sim \text{constant} \) for large values of \( Q^2 \).

It is interesting to extend this analysis to the full six-flavor QCD. The values of \( \Delta c_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)} \), \( \Delta b_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)} \), and \( \Delta g_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)} \) were derived in Ref. [24] to NLO in the heavy-quark expansion. Taking just the leading-order contribution plus the heavy-quark power correction according to the recipe [10,27] described above gives \( \Delta c_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)}(m_c^2) = -0.006 \pm 0.017 \) and \( \Delta b_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)}(m_c^2) = -0.009 \pm 0.017 \) for polarized charm. For the bottom and top quarks one obtains \( \Delta b_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)}(m_t^2) = 0 \pm 0.001 \pm 0.017 \), \( \Delta b_{\text{inv}}^{(f=6)}(m_b^2) = -0.003 \pm 0.001 \pm 0.017 \), and \( \Delta c(m_b^2) = 0 \pm 2 \times 10^{-7} \pm 0.017 \). Here the first error comes from the \( O(1/m_b^2) \) mass correction for the heaviest quark of \( c, b, \) and \( t \). The second error comes from the other heavy-quarks with lesser mass as we evaluate these heavy-quark contributions in terms of the measured value of the light-quark quantity \( g_A^{(0)} \mid_{\text{inv}} \). These numbers overlap with a zero value for \( \alpha_s(2\pi) \Delta g \) in the relevant \( f \)-flavor theories. The QCD scale dependence of \( \alpha_s(2\pi) \Delta g \) starts with NLO evolution induced by Kodaira’s two-loop anomalous dimension \( \gamma(\alpha_s) \).

The combination \( \alpha_s(2\pi) \Delta g \) is scale invariant at LO. This means that if we work just to LO and \( \Delta g \) vanishes at one scale, it will vanish at all scales (in LO approximation). The LO QCD evolution equation for gluon orbital angular momentum in the proton [22] then simplifies so that \( L_g(\infty) = 1/2(16/16 + 3/3) \). In practice, the two-loop anomalous dimension generates slow evolution of \( \alpha_s(2\pi) \Delta g \). Dividing the finite value of this combination at large scales by the small value of \( \alpha_s \) gives a finite value for the gluon polarization \( \Delta g \), which can readily be the same order of magnitude as the gluon

\(^2\)These \( O(1/m_c^2) \) terms associated with the full \( \Delta c \) are manifest in polarized photon-gluon fusion through the heavy-quark limit of Eq. (9). \( \int_0^1 dx \ g_1^{(g-g)} \sim -\alpha_s(2\pi)(5/8)(P^2/m_c^2) \), and are to be distinguished from the model evaluation of \( \Delta c_{\text{partons}} \).
total angular momentum (or larger with cancellation against a correspondingly larger gluon orbital angular momentum).

It is interesting that the value of $\Delta g$ deduced from present experiments COMPASS at CERN and PHENIX and STAR at RHIC typically give $|\Delta g| < 0.4$ with $\alpha_s \sim 0.3$ corresponding to $| -3(\alpha_s/2\pi)|\Delta g| | < 0.06$ [3]. This experimental value is extracted from direct measurements of gluon polarization at COMPASS in the region around $x_{\text{gluon}} \sim 0.1$, NLO QCD motivated fits to inclusive $g_1$ data taken in the region $x > 0.006$, and RHIC spin data in the region $0.02 < x_{\text{gluon}} < 0.4$. The theoretical bound, Eq. (10), is consistent with this experimental result.

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