

Chiral symmetries and Anomalies from Lattice Fermions

Arkya Chatterjee



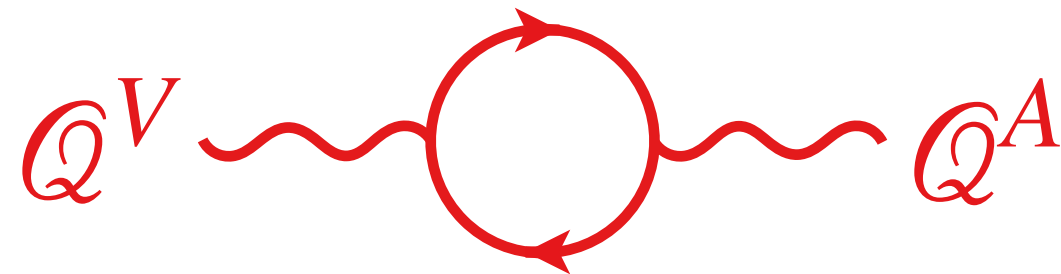
Stony Brook University

New Developments in Lattice Fermions

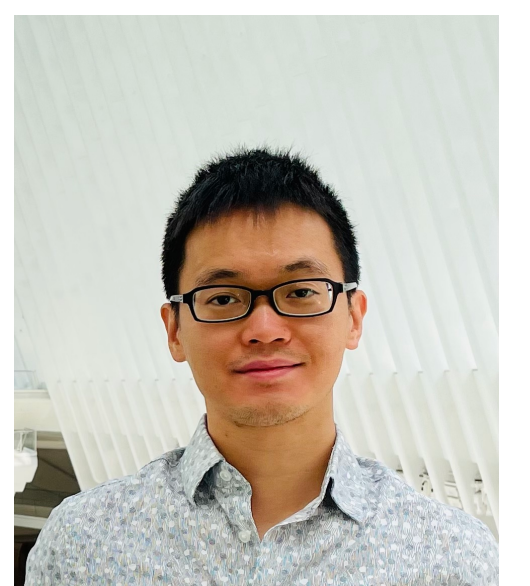
Syracuse University

Aug 12, 2026

$$[Q^V, Q^A] \neq 0$$



Sal Pace
(IAS)



Shu-Heng
Shao (MIT)

AC—Pace—Shao 2409.12220
[PRL Jan 2025]

Motivation

Fermions on the Lattice

- Long-standing challenge: how to realize **chiral global symmetries** of fermions on the **lattice**?

Nielsen–Ninomiya (1981)

- Various approaches have been studied over the years:

- Staggered fermions

Kogut–Susskind (1975)

Banks et al. (1976)

- Non-local models with modified lattice derivatives

Drell et al. (1976)

- Domain wall fermions, coupled to SPT bulk

Kaplan hep-lat/9206013

- Symmetric mass generation

Wang–Wen 1807.05998

- (Modified) Villain models

Seifnashri 2601.14359

Thorngren et al. 2601.04304

...

Baig et al. 2607.09935

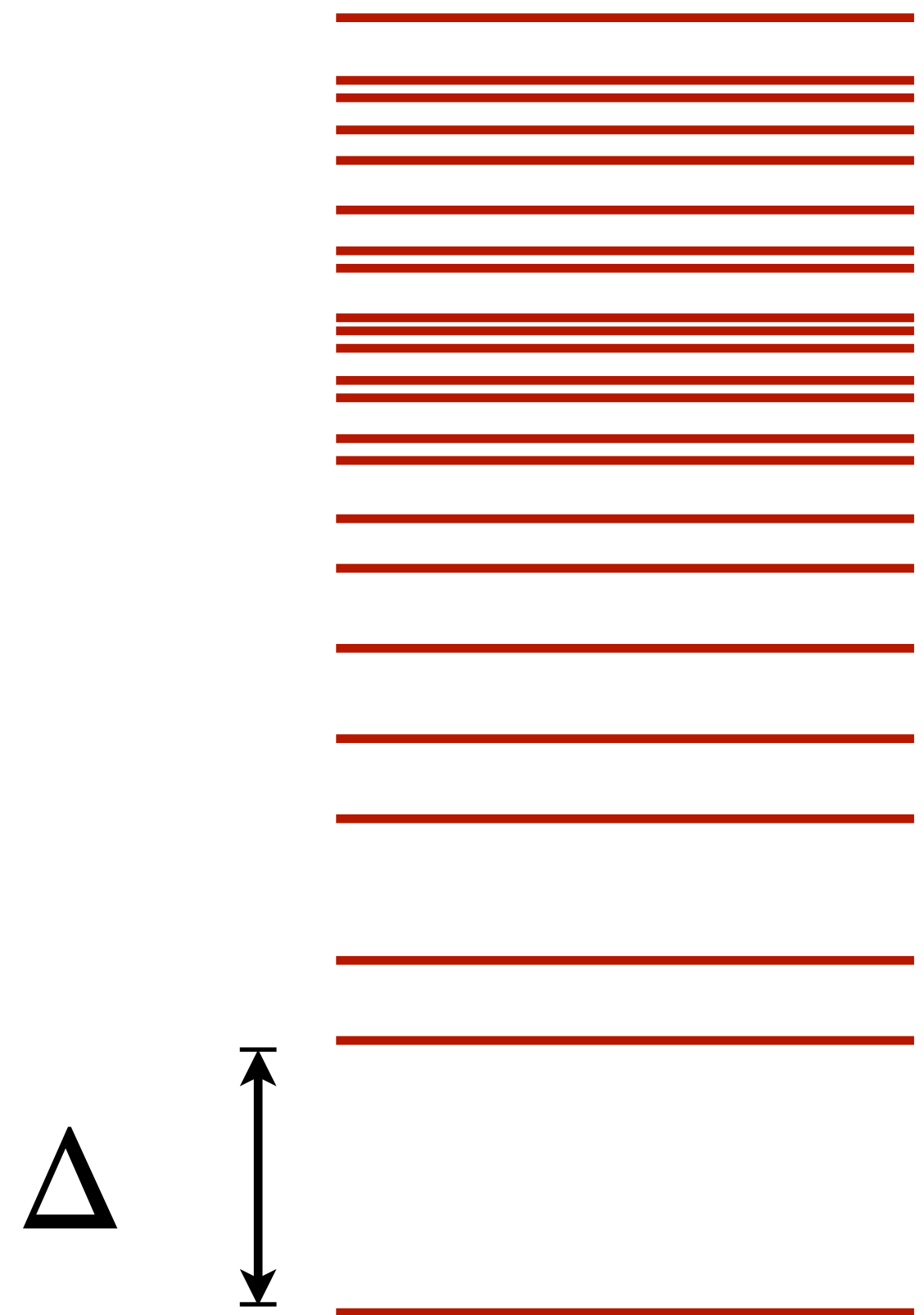
Lu–Shao 2608.02728

Dharanikota–Fidkowski 2608.02722

Anomalies

- Anomalies lead to **non-perturbative constraints** on infrared (IR) dynamics
∴ extremely powerful in analyzing strongly coupled QFT/quantum matter
- Obstruction to trivial gapped phases Lieb–Schultz–Mattis (1961)
- Sometimes, anomaly-enforced *gaplessness* Wang–Senthil 1401.1142
Córdova–Ohmori 1910.04962
- A symmetry of a quantum theory is **anomalous** if it forbids a symmetric gapped phase with unique ground state
- **Anomaly matching**: anomalies of **UV (ultraviolet) symmetries** must be matched by anomalous **IR symmetries** 't Hooft (1980)

Anomaly = guarantee of interesting IR dynamics



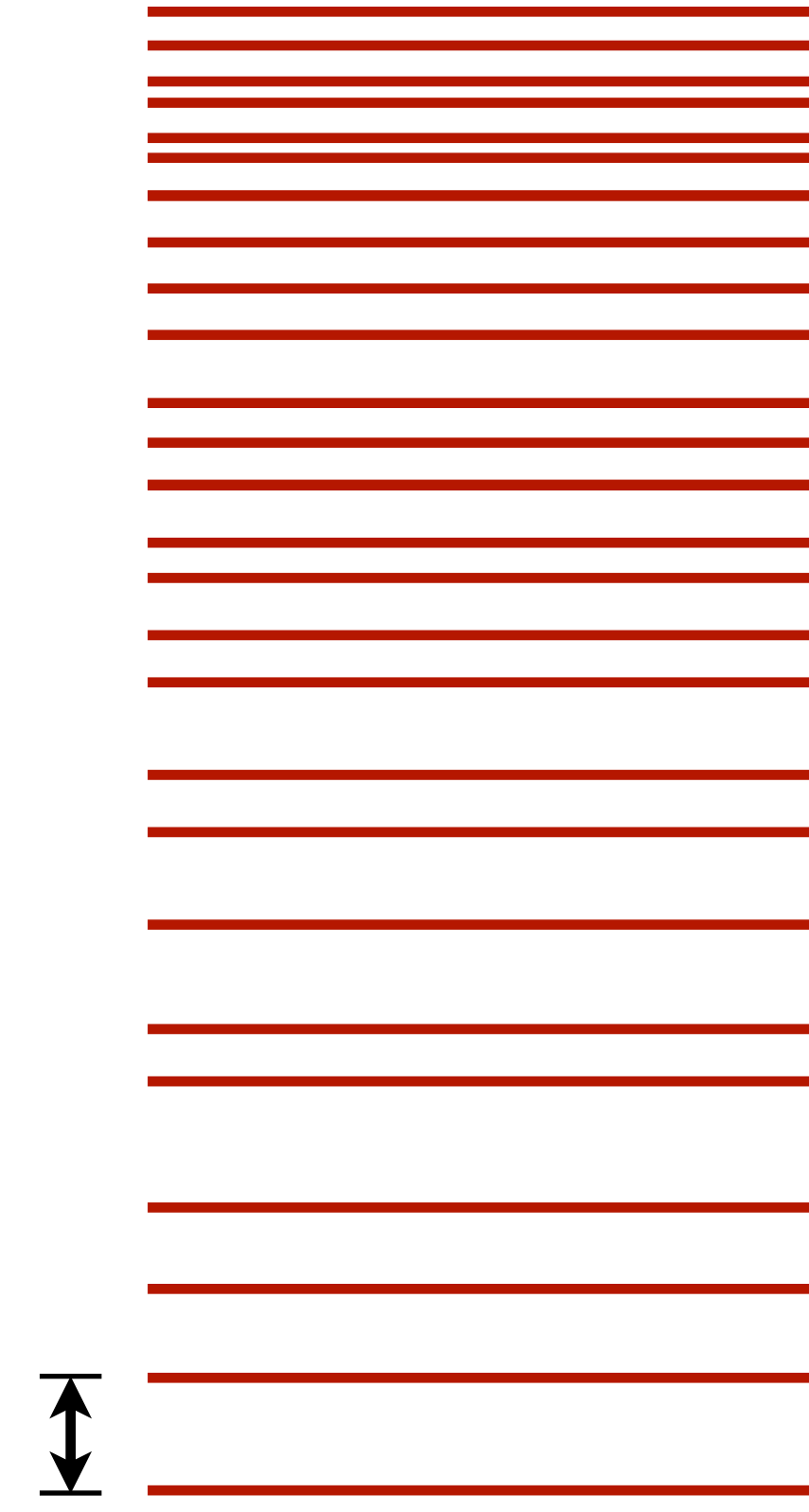
$$\Delta = O(1)$$

Gapped with unique
ground state



$$\Delta = O(e^{-L})$$

Gapped with ground
state degeneracy



$$\Delta = O(L^{-\alpha})$$

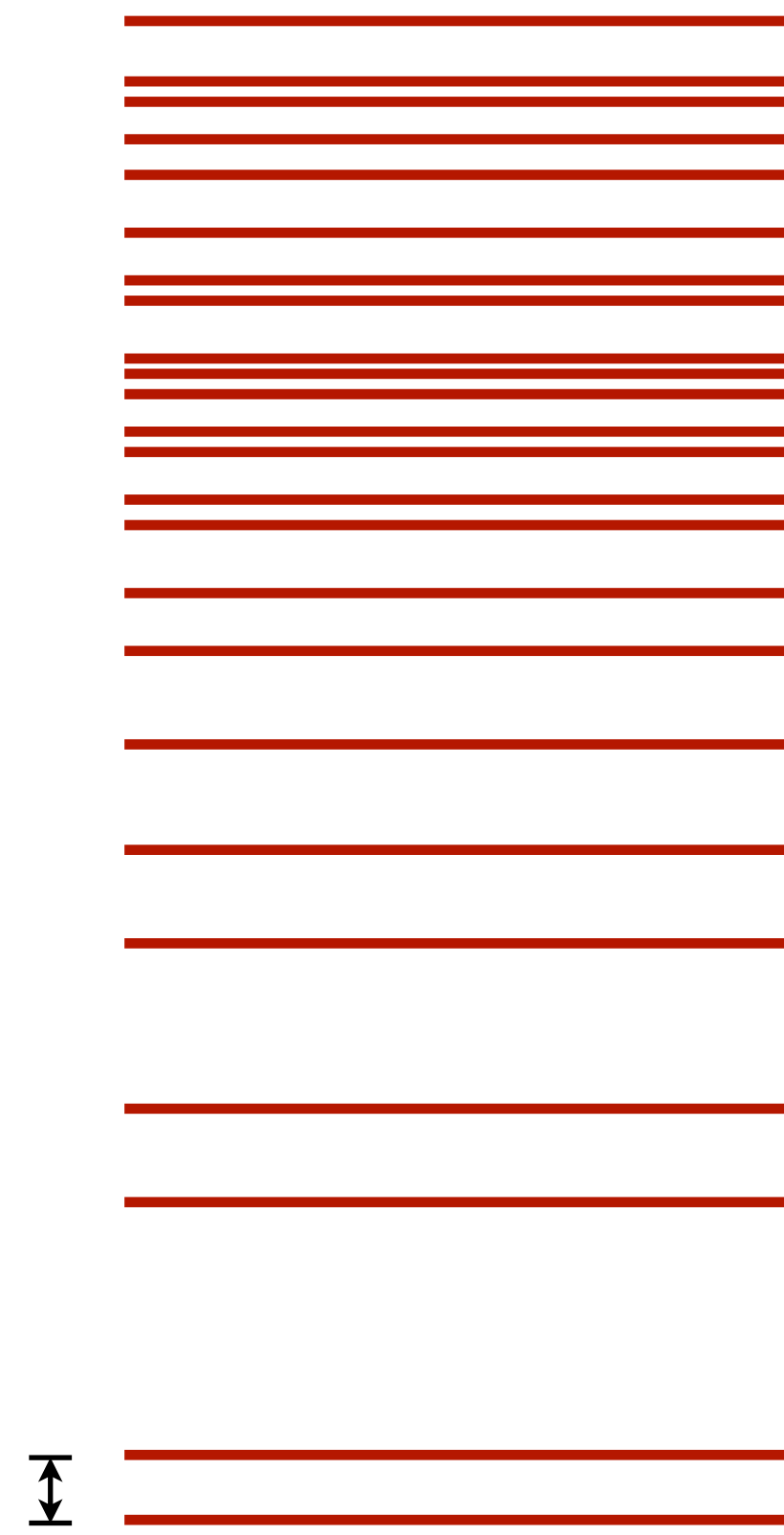
Gapless

Anomaly = guarantee of interesting IR dynamics



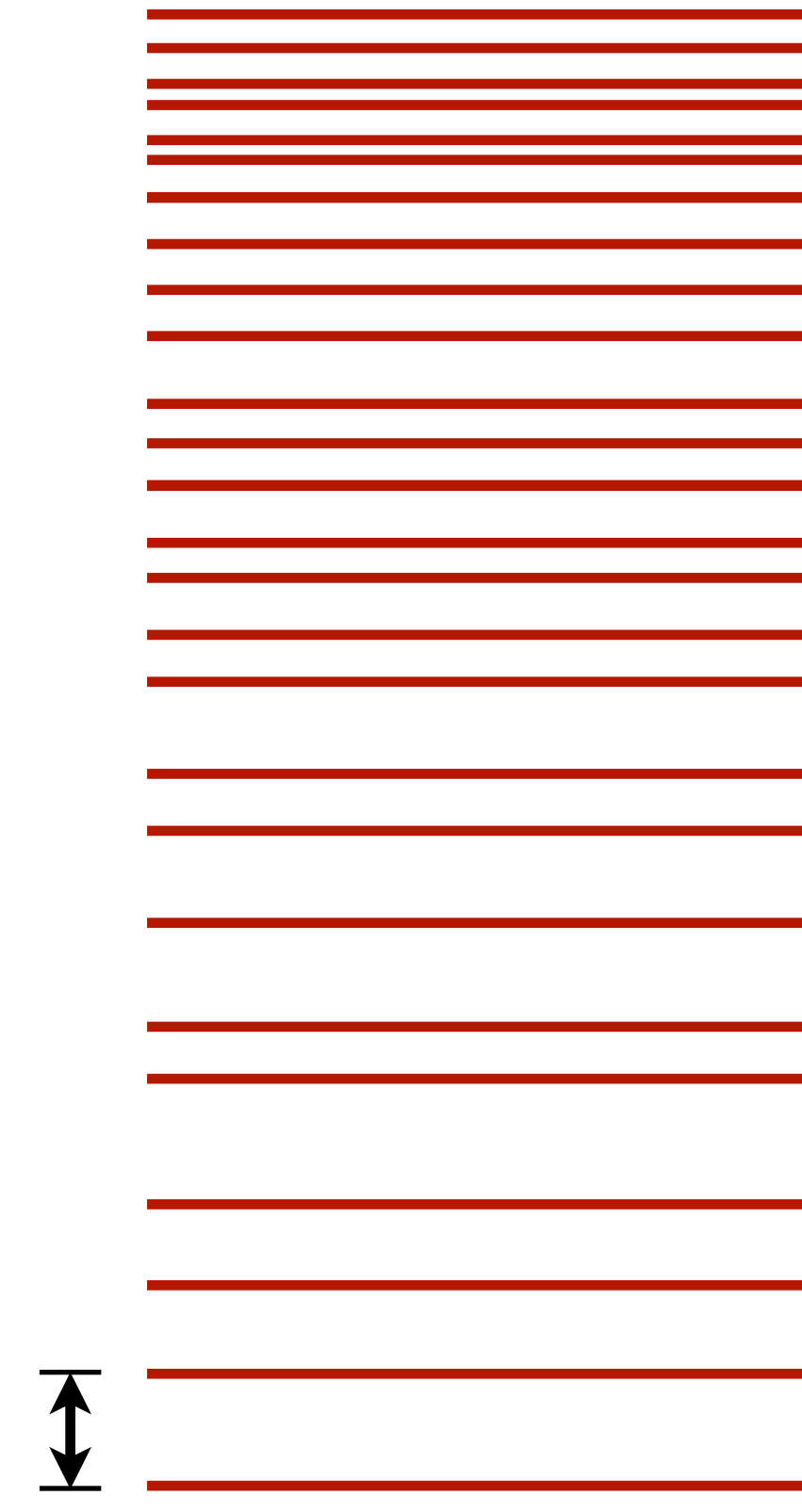
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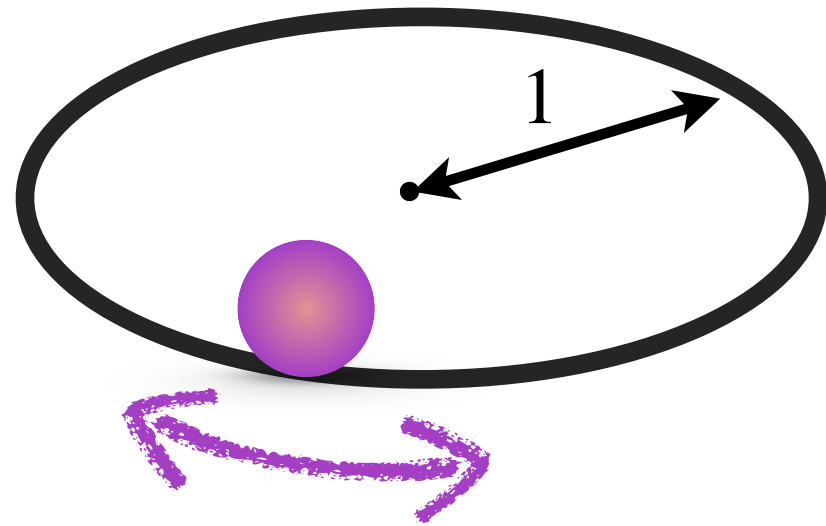
$$\Delta = O(L^{-\alpha})$$

Gapless

Warm-up: anomalies in 0+1d

(a.k.a. projective reps in QM)

Particle on a ring



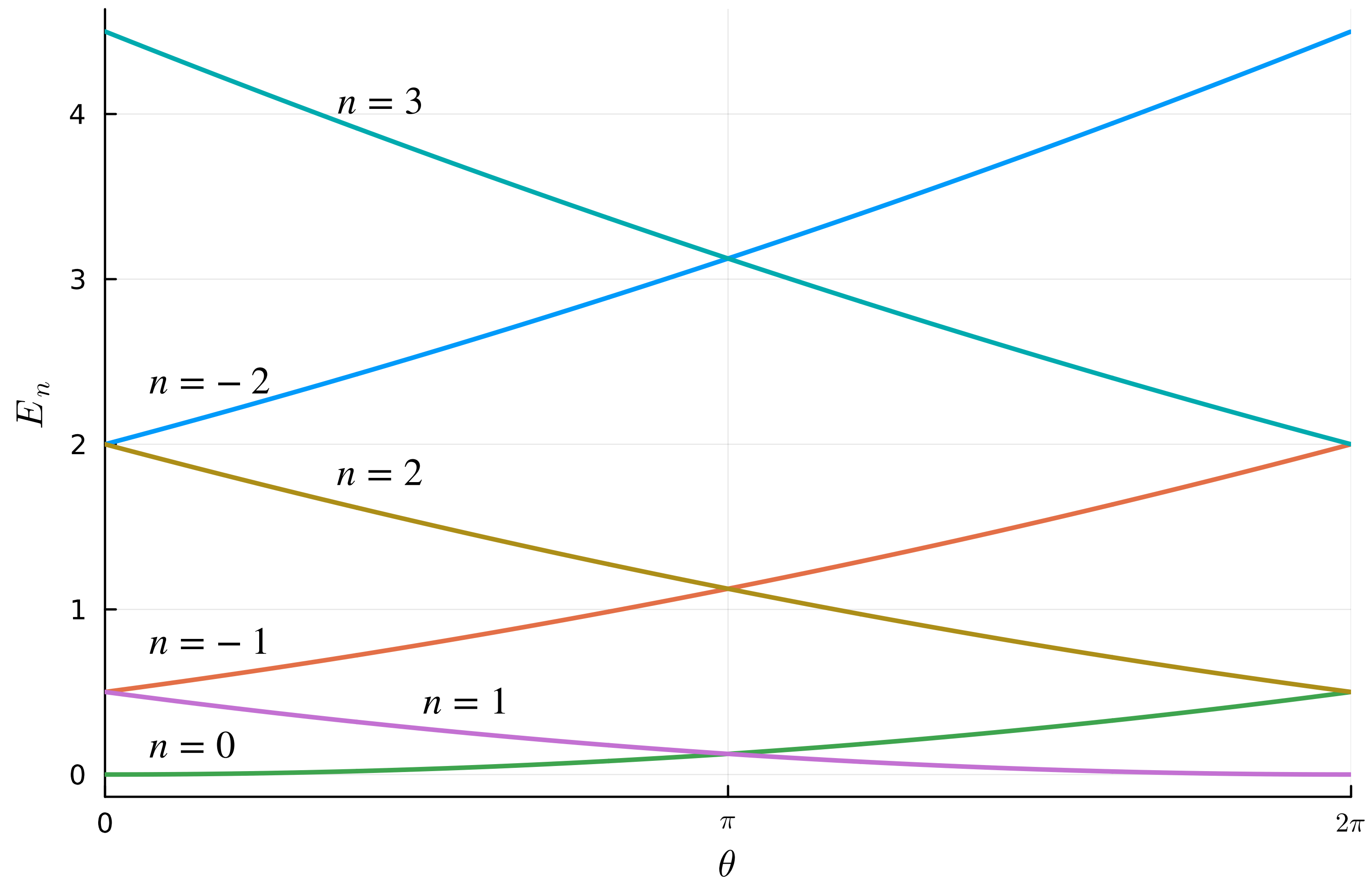
$$L = \frac{1}{2}\dot{x}^2 + \frac{\theta}{2\pi}\dot{x}, \quad x \sim x + 2\pi$$

The corresponding Hamiltonian is $H = \frac{1}{2} \left(-i\frac{\partial}{\partial x} - \frac{\theta}{2\pi} \right)^2$

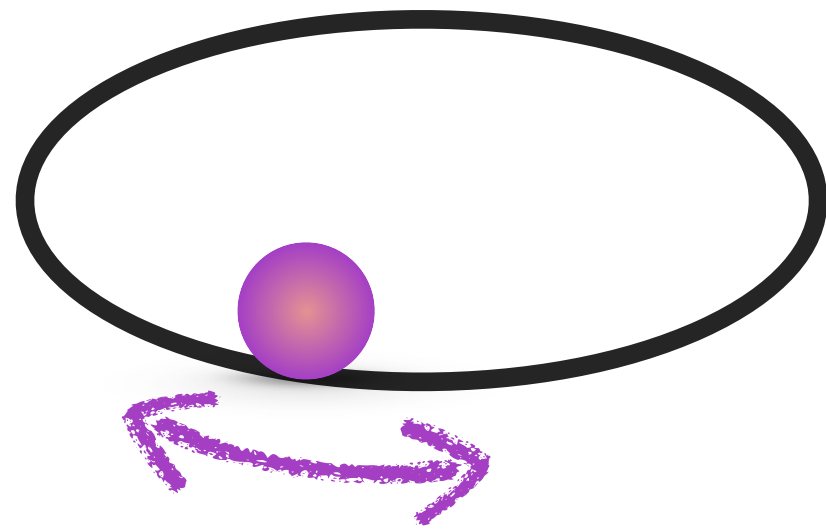
Its eigenfunctions are $\psi_n(x) \propto e^{inx}$, $n \in \mathbb{Z}$, with eigenvalues $E_n = \frac{1}{2} \left(n - \frac{\theta}{2\pi} \right)^2$

Note: only the value of $\theta \bmod 2\pi$ is physical, since $H_\theta = e^{-ix} H_{\theta+2\pi} e^{ix}$

Particle on a ring

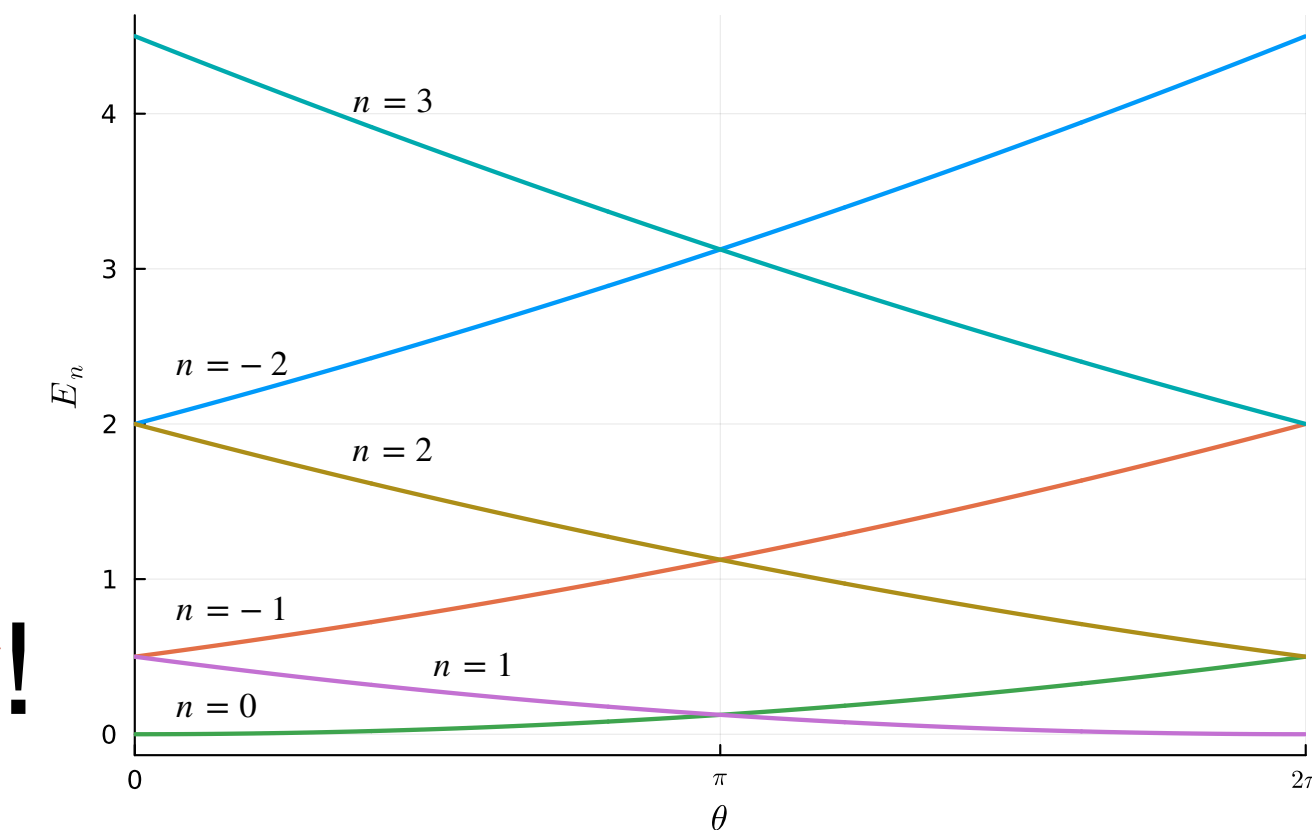


Particle on a ring



$$H = \left(-i \frac{\partial}{\partial x} - \frac{\theta}{2\pi} \right)^2$$

Degeneracies at $\theta = \pi$ are the consequence of an **anomaly**!



- U(1) shift symmetry $x \mapsto x + a$, $a \sim a + 2\pi$ for all θ $\psi_n(x) \mapsto e^{ina} \psi_n(x)$
- $\mathbb{Z}_2$ reflection symmetry $x \mapsto -x$ for $\theta = 0, \pi$ $\psi_n(x) \mapsto \begin{cases} \psi_{-n}(x) & \theta = 0 \\ \psi_{1-n}(x) & \theta = \pi \end{cases}$

$\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2$ subgroup has a mixed anomaly at $\theta = \pi$

- each eigenspace carries projective rep $\Rightarrow$ at least 2-fold degenerate
- symmetric potentials e.g. $V(x) = \lambda \cos(2x)$ cannot open a gap

Chiral anomaly in 1+1d

Massless free Dirac fermions

- A Dirac field forms a reducible representation of the 1+1d Clifford algebra, $\Psi = \begin{pmatrix} \Psi_L \\ \Psi_R \end{pmatrix}$ where Ψ_L and Ψ_R are 1-component (*complex*) Weyl fermions

- Massless free Dirac field theory is described by the action

$$S = i \int dt dx \left(\Psi_L^\dagger (\partial_t - \partial_x) \Psi_L + \Psi_R^\dagger (\partial_t + \partial_x) \Psi_R \right)$$

- Ψ_L, Ψ_R : left- and right-moving Weyl fermions, respectively

Symmetries of the field theory

$$S = i \int dt dx \left(\Psi_L^\dagger (\partial_t - \partial_x) \Psi_L + \Psi_R^\dagger (\partial_t + \partial_x) \Psi_R \right)$$

- Number conservation and charge conjugation for Ψ_L and Ψ_R :

$$\left(\text{U}(1)^L \rtimes \mathbb{Z}_2^{\mathcal{C}^L} \right) \times \left(\text{U}(1)^R \rtimes \mathbb{Z}_2^{\mathcal{C}^R} \right) \cong \text{O}(2)^L \times \text{O}(2)^R$$
- $\text{U}(1)^L : \Psi_L \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} \Psi_L, \Psi_R \rightarrow \Psi_R, \quad \mathbb{Z}_2^{\mathcal{C}^L} : \Psi_L \leftrightarrow \Psi_L^\dagger, \Psi_R \rightarrow \Psi_R$
 $\text{U}(1)^R : \Psi_L \rightarrow \Psi_L, \Psi_R \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} \Psi_R, \quad \mathbb{Z}_2^{\mathcal{C}^R} : \Psi_L \rightarrow \Psi_L, \Psi_R \leftrightarrow \Psi_R^\dagger$
- Conserved charges: $Q^L = \int dx \Psi_L^\dagger \Psi_L, \quad Q^R = \int dx \Psi_R^\dagger \Psi_R$

Vector and Axial U(1)

$$S = i \int dt dx \left(\Psi_L^\dagger (\partial_t - \partial_x) \Psi_L + \Psi_R^\dagger (\partial_t + \partial_x) \Psi_R \right)$$

Define *vector* and *axial* charges: $\mathcal{Q}^V = \mathcal{Q}^L + \mathcal{Q}^R$, $\mathcal{Q}^A = \mathcal{Q}^L - \mathcal{Q}^R$

$$\text{U}(1)^{\mathcal{V}} : \Psi_L \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} \Psi_L, \Psi_R \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} \Psi_R$$

$$\text{U}(1)^{\mathcal{A}} : \Psi_L \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} \Psi_L, \Psi_R \rightarrow e^{+i\theta} \Psi_R$$

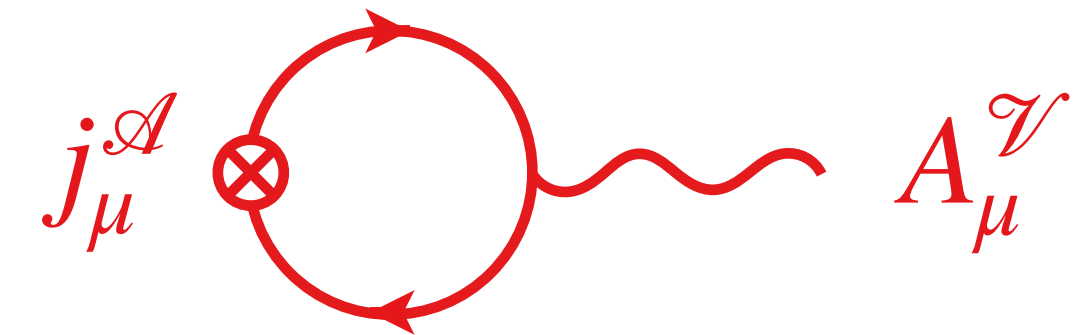
These symmetries have a **mixed anomaly**, called the “chiral anomaly”

Chiral anomaly

- $U(1)^{\mathcal{A}}$ symmetry is broken upon gauging $U(1)^{\mathcal{V}}$ symmetry

Johnson (1963)

$$\langle \partial^\mu j_\mu^{\mathcal{A}} \rangle = \frac{1}{2\pi} \epsilon^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu}^{\mathcal{V}}$$



- Relatedly, the equal-time commutator of the two current densities has a contact term (“*Schwinger term*”)

$$[j_t^{\mathcal{V}}(t, x_1), j_t^{\mathcal{A}}(t, x_2)] \propto i\delta'(x_1 - x_2)$$

Schwinger (1959)

- Impossible to realize such a commutator in a **finite-dimensional H.S.**
(*∵ l.h.s. has vanishing trace but r.h.s. does not*)

Kapustin-Sopenko 2401.02533

- Realized recently in modified Villain models with *infinite-dimensional H.S.*

Seifnashri 2601.14359

Lu-Shao 2608.02728

Dharanikota-Fidkowski 2608.02722

See also: Berkowitz et al. 2310.17539

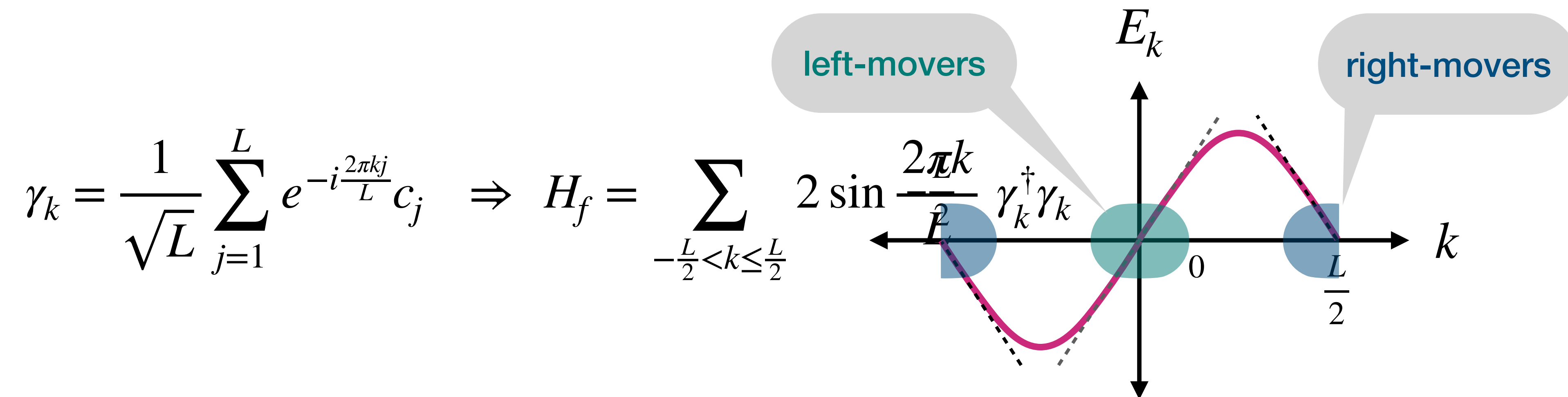
A lattice axial $U(1)$ symmetry

Staggered fermions in 1+1d

$$H_f = -i \sum_{j=1}^L \left(c_j^\dagger c_{j+1} + c_j c_{j+1}^\dagger \right)$$

Kogut-Susskind (1975)

- Single-component complex fermions on a periodic chain of (*even*) L sites
- Intuitively, two components of continuum Dirac field are distributed in a “staggered” manner between even and odd sites



Staggered fermions in 1+1d

$$H_f = -i \sum_{j=1}^L \left(c_j^\dagger c_{j+1} + c_j c_{j+1}^\dagger \right)$$

- Single-component complex fermions on a periodic chain of (*even*) L sites
- Intuitively, two components of continuum Dirac field are distributed in a “staggered” manner between even and odd sites
- H_f has the on-site symmetry $c_j \rightarrow e^{-i\theta} c_j$, generated by $Q^V = \sum_{j=1}^L (c_j^\dagger c_j - \frac{1}{2})$,
 $\Rightarrow$ lattice *vector* U(1) symmetry
- **Question:** Does H_f also have a lattice *axial* U(1) symmetry?

Staggered fermions in 1+1d

$$H_f = -i \sum_{j=1}^L (c_j^\dagger c_{j+1} + c_j c_{j+1}^\dagger)$$

- Single-component complex fermions on a periodic chain of (*even*) L sites

Answer: Yes!

- Intuitively, two components of a continuous Dirac field are distributed in a “staggered” manner between even and odd sites

Hint: decompose each *complex* fermion into two *real* fermions

- H_f has the on-site symmetry $c_j \rightarrow e^{i\theta} c_j$, generated by $Q = \sum_{j=1}^L (c_j^\dagger c_j - \frac{1}{2})$,
 $\Rightarrow$ lattice vector U(1) symmetry

- **Question:** Does H_f also have a lattice axial U(1) symmetry?

Be Real

- Recall, $Q^A = \mathcal{C}^R Q^V (\mathcal{C}^R)^{-1}$, where $\mathcal{C}^R \Psi_R (\mathcal{C}^R)^{-1} = \Psi_R^\dagger$

$$\begin{aligned} Q^V &= Q^L + Q^R \\ Q^A &= Q^L - Q^R \end{aligned}$$

- To find UV axial charge, look for a **UV symmetry** that flows to $\mathcal{C}^R$ in the IR
- Useful to decompose Weyl fermion into Majorana-Weyl (*real*) fermions as $\Psi_R = A_R + iB_R$, so that $\mathcal{C}^R : A_R \rightarrow A_R, B_R \rightarrow -B_R$
- Decompose the lattice fermions similarly into real fermions, i.e.

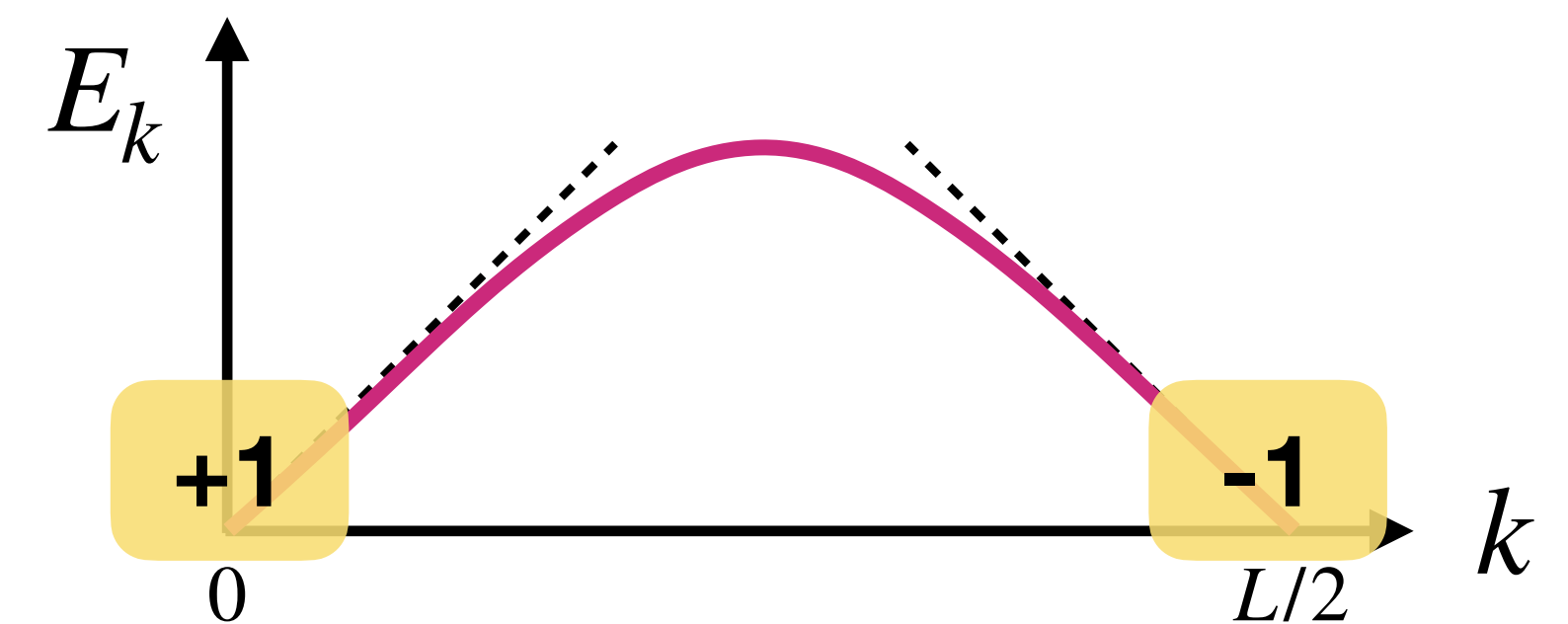
$$c_j = \frac{a_j + ib_j}{2} \text{ with } \{a_j, a_{j'}\} = \{b_j, b_{j'}\} = 2\delta_{j,j'}, \{a_j, b_{j'}\} = 0$$

Majorana translation T_b

- In real fermion representation, $H_f = -\frac{i}{2} \sum_j (a_j a_{j+1} + b_j b_{j+1})$
- Using momentum modes, $H_f = \sum_{0 < k < L/2} \sin \frac{2\pi k}{L} (\alpha_{-k} \alpha_k + \beta_{-k} \beta_k)$

$$\alpha_k = \frac{1}{\sqrt{L}} \sum_{j=1}^L e^{-i\frac{2\pi k j}{L}} a_j$$
- α_k, β_k with $k \approx 0$ and $L/2$ identified with continuum fields A_L, B_L and A_R, B_R in the IR
- Majorana translation, $T_b : b_j \rightarrow b_{j+1}$ acts on these momentum modes as

$$T_b \beta_{-k} |\Omega\rangle = e^{-i\frac{2\pi k}{L}} \beta_{-k} |\Omega\rangle$$



Axial U(1) on the lattice

- Conclusion: T_b flows to $\mathcal{C}^R$ in the IR limit

- Define $Q^A = T_b Q^V T_b^{-1}$ in analogy with the continuum $Q^A = \mathcal{C}^R Q^V (\mathcal{C}^R)^{-1}$

cf. "arrow charge" of Thacker (1994), Horvath-Thacker (1998)

$$Q^V = \sum_j \frac{i}{2} a_j b_j \quad Q^A = \sum_j \frac{i}{2} a_j b_{j+1}$$

- Q^A has several nice properties:

- commutes with H_f ,
- has quantized eigenvalues,
- action on fermions is locality-preserving,
- is a sum of mutually-commuting local fermion bilinears $\Rightarrow$

$$\begin{aligned} e^{i\theta Q^A} a_j e^{-i\theta Q^A} &= \cos \theta a_j + \sin \theta b_{j+1} \\ e^{i\theta Q^A} b_j e^{-i\theta Q^A} &= \cos \theta b_j - \sin \theta a_{j-1} \end{aligned}$$

$$e^{i\theta Q^A} = \prod_j e^{i\theta q_{j,j+1}^A}$$

A comment on Nielsen-Ninomiya

It follows from the Nielsen-Ninomiya theorem, that a lattice axial charge cannot satisfy both of the following properties:

(1) its eigenvalues are integer-quantized, and

Nielsen-Ninomiya (1981)

(2) it commutes with the vector charge

Friedan (1982)

- Q^A satisfies (1) but not (2), but one can construct another charge $\tilde{Q}^A$ that satisfies (2) but not (1):

$$Q^A = \sum_j \frac{i}{2} a_j b_{j+1}$$

$$\tilde{Q}^A = \sum_j \frac{i}{4} (a_j b_{j+1} - b_j a_{j+1})$$

Banks-Susskind-Kogut (1976)

- In the IR, both Q^A and $\tilde{Q}^A$ flow to $\mathcal{Q}^A$



Schwinger's anomaly from Onsager's algebra



$Q^V, Q^A \implies$ Onsager algebra

- Unlike their **continuum** counterparts, the **lattice** axial and vector charges **do not** commute with each other, $[Q^V, Q^A] \neq 0$

- In fact, they generate the **Onsager algebra!** Onsager (1944)

- Define $Q_n = \frac{i}{2} \sum_j a_j b_{j+n}$ and $G_n = \frac{i}{2} \sum_j (a_j a_{j+n} - b_j b_{j+n})$

$$\begin{array}{l} Q^V = Q_0 \\ Q^A = Q_1 \end{array}$$

- They satisfy the commutation relations,

$$[Q_n, Q_m] = iG_{m-n}, \quad [Q_n, G_m] = 2i(Q_{n-m} - Q_{n+m}), \quad [G_n, G_m] = 0$$

$$Q_0 \text{ and } Q_1 \text{ satisfy the Dolan-Grady relations } [Q_0, [Q_0, [Q_0, Q_1]]] = 4[Q_0, Q_1]$$

Emanant axial and vector U(1) symmetries

Cheng-Seiberg 2211.12543

How to see that the **IR symmetries** emanate from the **UV symmetries**?

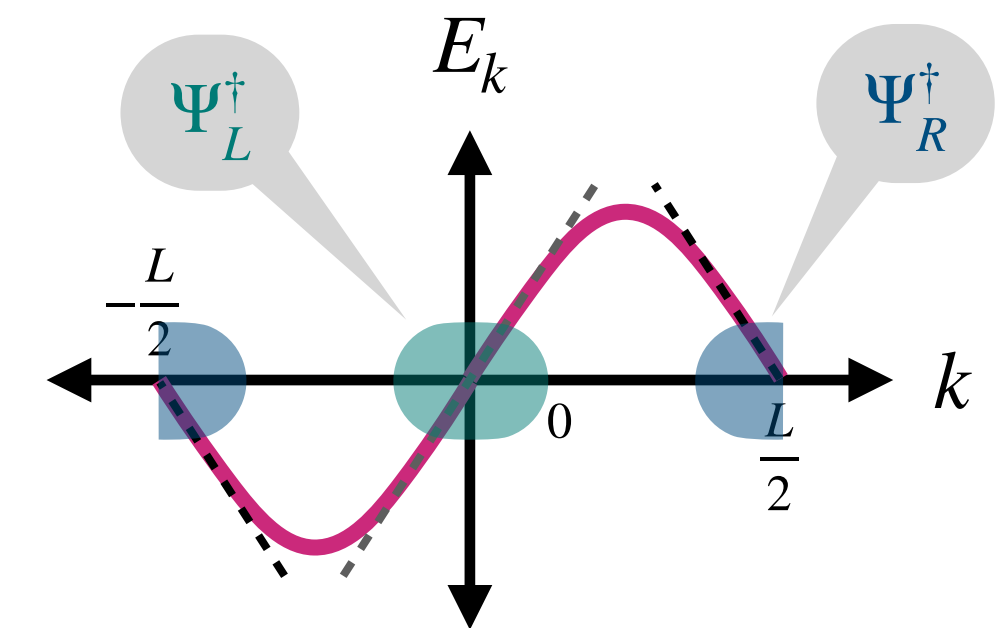
- Recall the momentum modes, $\gamma_k^\dagger = \frac{1}{\sqrt{L}} \sum_j e^{i\frac{2\pi kj}{L}} c_j^\dagger$
- The low-energy modes near $k \approx 0$ and $L/2$ transform under the symmetry charges in a way that mirrors the IR field theory

$$[Q^V, \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger] = \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^A, \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger] \approx \pm \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^V, \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger] = \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^A, \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger] = \pm \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger$$



For fixed n as $L \rightarrow \infty$, we have $Q_n \rightarrow \begin{cases} Q^A & n \text{ odd,} \\ Q^V & n \text{ even,} \end{cases}$ and $G_n \rightarrow 0$.

Emanant axial and vector U(1) symmetries

Cheng-Seiberg 2211.12543

How to see that the IR symmetries emanate from the UV symmetries?

- Recall the momentum modes, $\gamma_k^\dagger = \frac{1}{\sqrt{L}} \sum_j e^{i\frac{2\pi kj}{L}} c_j^\dagger$

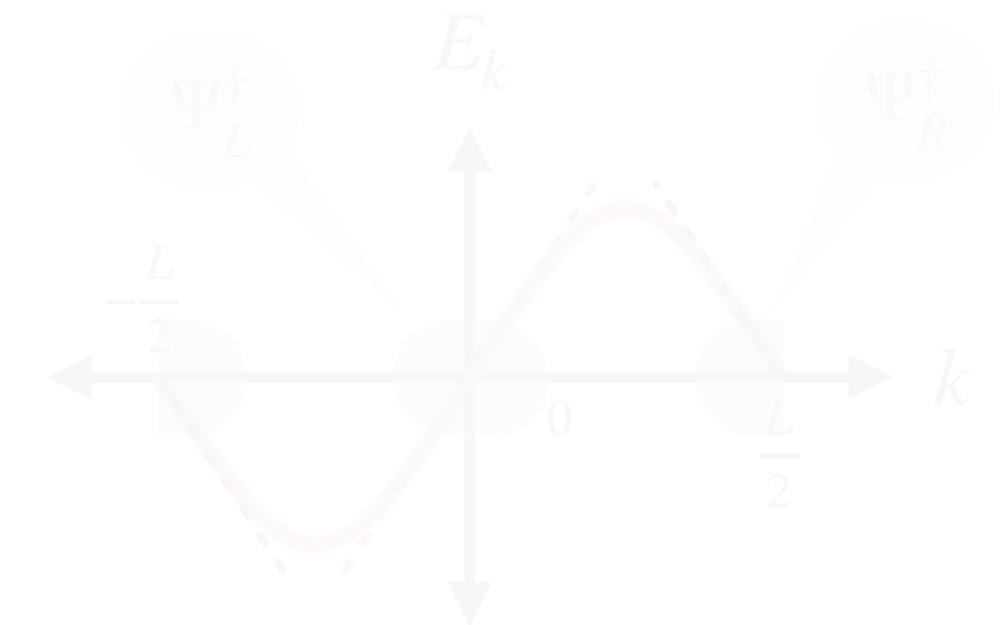
- The lattice Q^V and Q^A flow to the continuum $\mathcal{Q}^V$ and $\mathcal{Q}^A$, i.e. the chiral anomaly is *emanant*, rather than *emergent*!

$$[Q^V, \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger] = \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^A, \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger] \approx \pm \gamma_{k \approx 0, \frac{L}{2}}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^V, \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger] = \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger$$

$$[Q^A, \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger] = \pm \Psi_{L,R}^\dagger$$



For fixed n as $L \rightarrow \infty$, we have $Q_n \rightarrow \begin{cases} \mathcal{Q}^A & n \text{ odd,} \\ \mathcal{Q}^V & n \text{ even,} \end{cases}$ and $G_n \rightarrow 0$.

Anomaly checklist

1. Anomaly matching?
2. Obstruction to gauging the symmetry?
3. Anomaly inflow from 2+1d SPT (*symmetry protected topological*) phase?
4. Anomaly cancellation by stacking?

$Q^V, Q^A \implies$ no symmetric gapped phase

- Can show that any Q^V and Q^A -symmetric *local* Hamiltonian is **gapless**
- Family of symmetric Hamiltonians is parameterized as

$$H_{\text{symm}}(\{g_n\}) = \sum_{j=1}^L \sum_n g_n (i c_j^\dagger c_{j+n} + \text{h.c.})$$

- It is possible to open an energy gap with deformations that preserve Q^V while breaking Q^A (*and vice-versa*)
- Parallels the consequences of the chiral anomaly in the IR

Cf. Frishman et al. (1981)

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Coupling to gauge fields

Upon gauging $U(1)^V$: Q^A is not gauge-invariant, $\tilde{Q}^A(U)$ is not conserved

- The gauged Hamiltonian is $H_V = - \sum_j \left(i c_j^\dagger U_{j+\frac{1}{2}} c_{j+1} + \text{h.c.} \right) + K \sum_j L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}^2$
 where $[L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}, U_{j'+\frac{1}{2}}] = \delta_{j,j'} U_{j'+\frac{1}{2}}$, with Gauss constraints, $L_{j+\frac{1}{2}} - L_{j-\frac{1}{2}} = \frac{i}{2} a_j b_j + \frac{(-1)^j}{2}$
- The gauge-invariant version of $\tilde{Q}^A$ is $\tilde{Q}^A(U) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_j \left(c_j^\dagger U_{j+\frac{1}{2}} c_{j+1} - c_j U_{j+\frac{1}{2}}^\dagger c_{j+1}^\dagger \right)$

$$-i [\tilde{Q}^A(U), H_V] = -\frac{K}{2} \sum_j \{L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}, h_{j+\frac{1}{2}}\} \neq 0$$

Gauging $U(1)^A$

- To further illustrate the fact that $U(1)^A$ is anomaly-free, note that it can be gauged on the lattice:

$$H_A = \sum_j \left[-\frac{i}{4}(a_j - ib_{j+1})U_{j+\frac{1}{2}}(a_{j+1} + ib_{j+2}) + \text{h.c.} \right] + K \sum_j L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}^2$$

$$[L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}, U_{j'+\frac{1}{2}}] = \delta_{j,j'} U_{j'+\frac{1}{2}}, \text{ and the Gauss law is } L_{j+\frac{1}{2}} - L_{j-\frac{1}{2}} = \frac{i}{2} a_j b_{j+1} + \frac{(-1)^j}{2}$$

- Unitarily equivalent to the conventional lattice Schwinger model obtained by gauging $U(1)^V$:

$$H_V = - \sum_j \left[i c_j^\dagger U_{j+\frac{1}{2}} c_{j+1} + \text{h.c.} \right] + K \sum_j L_{j+\frac{1}{2}}^2$$

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Some remarks

- A lattice avatar of the Schwinger term:

$$[q_j^V, \tilde{q}_{j'+1/2}^A] = \frac{i}{2} \sum_j (\delta_{j,j'} - \delta_{j-1,j'}) h_{j'+1/2}$$

- **Interactions?** Lattice version of the 4-fermion Thirring coupling $(\bar{\Psi} \gamma^\mu \Psi)^2$ preserves $U(1)^V$ but breaks $U(1)^A$
- $U(1)^L$ and $U(1)^R$ on the lattice? $Q^V \pm Q^A$ have unquantized eigenvalues; do not generate locality-preserving symmetry actions

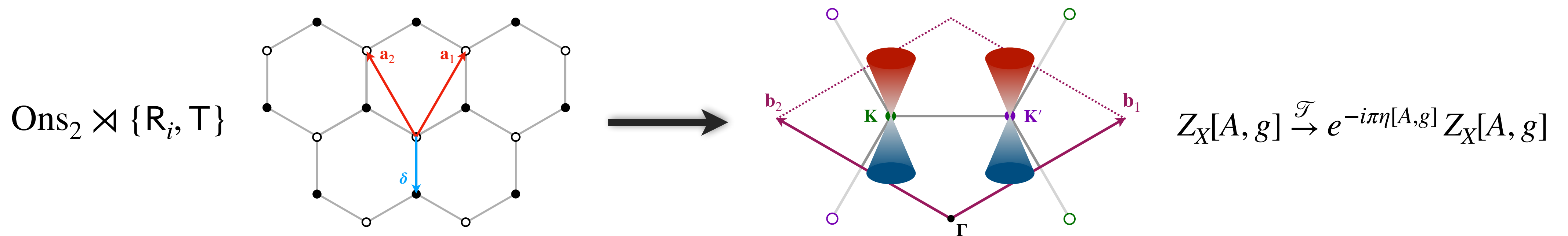
cf. Lu-Shao 2608.02728

More examples

Other anomalies arising from Onsager-like symmetries:

- $SU(2)$ “parity” anomaly in 2+1d

Pace-Kim-**AC**-Shao 2505.04684



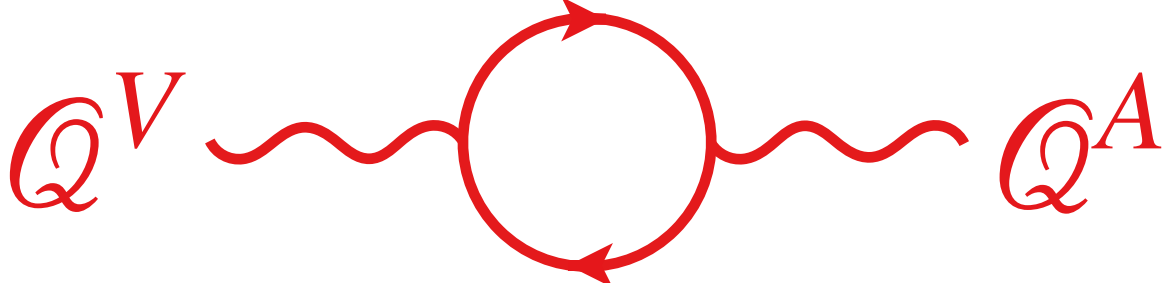
- Witten’s $SU(2)$ anomaly in 3+1d

Gioia-Thorngren 2503.07708

Also: Catterall et al. 2501.10862, Kim et al. 2512.04150

Summary and Outlook

- We discussed how symmetries of 1+1d massless Dirac fermions are realized exactly in a lattice Hamiltonian
- The chiral anomaly emanates from a lattice Onsager symmetry: first in a family of such examples
- Classification of anomalies of Onsager symmetries?
- Non-Abelian perturbative anomalies on the lattice?

$$[Q^V, Q^A] \neq 0 \longrightarrow Q^V \text{---}\text{wavy}\text{---}\text{loop}\text{---}\text{wavy}\text{---} Q^A$$
A Feynman diagram representing a fermion loop. It consists of a red circle with two arrows indicating a clockwise flow. Two red wavy lines extend from the left and right sides of the circle. The left wavy line is labeled with a red Q^V and the right wavy line is labeled with a red Q^A .

Thank You

Backup Slides

Sketch of gaplessness proof

- (1) Requiring invariance under both $U(1)^V$ and $U(1)^A$ implies invariance under $e^{-i\frac{\pi}{2}Q^A}e^{i\frac{\pi}{2}Q^V}$, which acts identically to $T_bT_a^{-1}$
- (2) Imposing $T_bT_a^{-1}$ rules out any coupling between a_j and b_j Majoranas, if the Hamiltonian must be a sum of local terms
- (3) Any quartic or higher order coupling in either a_j or b_j breaks $U(1)^V$
- (4) The only allowed local Hamiltonian terms are of the form $\sum_j (ia_ja_{j+n} + ib_jb_{j+n})$
- (5) The entire family of such Hamiltonians is gapless $\sum_n g_n \sum_j (ic_j^\dagger c_{j+n} + h.c.)$

Lattice T-duality

- Bosonizing the staggered fermion Hamiltonian gives the spin-1/2 XX model

$$H_{\text{XX}} = \sum_{j=1}^L \left(X_j X_{j+1} + Y_j Y_{j+1} \right)$$

- The IR limit of this Hamiltonian is the $c = 1$ compact boson CFT at radius $R = \sqrt{2}$
(in our conventions, $R = 1$ is the self-dual radius)

$$S = \frac{R^2}{4\pi} \int d\Phi \wedge \star (d\Phi) = \frac{1}{4\pi R^2} \int d\Theta \wedge \star (d\Theta)$$

- We find two U(1) symmetries of the XX model that flow to the “momentum” and “winding” U(1) symmetries of the CFT

$$Q^M = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j=1}^L Z_j \quad Q^W = \frac{1}{4} \sum_{n=1}^{L/2} (X_{2n-1} Y_{2n} - Y_{2n} X_{2n+1})$$

- The T-duality $R \rightarrow 1/R$ of the CFT is realized as a unitary on the lattice