Competing anisotropies and flux confinement-deconfinement transitions in frustrated kagome and pyrochlore magnets

Kedar Damle (TIFR Mumbai) @ MIT (Jan 2026)

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

Jay Pandey & KD arXiv:2512.11623; unpublished

Funding: DAE-India, SERB-India, Infosys-Chandrasekharan Random Geometry Center

One slide summary

Competition between two different manifestations of spin-orbit coupling:

Easy-axis anisotropy of the exchange couplings

Easy-plane anisotropy in the single-ion energetics

Tight-binding descriptions for SO coupled Mott insulators suggest such regimes can exist

Lee, Bhattacharjee, Kim, PRB 87, 214416 (2013)

Rau, Lee, Kee, PRL 112, 077204 (2014)

Our message-

Interplay of geometric frustration and this competition drives interesting physics

However-

caveat emptor: No candidate materials known to us...

1. Competing anisotropies and the S=1 kagome 1/3-magnetization plateau

Representative Hamiltonian:

$$H_{eff} = J^z \sum_{rr'} S_r^z S_{r'}^z + \Delta \sum_r (S_r^z)^2 - B \sum_r S_r^z + \cdots$$

$J^z = J \ , \quad \Delta = J + \mu$

$T, \ \mu \ll J$

Quantum fluctuations, additional interactions are small $(J_\perp \, , \ J' \ll T)$

One-third magnetization plateau

($\mathcal{O}(J)$ width around $B \simeq 2J$)

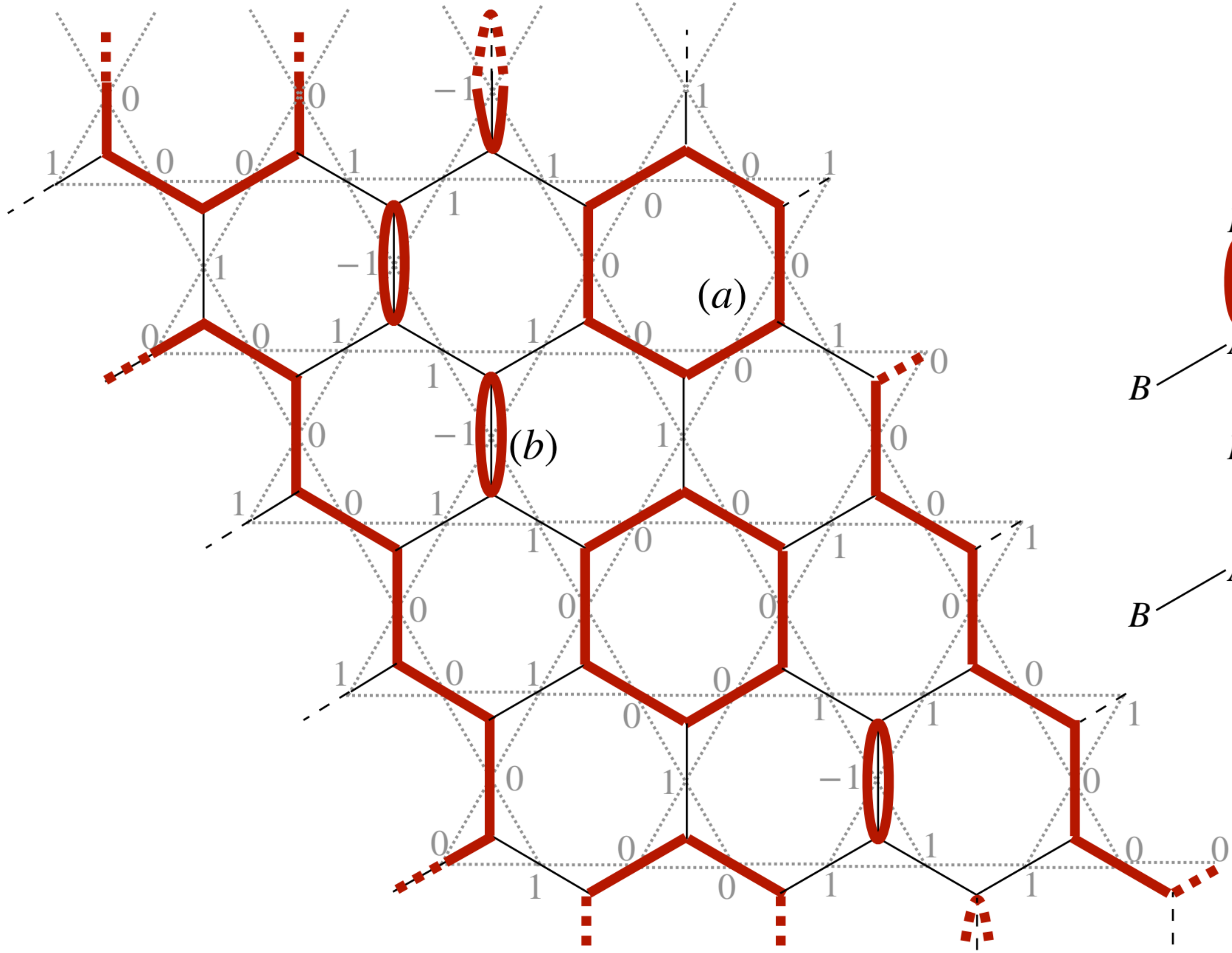
Each kagome triangle has: $S^z = 1$

Two ways to add up to $S^z = 1$ (1,0,0) or (1,1, -1) (Large $\mathcal{O}(J)$ energy gap to other values)

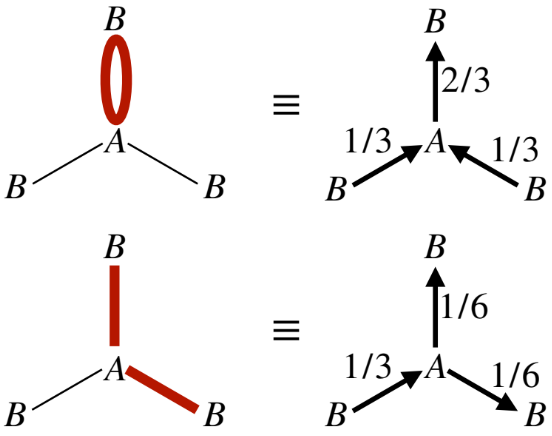
(with slightly different energies)

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Fully-packed configurations of loops + trivial loops (dimers)



Divergence-free polarization

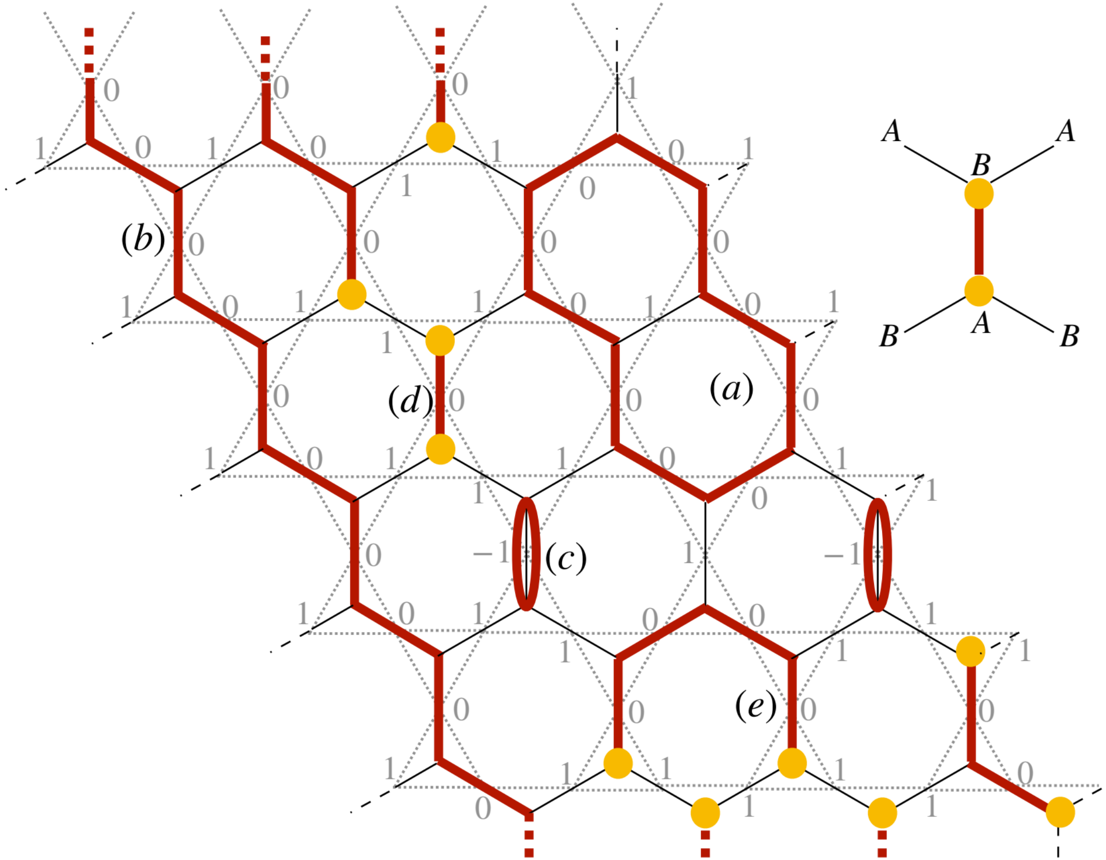


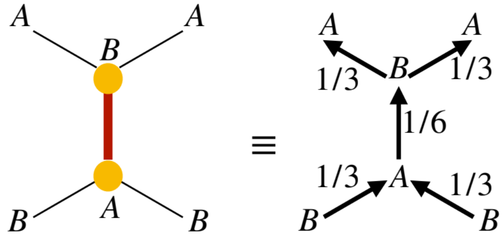
$$\Delta \cdot P = 0$$

Microscopic height construction

$$P = \Delta \times H$$

All open strings disallowed





Half-charges (half-vortices) forbidden

Integer charges (unit-vortices) also forbidden

Two distinct length-1 objects if half vortices allowed (drive transition to 2/3 magnetization plateau)

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Dimer-loop partition function

$$Z = \sum_{\mathcal{C}} w^{n_d(\mathcal{C})}$$

$$w = \exp(-2\mu/T)$$

Physics of kagome magnet described in terms of dimer-loop partition function on honeycomb lattice

Tool: Classical Monte Carlo using a worm algorithm

Also useful to study square lattice dimer loop model (to check universality of honeycomb model transitions)

Some theoretical perspective

w=0 is fully-packed O(1) honeycomb loops (loop fugacity is unity).

(configurations in one-to-one correspondence with fully-packed dimers: empty links form loops)

Limit of infinite w is usual fully-packed dimer model.

Warning: no obvious duality between w and 1/w for general w

Expect:

At w=0: Power-law loop size distribution, dipolar correlations.

At infinite w: dipolar correlations

(Baxter, Moessner-Tchernyshyov-Sondhi 2004, Jaubert-Haque-Moessner 2011, Jacobsen-Kondev 1998, Saleur-Duplantier 1987)

Coarse-grained height field-theory

$$S = \pi g \int (\nabla h)^2$$

h is an angle:

h-->h+1 redundancy in pure dimer limit

h-->h+1/2 redundancy in pure loop limit

(Youngblood 1980, Henley, Fradkin et al 2004, Vishwanath et al 2004, Alet et al 2005, Moessner et al 2004 ...)

Since loops exist at any finite w, expect h-->h+1/2 redundancy for all finite w.

Smooth crossover as a function of w as we go from 0 to infinity?

Numerics:

- Classical Monte Carlo using two worm updates
- One uses a unit-vortex antivortex pair, the other does the same with half-vortices
- Allows measurement of test half-vortex correlator
- Puts a bound on test unit-vortex correlator
- Periodic boundary conditions: Two independent fluxes of polarization field (winding numbers for height field) are well-defined
- Fluxes are allowed to be half-integer in general except in pure dimer limit.

Measurements

Loop-size distribution and moments $P_l(s, L)$ $S_m = \langle \sum_j s_j^m \rangle$

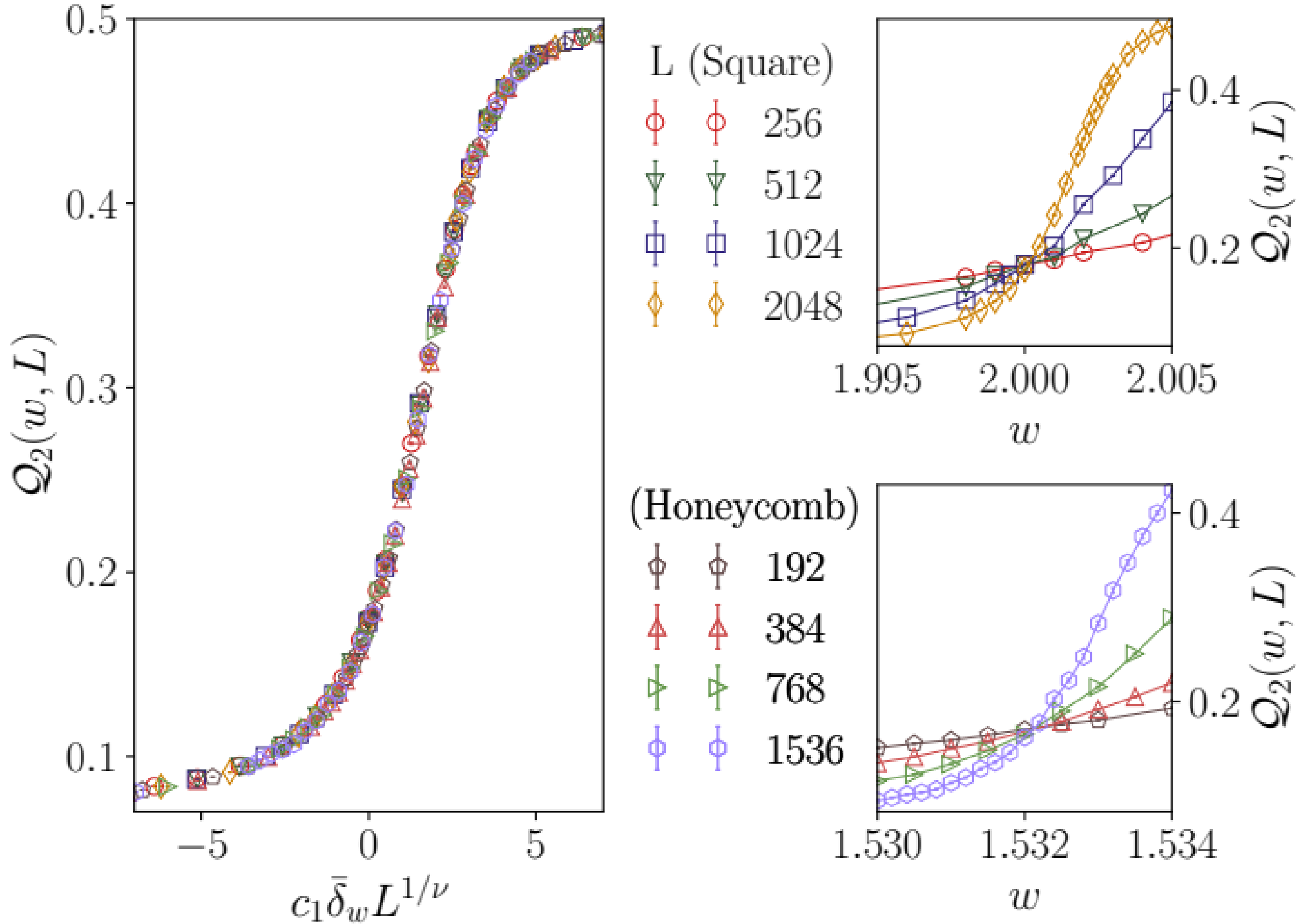
Loop-size Binder ratio $Q_2 = \langle \sum_{i \neq j} s_i^2 s_j^2 \rangle / S_2^2$

Flux (winding number) distribution $P(\phi_x, \phi_y)$

Probability of having fractional fluxes $P_{\mathrm{frac}} = 1 - \sum_{\phi_x \in Z, \phi_y \in Z} P(\phi_x, \phi_y)$

Three-sublattice spin order parameter and half/unit-vortex correlators $C_\psi(r)$ $C_v^q(r)$ for $q = 1/2, 1$

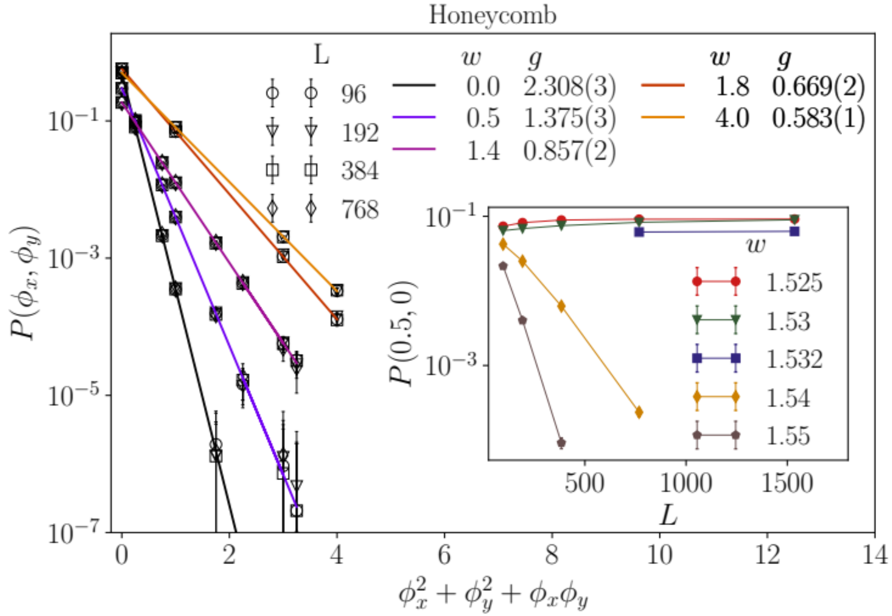
Geometric characterization: short-to-long loop phase transition

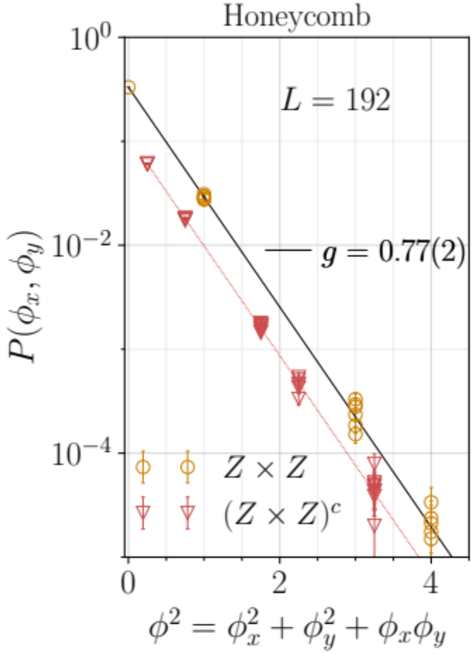


$\nu \approx 1.00(2)$

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Topological characterization: Flux confinement-deconfinement transition





$$P(\phi_x, \phi_y) \propto \exp\left[-\pi g(\phi_x^2 + \phi_y^2 + \phi_x\phi_y)\right]$$

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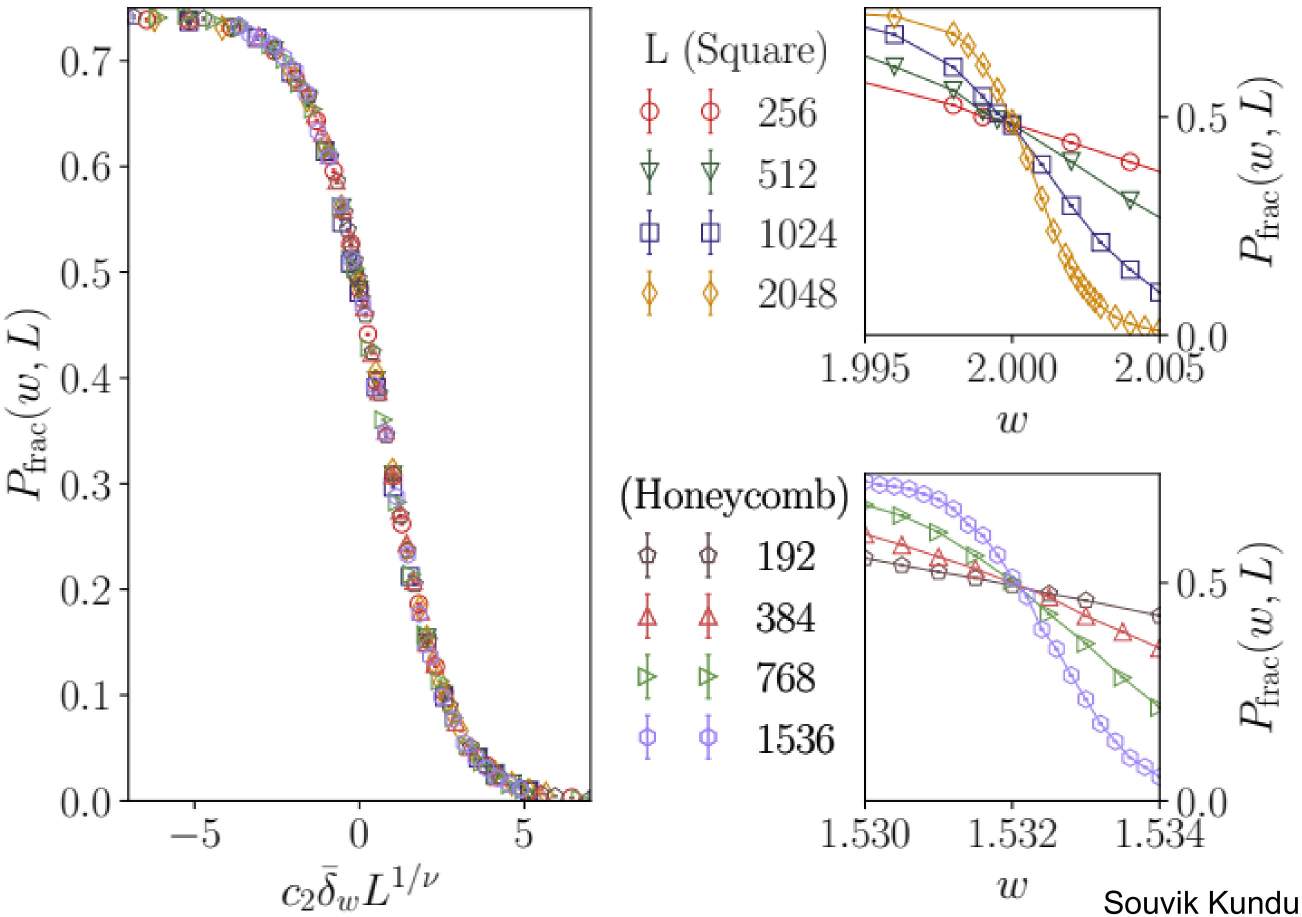
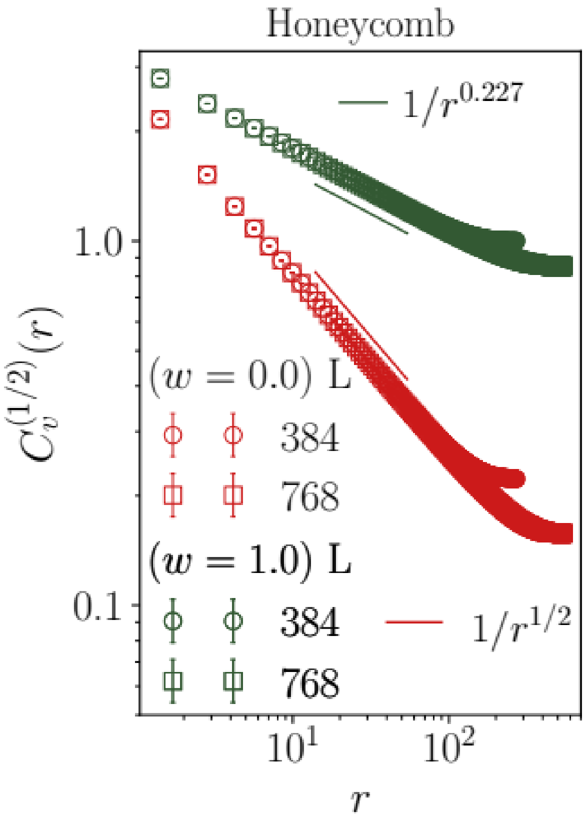
Topological characterization: Flux confinement-deconfinement transition

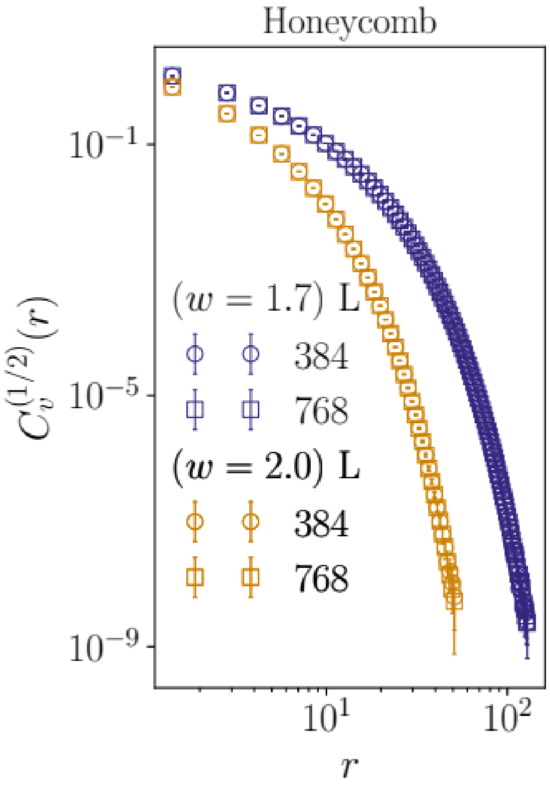


$\nu \approx 1.00(2)$

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Dynamical characterization: Half-vortex (charge) correlators in two phases



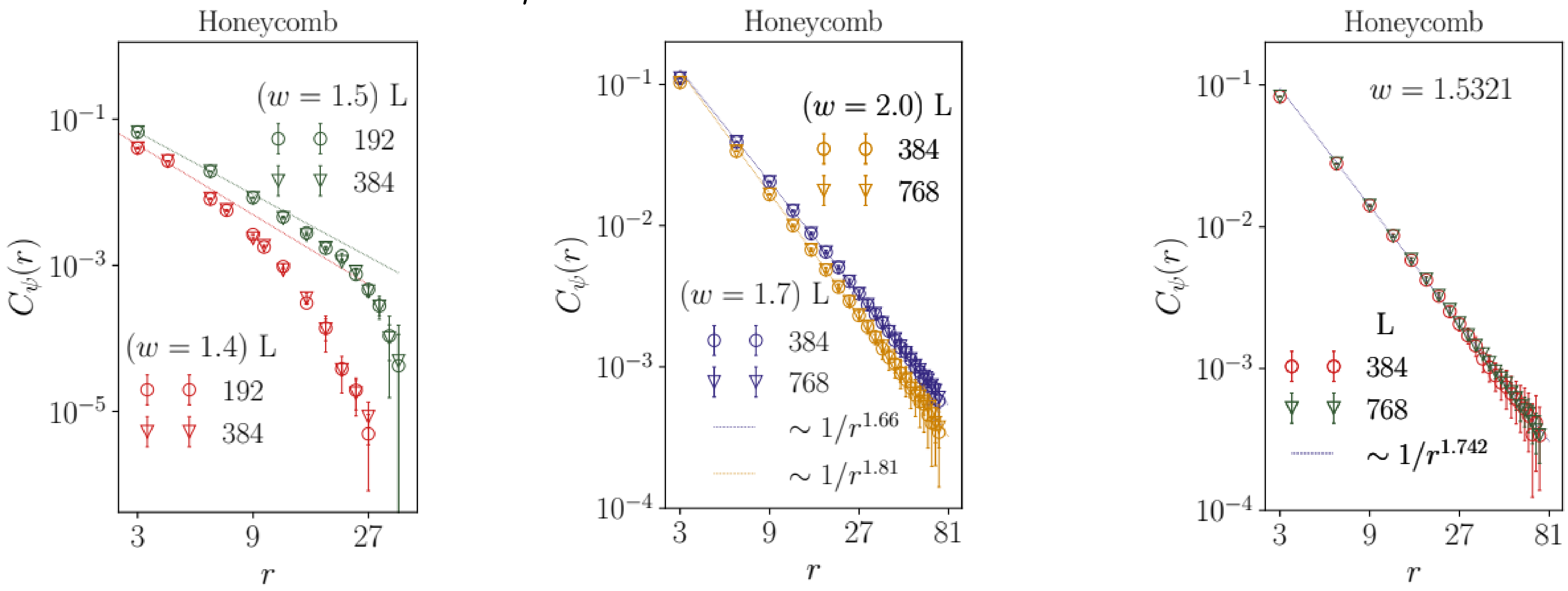


Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Transition in kagome spin three-sublattice correlations

$$\langle e^{2\pi i h(r)} e^{-2\pi i h(0)} \rangle \sim \frac{1}{r^{2/\sqrt{3}g}}$$

(but: operator is illegal in flux deconfined phase)



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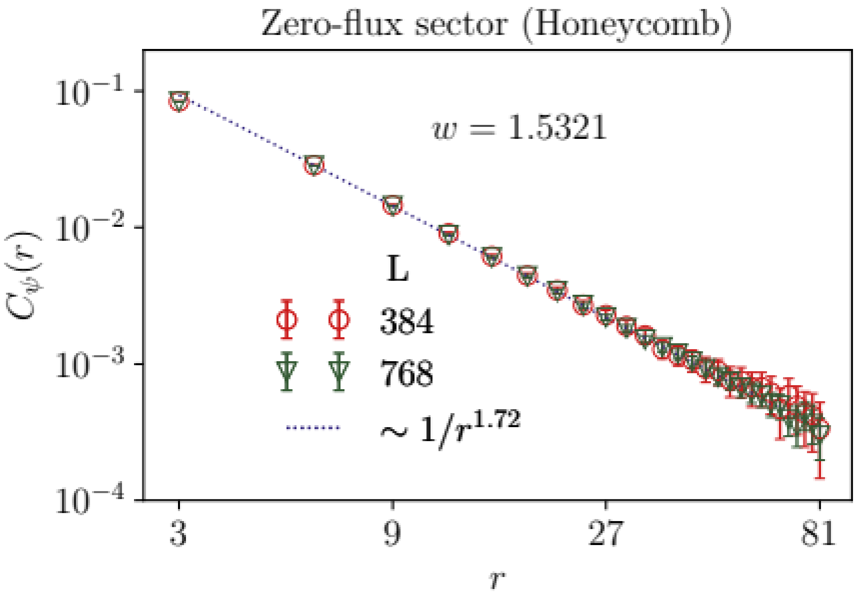
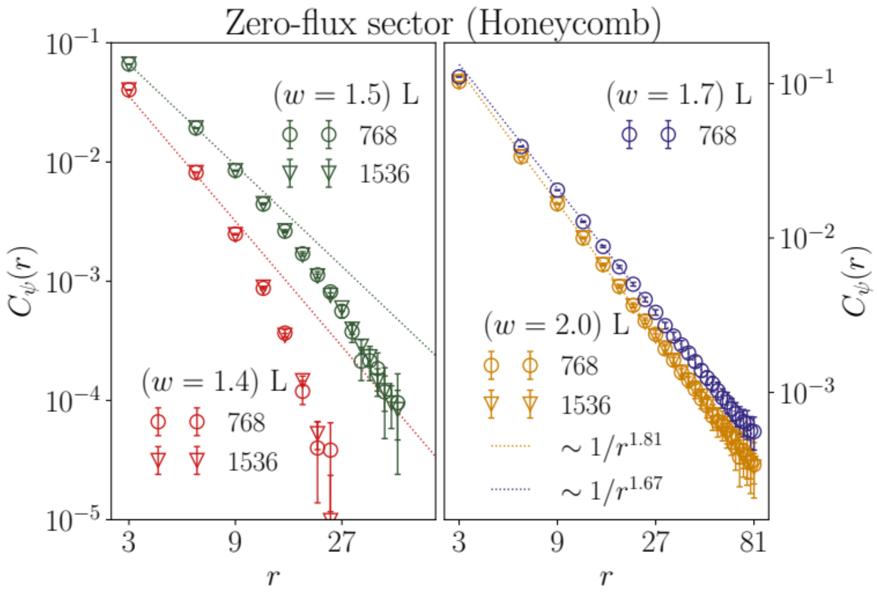
Not an artifact of periodic boundary conditions...





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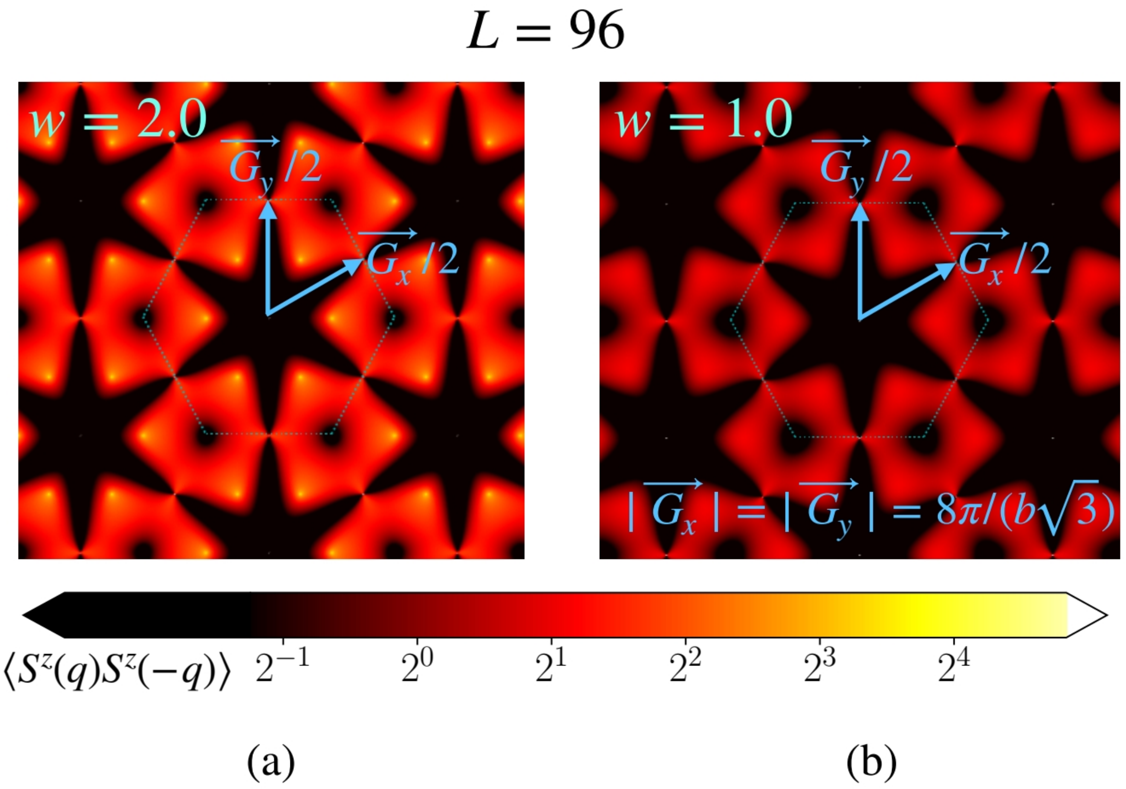
Transition observable in kagome spin structure factor



Power-law feature at three sublattice wavevector absent in long-loop phase

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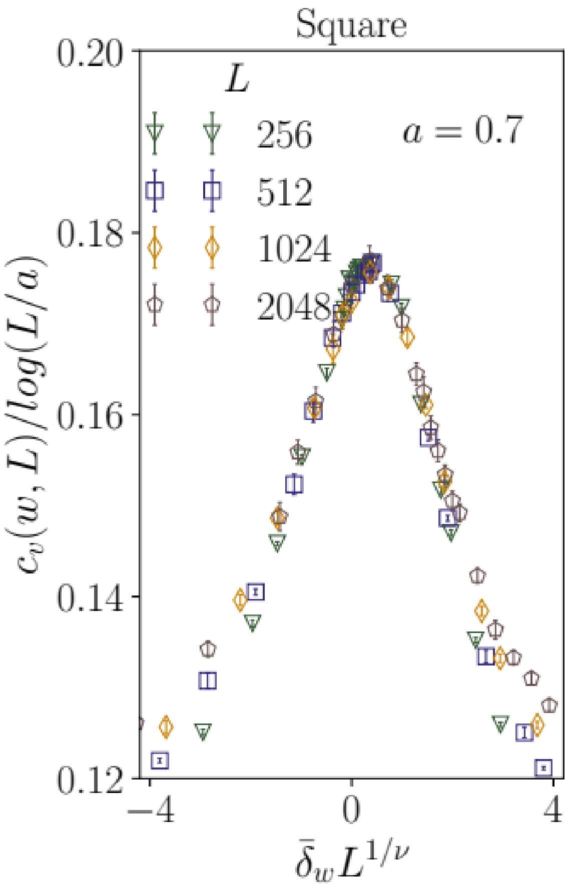
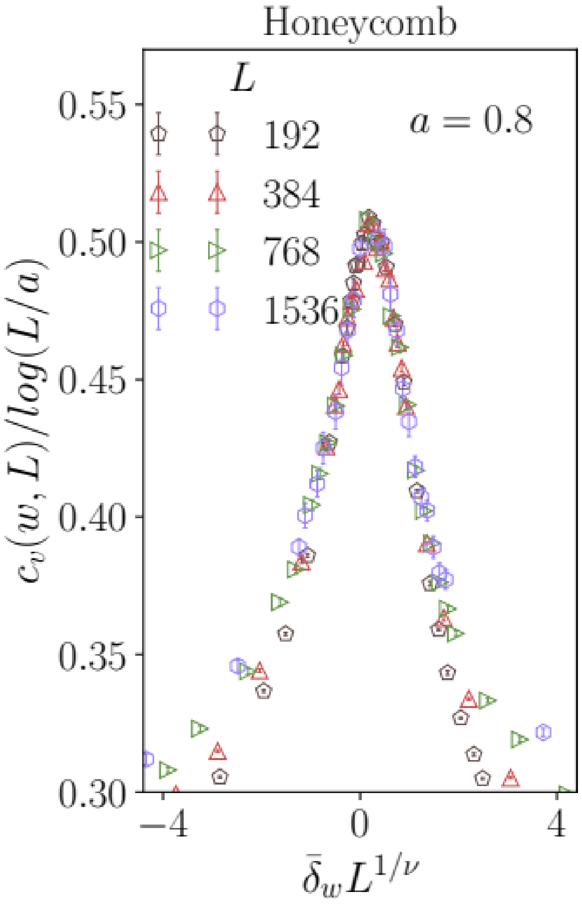
Thermodynamic characterization: Specific heat singularity



Ising-like



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Conclusion from numerics

Two distinct Coulomb liquids separated by continuous transition

Multiple characterizations of the two Coulomb liquids and transition between them:

Geometric: Long-loop phase vs short-loop phase

Topological: Flux confinement-deconfinement transition (jump in compactification radius)

Dynamical: Half-vortices are deconfined in one phase but not other (unit vortices always deconfined)

Long-wavelength correlations: Power-law three-sublattice order in one but not other phase

Ising transition: Hidden Ising order parameter

Souvik Kundu & KD, Phys. Rev. X 15, 011018 (2025)

Jay Pandey & KD, unpublished

“Hidden” Ising order parameter

View each non-trivial loop as a domain wall

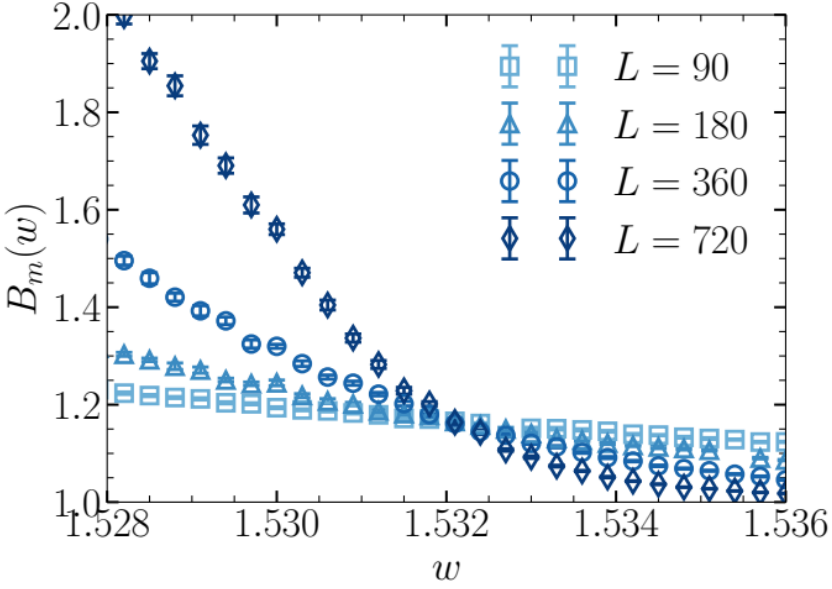
Fine print:

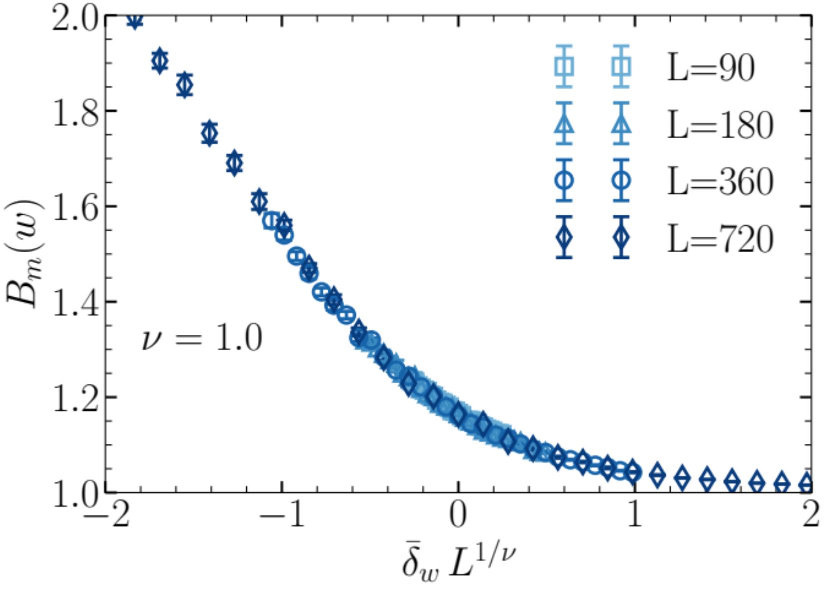
Ising variable only defined for integer flux sectors.

and each dimer-loop state maps to pair of Ising configurations $\mathcal{C}_I$ and $\mathcal{C}^*{}_I$

Jay Pandey & KD, unpublished

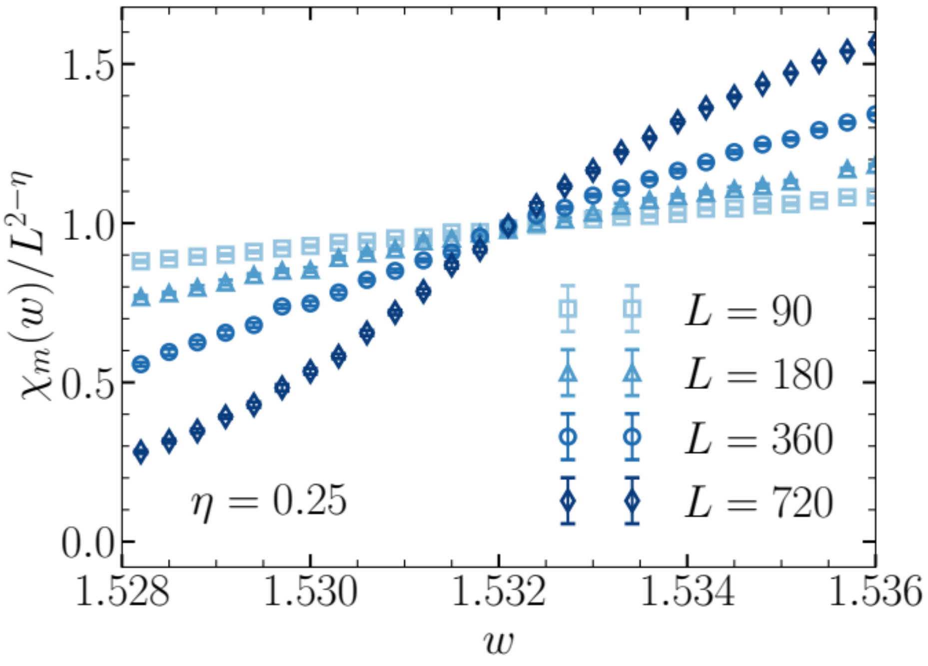
Ferromagnetic transition seen by Ising Binder ratio

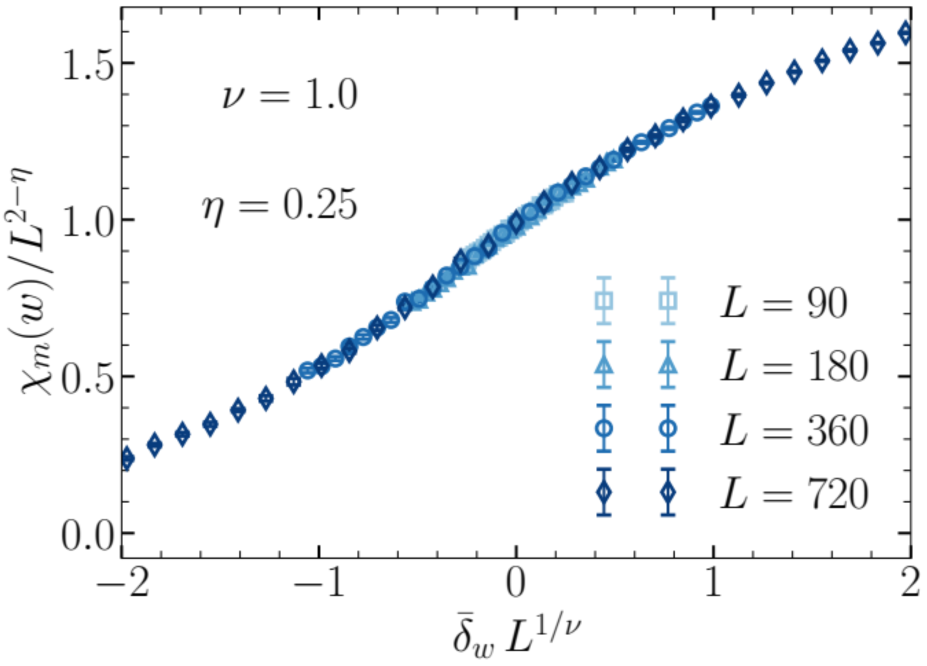




Jay Pandey & KD, unpublished

Ferromagnetic transition seen by Ising susceptibility





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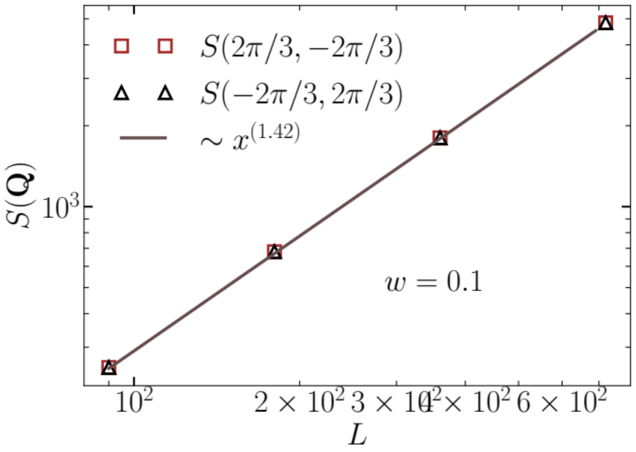
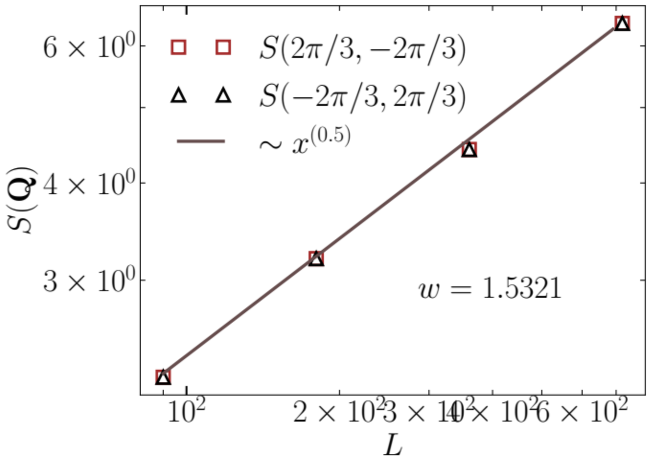
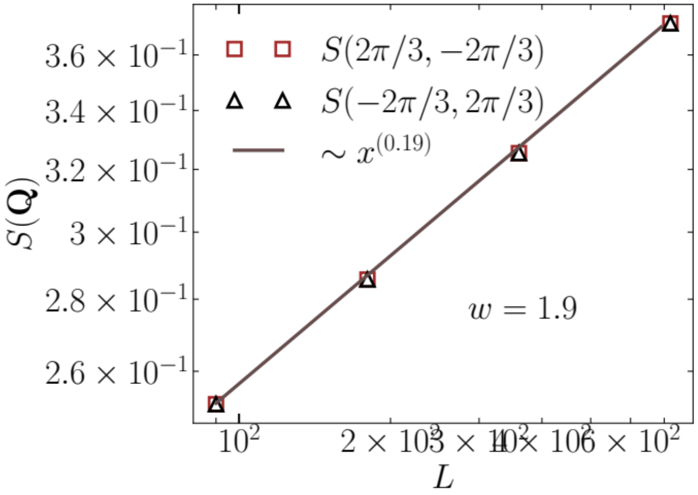
Aside: Ising variable has power-law three-sublattice order in both phases







Consistent with:

$$\langle e^{2\pi i h(r)} e^{-2\pi i h(0)} \rangle \sim \frac{1}{r^{2/\sqrt{3}g}} \qquad S(\mathbf{Q}) \sim L^{2-\eta} \qquad \eta = 2/\sqrt{3}g$$

Jay Pandey & KD, unpublished

2. S=1 kagome in zero field

Representative Hamiltonian: $$H_{eff} = J^z \sum_{rr'} S^z_r S^z_{r'} + \Delta \sum_r (S^z_r)^2 + \cdots$$

$J^z = J \,, \quad \Delta = J + \mu$

$T, \; \mu \ll J$

Quantum fluctuations, additional interactions negligible $(J_\perp \,, \; J' \ll T)$

zero field physics: Each kagome triangle has: $S^z = 0$ (Large $\mathcal{O}(J)$ energy gap to other values)

Multiple ways to add up to $S^z = 0$: (with slightly different energies)

(0,0,0), or (1,-1, 0) and permutations (a "vertex model")

Each $S^z_r = \pm 1$ contributes one factor of $w = \exp(-\beta\mu)$ to the Boltzmann weight

Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

Description in terms of fluctuating polarization field and heights

Divergence-free polarization on honeycomb links: $P_{r_{AB}} = S^z_{r_{AB}} \mathbf{e}_{AB}$

$S^z_{\Delta} = 0$ implies $\Delta \cdot P = 0$

Periodic boundary conditions: Two independent fluxes of polarization field (winding numbers) well-defined

Microscopic height construction: $P = \Delta \times H$

Expect coarse-grained theory: $S = \pi g \int (\nabla h)^2$

h is an angle: h-->h+1 redundancy

Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

Question:

w=0 is trivial paramagnet, while infinite w maps to a O(2) honeycomb loop model.

Is there a smooth crossover from small w to large w, or a thermodynamic phase transition?

Viewing polarization field as divergence-free current in current-loop representation of 2dxy model:

Expect an (inverted) KT transition driven by relevance of exp(± 2π i h) (?)

$$\langle e^{2\pi i h(r)} e^{-2\pi i h(0)} \rangle \sim \frac{1}{r^{2/\sqrt{3}g}}$$

would imply transition when $2/\sqrt{3}g = 4$

Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

Answering this: Vertex model partition function

$$Z = \sum_{\mathcal{C}} w^{n_{\pm 1}(\mathcal{C})}$$

$$w = \exp(-\mu/T)$$

Physics of kagome magnet described in terms of vertex model partition function on honeycomb lattice

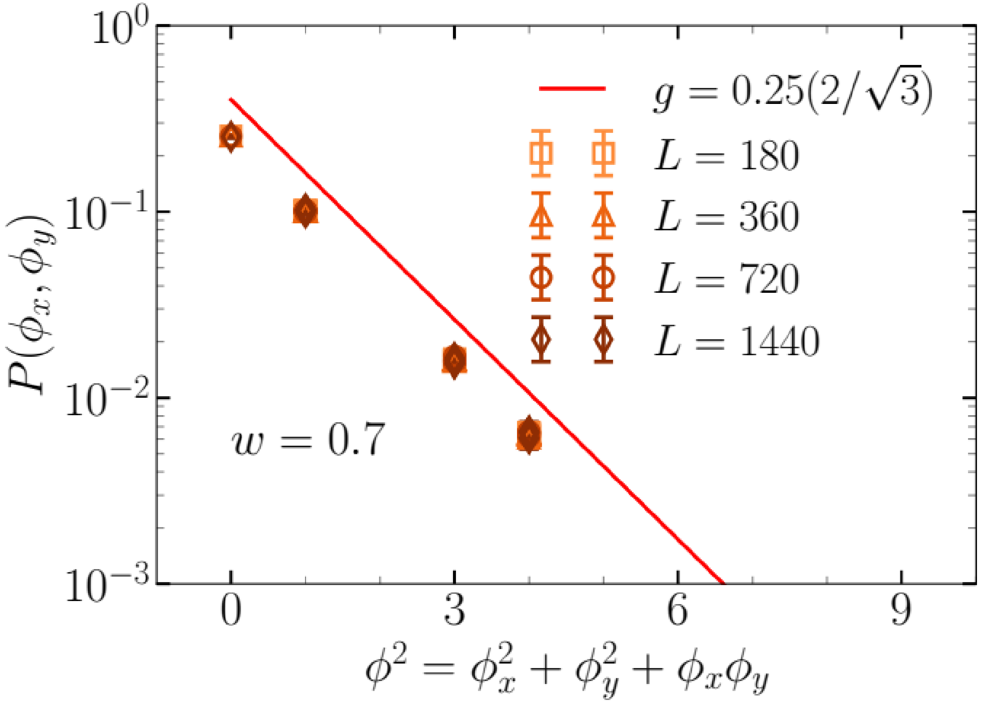
Tool: Classical Monte Carlo using a worm algorithm

Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

Spin 1 kagome in zero field

$$P(\phi_x, \phi_y) \propto \exp\left[-\pi g(\phi_x^2 + \phi_y^2 + \phi_x\phi_y)\right]$$

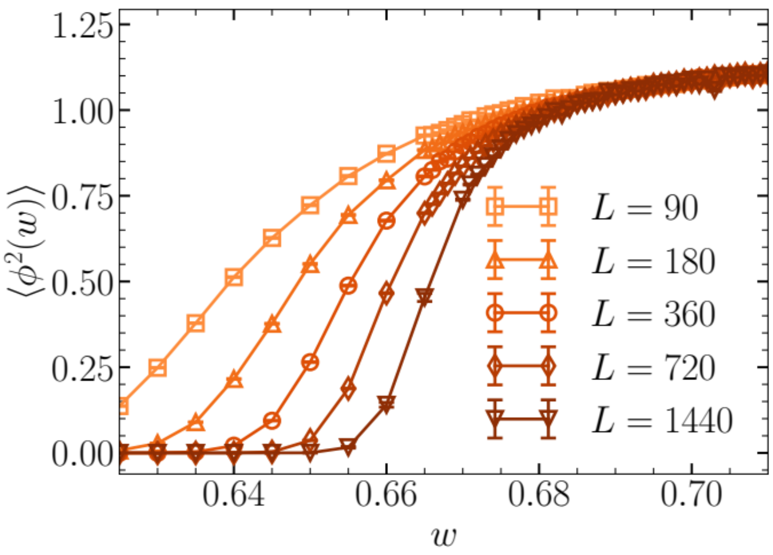
Scaling argument would
suggest transition at w=0.7

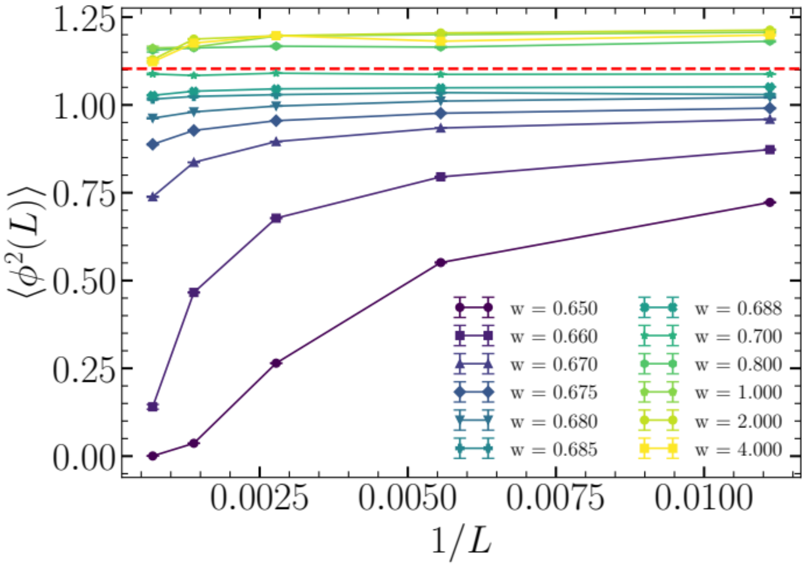


Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

S=1 kagome in zero field

Analog of superfluid stiffness: $\langle \phi^2 \rangle$





Dotted line corresponds to expected value at critical w

Jay Pandey & KD unpublished

3. Competing anisotropies and the S=1 pyrochore in zero field

Representative Hamiltonian:

$$H_{eff} = J^z \sum_{rr'} S_r^z S_{r'}^z + \Delta \sum_r (S_r^z)^2 + \cdots$$

$J^z = J \ , \quad \Delta = J + \mu$

$T, \ \mu \ll J$

Quantum fluctuations, additional interactions negligible $(J_\perp \ , \ J' \ll T)$

zero field physics: Each pyrochlore tetrahedron has: $S^z = 0$ (Large $\mathcal{O}(J)$ energy gap to other values)

Multiple ways to add up to $S^z = 0$: (with slightly different energies)

(a “vertex model” on the diamond lattice)

Each $S_r^z = \pm 1$ contributes one factor of $w = \exp(-\beta\mu)$ to the Boltzmann weight

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

4. Competing anisotropies and the S=3/2 pyrochore in zero field

Representative Hamiltonian: $$H_{eff} = J^z \sum_{rr'} S^z_r S^z_{r'} + \Delta \sum_r (S^z_r)^2 + \cdots$$

$J^z = J \;, \quad \Delta = J + \mu$

$T, \; \mu \ll J$

Quantum fluctuations, additional interactions negligible $(J_\perp \,, \; J' \ll T)$

zero field physics: Each pyrochlore tetrahedron has: $S^z = 0$ (Large $\mathcal{O}(J)$ energy gap to other values)

Multiple ways to add up to $S^z = 0$: (with slightly different energies)

(a "vertex model" on the diamond lattice)

Each $S^z_r = \pm 3/2$ contributes one factor of $w = \exp(-2\beta\mu)$ to the Boltzmann weight

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

Description in terms of fluctuating polarization field and vector potential

Divergence-free polarization on diamond links: $P_{A \to B} = S^z_{r_{AB}}$

$S^z_{\mathrm{tetrahedron}} = 0$ implies $\Delta \cdot P = 0$

Periodic boundary conditions: Three independent integer-valued fluxes of polarization field well-defined

Microscopic height construction: $P = \Delta \times A$

Expect coarse-grained theory: $S = \frac{K}{2} \int (\nabla \times a)^2$

Vertex model partition function

$$Z = \sum_{\mathcal{C}} w^{n(\mathcal{C})}$$

Physics of $S{=}1$ and $S{=}3/2$ pyrochlore magnets described by respective vertex models on diamond lattice

Tool: Classical Monte Carlo using a worm algorithm

S=1 case

By analogy to kagome:

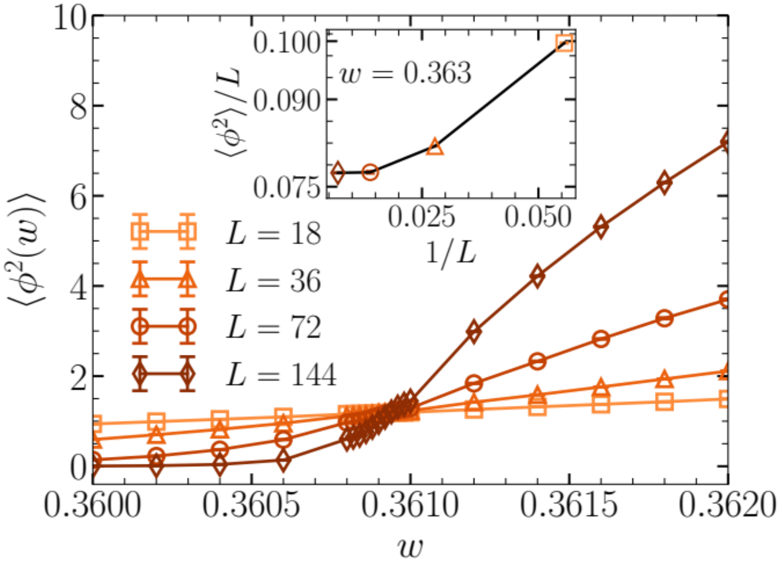
Viewing the polarization field as a divergence free current of 2+1d bosons

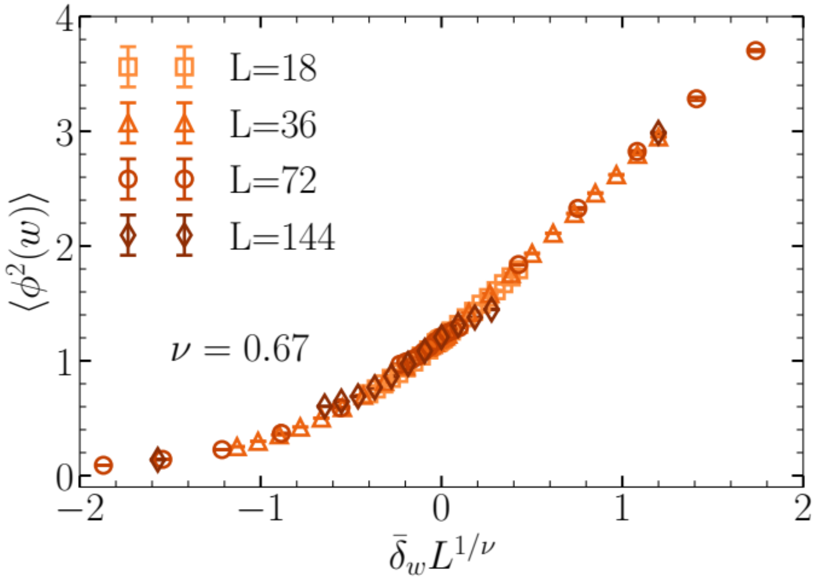
Transition from trivial paramagnet to non-trivial liquid is a 3dxy transition?

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

Superfluid stiffness scales as expected for 3d xy transition

$$\rho_s \sim \langle \phi^2 \rangle / L$$

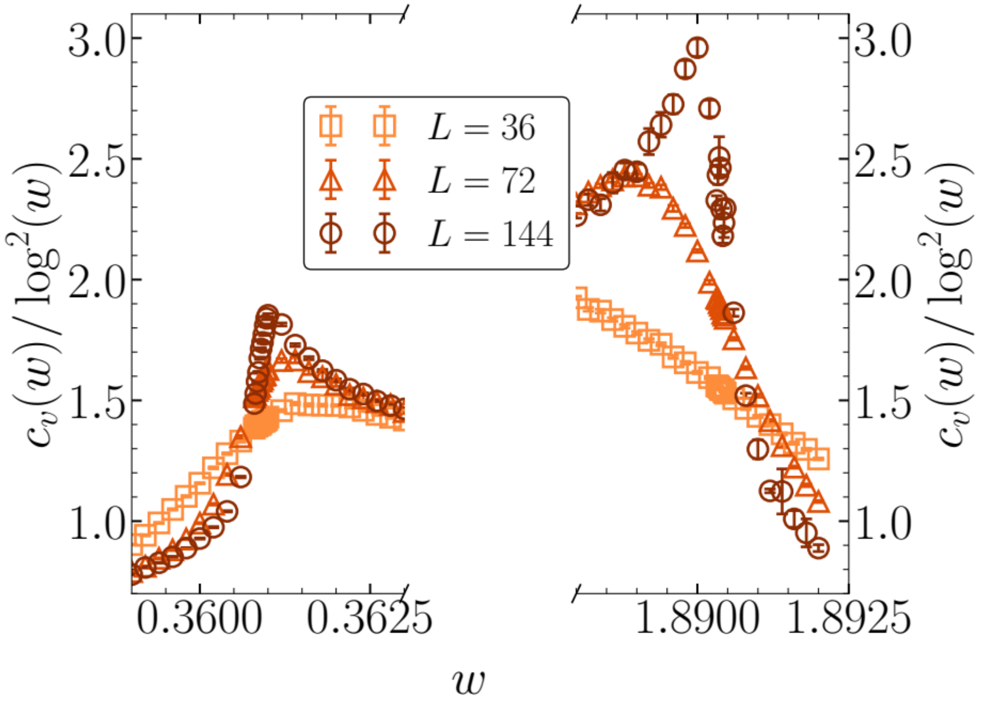




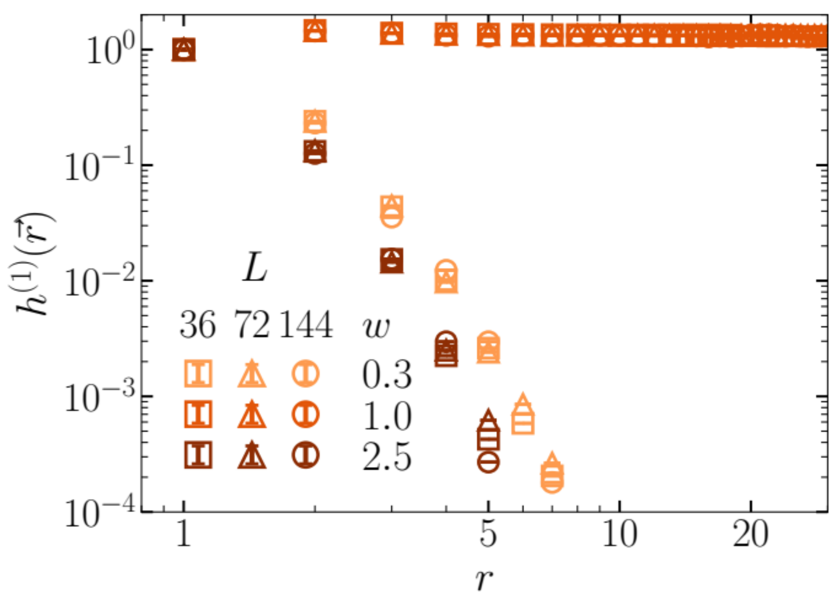
$\rho_s L$ shows expected scaling

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

Surprise: second transition



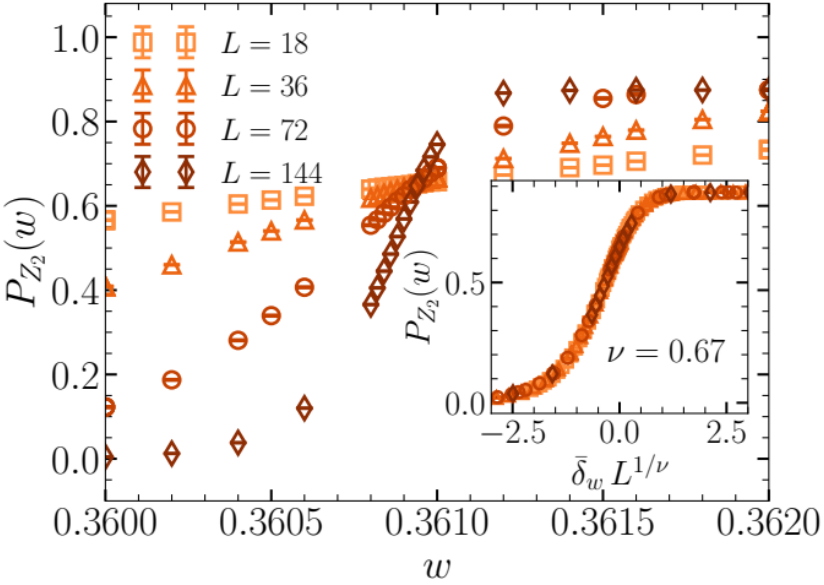
Two transitions seen in specific heat

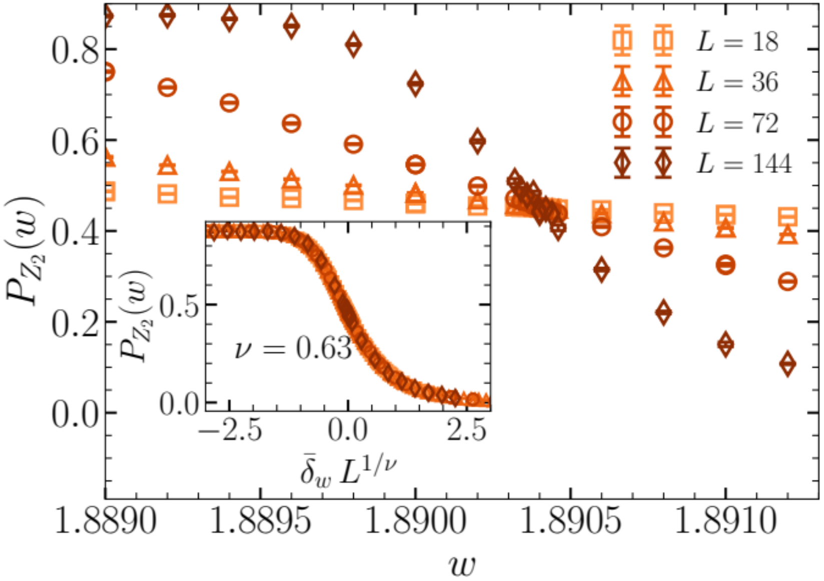


Three phases seen in unit test charge correlator

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

Understanding the second transition

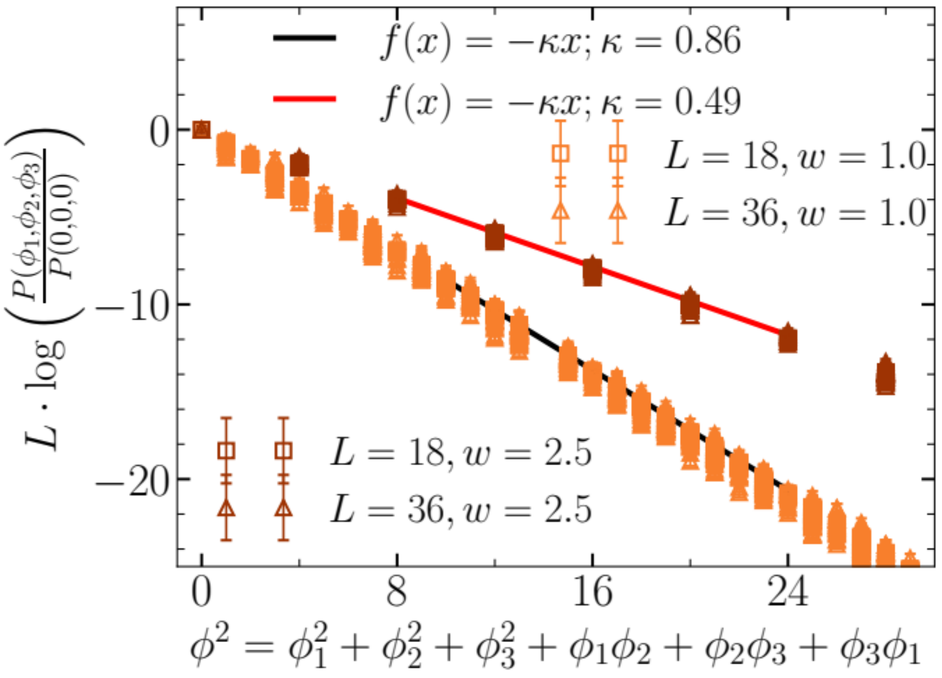


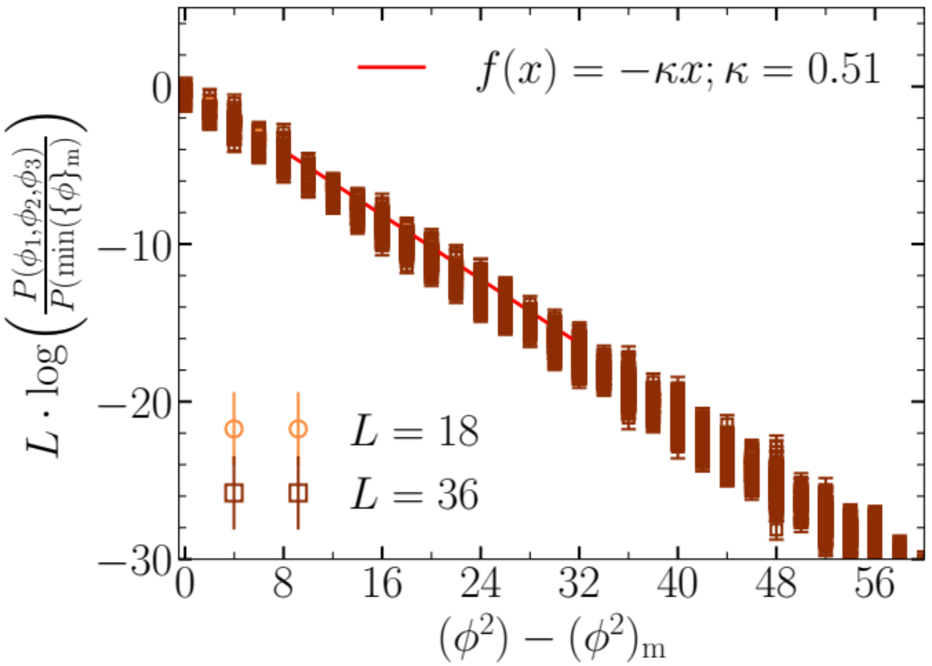


Z2 part of the flux has a confinement transition

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

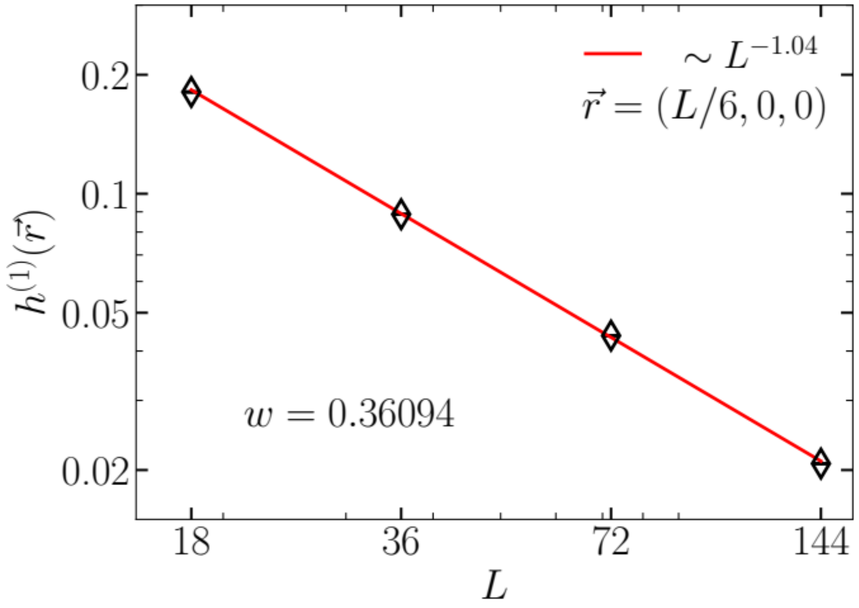
Flux distribution: evidence of Z2 confinement

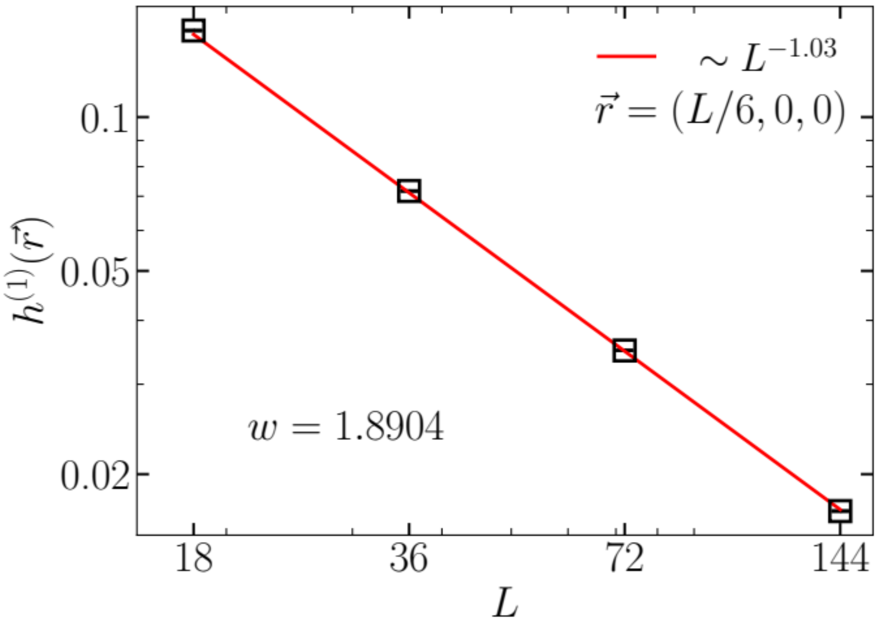




Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

Critical test charge correlators





Interpret as correlation function of xy field whose current is the polarization

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

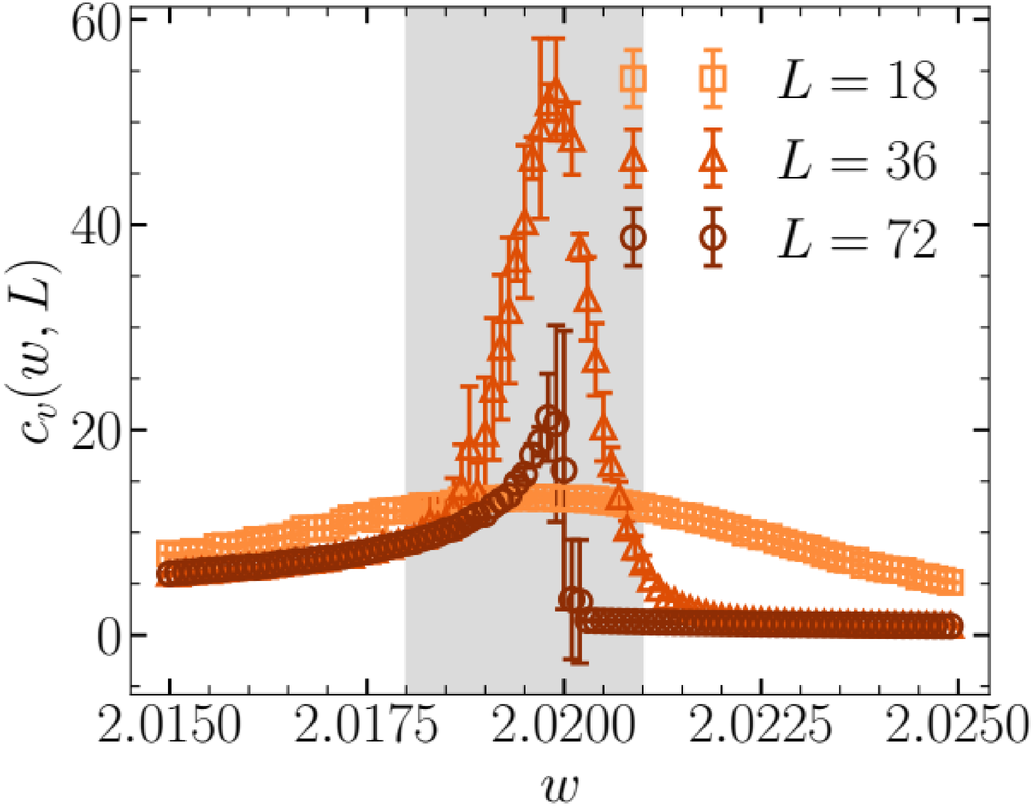
Summary of spin 1 case:

Three phases in the S=1 case:
small-w paramagnet, intermediate-w flux-deconfined Coulomb, & large-w flux-confined Coulomb phases.
(with intervening 3dxy transition followed by flux confinement-deconfinement transition with Z_2 character.

Jay Pandey & KD, arXiv:2512.11623

S=3/2 case

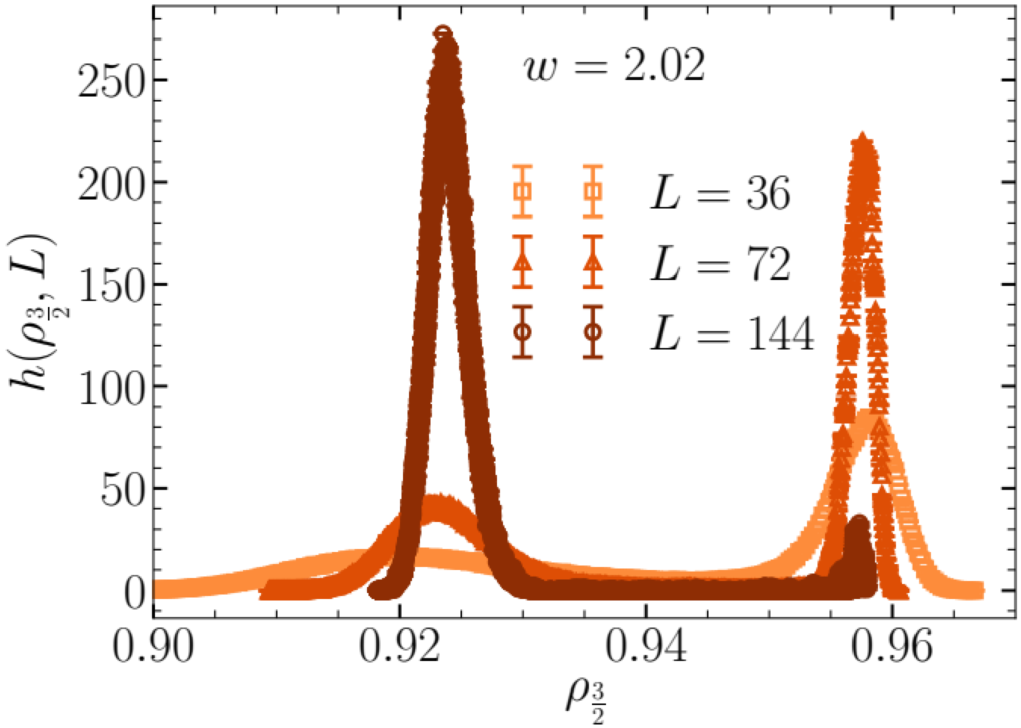
First order transition



First-order transition between two Coulomb phases

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

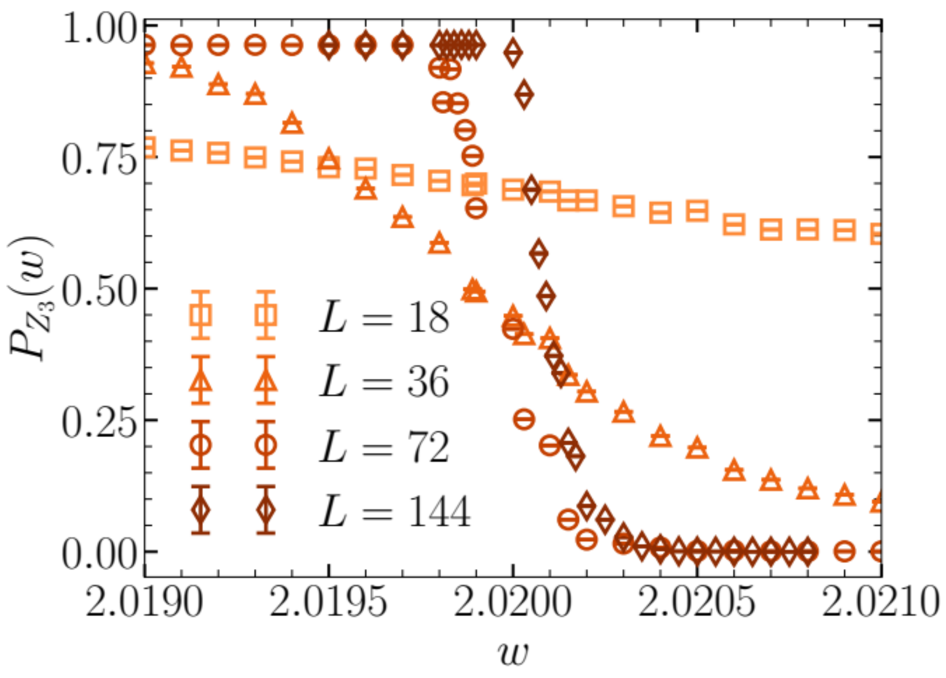
Clear phase co-existence



First-order transition between two Coulomb phases

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

Z3 flux confinement



Transition is a Z_3 flux confinement-deconfinement transition between two Coulomb liquids

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

Summary of spin 3/2 case:

Two phases in the S=3/2 case:

Small-w flux-deconfined Coulomb phase separated from large-w flux-confined Coulomb phase by a first order flux confinement-deconfinement transition with Z_3 character

Jay Pandey, Souvik Kundu, & KD, unpublished

Acknowledgements

Crucial enablers: Computational resources @ TIFR & TIFR sys-ads Kapil Ghadiali and Ajay Salve