

# Chapter 1

## Metal to Topological Insulator Scattering

We compute the spin-active scattering matrix and the local spectrum at the interface between a metal and a three-dimensional topological band insulator. We show that there exists a critical incident angle at which complete (100%) spin flip reflection occurs and the spin rotation angle jumps by  $\pi$ . We discuss the origin of this phenomena, and systematically study the dependence of spin-flip and spin-conserving scattering amplitudes on the interface transparency and metal Fermi surface parameters. The interface spectrum contains a well-defined Dirac cone in the tunneling limit, and smoothly evolves into a continuum of metal induced gap states for good contacts. We also investigate the complex band structure of  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ .

### 1.1 Introduction

Recently discovered three dimensional topological band insulators [?, ?, ?], such as  $\text{Bi}_{1-x}\text{Sb}_x$  [?] and  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  [?, ?, ?], are spin-orbit coupled crystal solids with a bulk gap but protected gapless surface states. The low energy excitations at the surface are helical Dirac fermions, i.e., their spin and momentum are entangled (locked) [?]. The charge and spin transport on the surface of a topological insulator are intrinsically coupled [?]. This makes these materials a promising new platform for spintronics. In addition, heterostructures involving topological insulator, superconductor, and/or ferromagnet have been predicted to show a remarkable array of novel spectral and transport properties (for review see Ref. [?, ?, ?]).

Electronic or spintronic devices based on topological insulators will almost inevitably involve metal as measurement probes or functioning components [?]. This motivates us to study the local spectrum near the interface between a metal (M) and a topological insulator (TI). For a metal-ordinary semiconductor junction with good contact, it is well known that the metallic Bloch states penetrate into the semiconductor as evanescent waves localized at the interface (for energies within the band gap). Such interface states are known as metal induced gap states (MIGS) [?, ?]. They play an important role in controlling the junction properties, e.g., by pinning the semiconductor Fermi level to determine the Schottky barrier height [?], a key parameter of the junction.

The local spectrum at the M-TI junction is intimately related to the spin-active scattering of electrons at the M-TI interface. In this paper, we systematically study the evolution of the scattering matrix and the interface spectra with the junction transparency and metal Fermi surface parameters. The scattering matrix [?] we obtain here also forms the basis to investigate the details of the superconducting proximity effect near the superconductor-TI interface [?], which was shown

by Fu and Kane to host Majorana fermions [?].

The scattering at the M-TI interface differs significantly from its two dimensional analog, the interface between a metal and a quantum spin Hall (QSH) insulator studied by Tokoyama et al [?]. They predicted a giant spin rotation angle  $\alpha \sim \pi$  and interpreted the enhancement as resonance with the one-dimensional helical edge modes. By contrast, for M-TI interface we predict a critical incident angle at which complete spin flipping occurs and the spin rotation angle jumps by  $\pi$ . We will explain its origin, in particular its relation to the surface helical Dirac spectrum, and discuss its spintronic implications.

This paper is organized as follows. We will first compute the scattering matrix using a  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  continuum model by matching the envelope wave functions at the M-TI interface. This simple calculation is easy to understand, and it brings out the main physics of our problem. Along the way, we will discuss the complex band structure of  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ , which describes the decaying (rather than propagating Bloch wave) solutions of the crystal Hamiltonian. The various caveats of this calculation are then remedied by considering a much more general lattice model. Most importantly, it enables us to track how the scattering matrix and interface spectrum change with interface transparency. It also sheds light on the origin of perfect spin-flip scattering at the critical angle. We will show that the results obtained from these two complementary methods are consistent with each.

## 1.2 Model Hamiltonian and complex band structure

We consider  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  as a prime example of 3D strong topological insulators. Its low energy  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  Hamiltonian was obtained by Zhang et al [?],

$$\hat{H}_{TI}(\mathbf{k}) = \epsilon_0(\mathbf{k})\hat{1} + \sum_{\mu=0}^3 d_{\mu}(\mathbf{k})\hat{\Gamma}_{\mu}.$$

Here  $d_0(\mathbf{k}) = M - B_1k_z^2 - B_2(k_x^2 + k_y^2)$ ,  $d_1(\mathbf{k}) = A_2k_x$ ,  $d_2(\mathbf{k}) = A_2k_y$ ,  $d_3(\mathbf{k}) = A_1k_z$ , and  $\epsilon_0(\mathbf{k}) = C + D_1k_z^2 + D_2(k_x^2 + k_y^2)$ . The numerical values of  $M$ ,  $A$ ,  $B$ ,  $C$ ,  $D$  are given in Ref. [?]. We choose the basis  $(|+\uparrow\rangle, |+\downarrow\rangle, |-\uparrow\rangle, |-\downarrow\rangle)$ , where  $\pm$  labels the hybridized  $p_z$  orbital with even (odd) parity [?]. The Gamma matrices are defined as  $\hat{\Gamma}_0 = \hat{\tau}_3 \otimes \hat{1}$ ,  $\hat{\Gamma}_i = \hat{\tau}_1 \otimes \hat{\sigma}_i$ , with  $\hat{\tau}_i$  ( $\hat{\sigma}_i$ ) being the Pauli matrices in the orbital (spin) space. The chemical potential of as-grown  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  crystal actually lies in the conduction band [?]. By hole doping [?] or applying a gate voltage [?], the chemical potential can be tuned inside the gap. The system is well described by  $H_{TI}$  (note that energy zero is set as in the middle of the band gap).

In this section, we first adopt a rather artificial model for metals with negligible spin-orbit coupling. It is obtained by turning off the spin-orbit interaction (setting  $d_{\mu} = 0$  for  $\mu=1,2,3$ ) in  $H_{TI}$  and shifting the Fermi level into the conduction band. The result is spin-degenerate two-band Hamiltonian

$$\hat{H}_M(\mathbf{k}) = [\epsilon_0(\mathbf{k}) - E_F]\hat{1} + d_0(\mathbf{k})\hat{\Gamma}_0.$$

Its band structure, schematically shown in Fig. 1(b), consists of two oppositely dispersing bands (the solid and dash line).  $E_F$  is tuned to be much higher than the band crossing point, so the scattering properties of low energy electrons near the Fermi surface are insensitive to the band crossing at high energies. This claim will be verified later using a more generic model for the metal. A similar model was used in the study of metal-QSH interface [?].

Matching the wave functions of two dissimilar materials (such as Au and  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ ) at interface is in general complicated within the  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  formalism, because the envelope wave functions on either

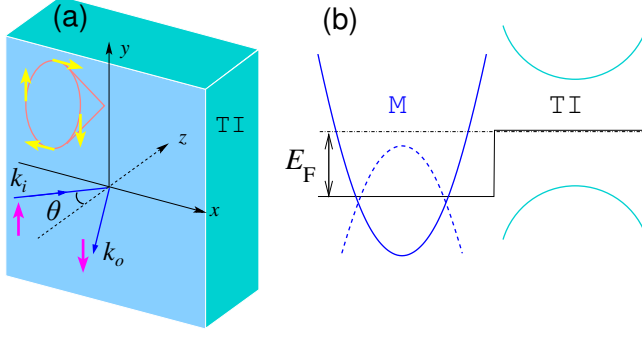


Figure 1.1: (a) Scattering geometry at a metal (M)-topological insulator (TI) interface. (b) Schematic band structure of the metal (modeled by  $\hat{H}_M$ ) and topological insulator.

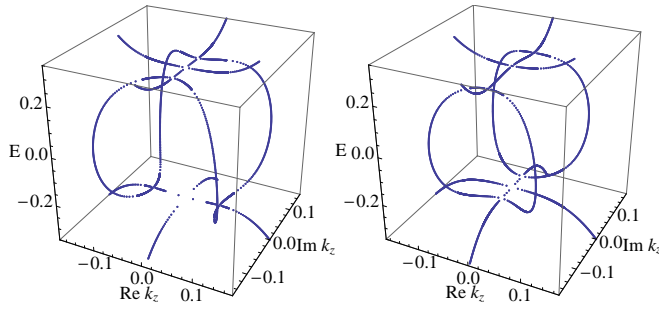


Figure 1.2: The complex band structure of topological insulator described by  $\hat{H}_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$  for  $k_y = 0$ ,  $k_x = 0.02$  (left) and  $0.04$  (right).  $E$  is measured in eV, and  $k$  in  $\text{\AA}^{-1}$ . Subgap states with complex  $k_z$  represent evanescent waves. The topology of real lines [?] changes as  $k_x$  is increased.

side are defined using different basis (see Ref. bc and reference therein). For the particular model  $H_M$ , however, such complication is circumvented. Then, the wave functions at the metal-TI interface ( $z = 0$ ) satisfy the Ben-Daniel and Duke boundary condition [?],

$$\hat{\Phi}_M = \hat{\Phi}_{TI}, \quad \hat{v}_M \hat{\Phi}_M = \hat{v}_{TI} \hat{\Phi}_{TI}.$$

Here  $\hat{\Phi}_i$  is the four-component wave function, and the velocity matrix  $\hat{v}_i = \partial \hat{H}_i / \partial k_z$ ,  $i \in \{M, TI\}$ . Such boundary condition assumes good atomic contact between two materials.

We are interested in energies below the band gap of TI, so  $\hat{\Phi}_{TI}$  is evanescent in nature and only penetrates into TI for a finite length. Such localized (surface or interface) states inside topological insulator can be treated within the  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  formalism using the theory of *complex band structures*, pioneered by Kohn [?], Blount [?], and Heine [?] et al. The main idea is to allow the crystal momentum to be complex and analytically continue  $H_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$  to the complex  $\mathbf{k}$  plane. While the extended Bloch waves are the eigen states of  $H_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$  for real  $\mathbf{k}$ , eigen functions of  $H_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$  for complex  $\mathbf{k}$  describe localized states. Together they form a complete basis to describe crystals of finite dimension.

In our scattering problem, we have to find all eigen states of  $H_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$  with energy  $E$  and wave vector  $\mathbf{k} = (k_x, k_y, \tilde{k}_z)$ , where  $k_x$  and  $k_y$  are given and real, but  $\tilde{k}_z$  is complex and unknown. For a general  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  Hamiltonian such as  $\hat{H}_{TI}$ , we follow Chang and Schulman [?] to rewrite it as

$$\hat{H}_{TI} = \hat{h}_0(k_x, k_y) + \hat{h}_1 \tilde{k}_z + \hat{h}_2 \tilde{k}_z^2,$$

where  $\hat{h}_1 = A_1 \hat{\Gamma}_3$ , and  $\hat{h}_2 = -B_1 \hat{\Gamma}_0$ . Then the eigen equation  $(\hat{H}_{TI} - E\hat{1})\hat{\phi} = 0$  can be reorganized into an eigen value problem for  $\tilde{k}_z$ ,

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ -\hat{h}_2^{-1}(\hat{h}_0 - E\hat{1}) & -\hat{h}_2^{-1}\hat{h}_1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\phi} \\ \hat{\phi}' \end{pmatrix} = \tilde{k}_z \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\phi} \\ \hat{\phi}' \end{pmatrix}.$$

Then all possible values of  $\tilde{k}_z$  can be obtained for given incident parameter  $E$ ,  $k_x$ , and  $k_y$ . For the anisotropic Dirac Hamiltonian  $H_{TI}(\mathbf{k})$ , the energy eigenvalues can be obtained analytically [?], which allows for an analytical solution of the complex band structure.

For  $E$  within the gap, there are in general 4 pairs of complex solution of  $\tilde{k}_z$ , for if  $\tilde{k}_z$  is a solution so is  $\tilde{k}_z^*$ . We label those with positive imaginary parts with  $\{\tilde{k}_z^\nu\}$ , and the corresponding wave function  $\{\hat{\phi}^\nu\}$ ,  $\nu = 1, 2, 3, 4$ . They are decaying solutions in the half space  $z > 0$ . In our model,  $\tilde{k}_z$  turns out to be doubly degenerate, as shown in Fig. 2. The wave function inside TI ( $z > 0$ ) then has the form

$$\hat{\Phi}_{TI} = \sum_{\nu} t_{\nu} e^{i\tilde{k}_z^{\nu} z} \hat{\phi}_{\nu}.$$

### 1.3 Scattering matrix from wave-function matching

To set the stage for discussing scattering off a topological insulator, it is instructive to recall the generic features of elastic scattering of electrons by a heavy ion with spin-orbit interaction. This classical problem was solved by Mott, and known as *Mott scattering*. The scattering matrix has the general form [?]

$$\hat{S}_{Mott} = u\hat{1} + w\hat{\sigma} \cdot (\mathbf{k}_i \times \mathbf{k}_o),$$

where  $\mathbf{k}_i$  and  $\mathbf{k}_o$  are the incident and outgoing momentum respectively,  $\hat{\sigma}$  is the Pauli matrix, and  $u, w$  depend on the scattering angle. It is customary to define the spin-flip amplitude  $f = S_{21}$ , and spin-conserving amplitude  $g = S_{11}$ . Both  $f$  and  $g$  are complex numbers, their relative phase defines the *spin rotation angle*  $\alpha = \text{Arg}(g^* f)$ . One immediately sees that for back scattering,  $\hat{S}_{Mott} = u\hat{1}$ , so there is no spin flip,  $f = 0$ . As we will show below, this also holds true for scattering off TI.

Now consider an electron coming from the metal with momentum  $\mathbf{k}$  incident on the M-TI interface located at  $z = 0$ , as schematically shown in Fig. 1(a). We assume the interface is translationally invariant, so the transverse momentum  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} = (k_x, k_y)$  is conserved, and the energy  $E$  of the electron lies within the band gap of TI. Then, only total reflection is possible, but the spin-orbit coupling inside TI acting like a  $\mathbf{k}$ -dependent magnetic field rotates the spin of the incident particle. The scattering (reflection) matrix has the form

$$\hat{S}(\mathbf{k}) = \begin{pmatrix} g & \bar{f} \\ f & \bar{g} \end{pmatrix},$$

where  $|g|^2 + |f|^2 = 1$ . Our goal is to find the dependence of the scattering amplitudes  $f, g$  on  $\mathbf{k}$ , or equivalently, on energy  $E$  and incident angle  $\theta$ . From time-reversal symmetry,  $\bar{f}(E, \theta) = f(E, -\theta)$  and  $\bar{g}(E, \theta) = g(E, -\theta)$ . We shall show that  $f(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) = -f(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel})$ ,  $g(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) = g(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel})$ . So  $f$  is an odd function of  $\theta$ , while  $g$  is even in  $\theta$ . Since our problem can be viewed as coherent multiple scattering from a lattice array of Mott scatters occupying half the space, we will refer to spin-active scattering at the metal-TI interface as Mott scattering.

Consider a spin up electron from the conduction band of the metal with momentum  $\mathbf{k}$  and energy  $E = \epsilon_0(\mathbf{k}) - E_F - d_0(\mathbf{k})$  lying within the band gap of TI. The wave function inside the metal ( $z < 0$ ) has the form

$$\hat{\Phi}_M = (r_1 e^{-ik'_z z}, r_2 e^{-ik'_z z}, e^{ik_z z} + r_3 e^{-ik_z z}, r_4 e^{-ik_z z})^T,$$

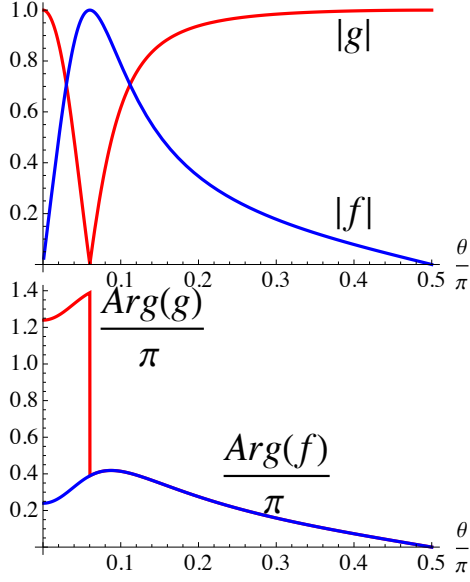


Figure 1.3: The magnitudes (upper panel) and the phases (lower panel) of the spin-flip amplitude  $f$  and spin-conserving amplitude  $g$  versus the incident angle  $\theta$ .  $E = 0.1\text{eV}$ ,  $E_F = 0.28\text{eV}$ .  $|g|^2 + |f|^2 = 1$ .  $\text{Arg}(g)$  and  $\text{Arg}(f)$  are shifted upward by  $\pi$  for clarity.

up to the trivial  $e^{i(k_x x + k_y y)}$  and renormalization factor. Here  $k_z = \hat{z} \cdot \mathbf{k}$ , and  $\{r_i\}$  are the reflection amplitudes. We identify the spin flip amplitude  $f = r_4$  and the spin-conserving amplitude  $g = r_3$ . Note that there is no propagating mode at energy  $E$  available in the valence band for the reflected electron. So  $k'_z$  is purely imaginary. At such energy, there is no propagating mode available in TI. We have discussed the evanescent wave function  $\hat{\Phi}_{TI}$  in the previous section. With  $\hat{\Phi}_M$  and  $\hat{\Phi}_{TI}$ , we solve the boundary condition at  $z = 0$  to obtain  $r_\nu, t_\nu$  and the scattering matrix  $S$ .

Fig. 3 shows the magnitude and phase of  $f$  and  $g$  versus the incident angle  $\theta$  for  $E = 0.1\text{eV}$ , with  $E_F$  set to be  $0.28\text{eV}$ . At normal incidence,  $\theta = 0$ , spin flip scattering is forbidden as in the single-ion Mott scattering. With increasing  $\theta$  the magnitude of  $g$  drops continuously. At a critical angle  $\theta_c$ ,  $|g|$  drops to zero and we have perfect (100%) spin flip reflection. At the same time, the spin rotation angle  $\alpha$  (the relative phase between  $f$  and  $g$ ) jumps by  $\pi$ .

It is tantalizing to think of what happens at  $\theta_c$  as resonant scattering with the helical surface mode of the TI. This however is problematic. We are considering good contacts at which the wave functions of the two materials hybridize strongly. Surface mode is preempted by MIGS. Indeed, we checked that the corresponding critical transverse momentum  $k_\parallel$  depends only weakly on  $E$ . This is at odds with the linear dispersion of the TI surface mode,  $E = A_2 k_\parallel$  [?]. To gain better understanding, we now switch to a lattice model to systematically study the role of interface transparency and metal Fermi surface parameter  $(E_f, k_f, v_f)$  on the scattering matrix.

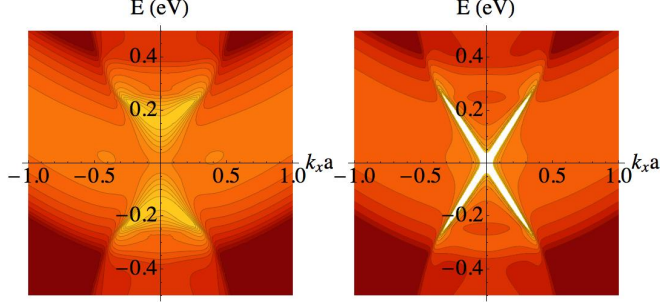


Figure 1.4: The spectral function  $N(E, k_x, k_y = 0)$  at the interface of metal and topological insulator. Left: good contact,  $J = t_M$ , showing the continuum of metal induced gap states. Right: poor contact with low transparency,  $J = 0.2t_M$ , showing well defined Dirac spectrum as on the TI surface.  $t_M = 0.18\text{eV}$ ,  $\mu_M = -4t_M$ ,  $a$  is lattice spacing.

## 1.4 Interface spectrum and scattering matrix from lattice Green function

We consider a simple lattice model for the M-TI junction. The topological insulator is modeled by a tight binding Hamiltonian on cubic lattice,

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{H}_R = \sum_{k_+, n} \left\{ \hat{\psi}_{k_+, n}^\dagger (b_1 \hat{\Gamma}_0 - i \frac{a_1}{2} \hat{\Gamma}_3) \hat{\psi}_{k_+, n+1} + h.c. \right. \\ \left. + \hat{\psi}_{k_+, n}^\dagger \left[ d(k_+) \hat{\Gamma}_0 + a_2 (\hat{\Gamma}_1 \sin k_x + \hat{\Gamma}_2 \sin k_y) \right] \hat{\psi}_{k_+, n} \right\}. \end{aligned}$$

Here  $\hat{\psi} = (\psi_{+\uparrow}, \psi_{+\downarrow}, \psi_{-\uparrow}, \psi_{-\downarrow})^T$  is the annihilation operator,  $d(k_+) = M - 2b_1 + 2b_2(\cos k_x + \cos k_y - 2)$  with  $k$  measured in  $1/a$ . The cubic lattice consists of layers of square lattice stacked in the  $z$  direction,  $n$  is the layer index, and  $k_+$  is the momentum in the  $xy$  plane. The isotropic version of  $\mathcal{H}_R$ , with  $a_1 = a_2$ ,  $b_1 = b_2$ , was studied by Qi et al as a minimal model for 3D topological insulators [?]. To mimic  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ , we set the lattice spacing  $a = 5.2\text{\AA}$ , which gives the correct unit cell volume, and  $a_i = A_i/a$ ,  $b_i = B_i/a^2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Although a crude caricature of the real material,  $\mathcal{H}_R$  yields the correct gap size and surface dispersion, it also reduces to the continuum  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  Hamiltonian  $\hat{H}_{TI}$  in the small  $k$  limit, aside from the topologically trivial  $\epsilon_0(\mathbf{k})$  term.

As a generic model for metal, we consider a single band tight binding Hamiltonian on cubic lattice,

$$\mathcal{H}_L = \sum_{k_+, n, \sigma} [h(k_+) n_{k_+, n, \sigma} - t_M \phi_{k_+, n, \sigma}^\dagger \phi_{k_+, n+1, \sigma} + h.c.]$$

where  $h(k_+) = -2t_M(\cos k_x + \cos k_y) - \mu_M$ . The Fermi surface parameters of the metal can be varied by tuning  $t_M$  and  $\mu_M$ . The metal occupies the left half space,  $n \leq 0$ , and the TI occupies the right half space  $n \geq 1$ . The interface domain consists of layer  $n = 0, 1$ . The coupling between metal and TI is described by hopping,

$$\mathcal{H}_{LR} = - \sum_{k_+, \ell, \sigma} J_\ell \psi_{k_+, n=1, \ell, \sigma}^\dagger \phi_{k_+, n=0, \sigma} + h.c.$$

$J_\ell$  is the overlap integral between the  $p$ -orbital  $\ell = \pm$  of TI and the  $s$ -like orbital of metal. For simplicity, we assume  $J_\ell$  is independent of spin. Then,  $J_+ = -J_- = J$ .  $J$  can be tuned from weak

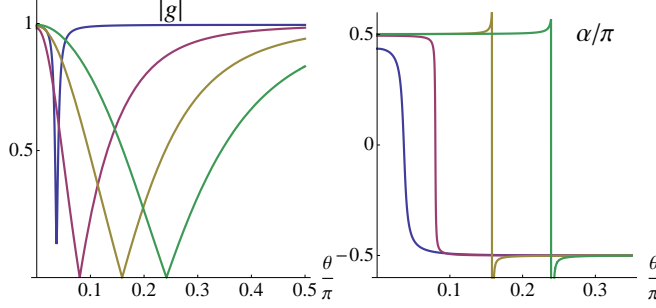


Figure 1.5: The spin-conserving reflection amplitude  $|g|$  and spin rotation angle  $\alpha$  versus the incident angle  $\theta$  for increasing contact transparency,  $J/t_M = 0.25, 1, 1.5, 2$  (from left to right).  $t_M = 0.18\text{eV}$ ,  $\mu_M = -4t_M$ ,  $E = 0.05\text{eV}$ ,  $k_y = 0$ .  $|f|^2 = 1 - |g|^2$ .

to strong. Small  $J$  mimics a large tunneling barrier between M and TI, and large  $J$  (comparable to  $t_M$  or  $B_2$ ) describes a good contact.

The lattice Green function of the composite system is computed via standard procedure by introducing the inter-layer transfer matrix and the method of interface Green function matching [?]. Fig. 4 shows two examples of the local spectral function (momentum-resolved density of states) at the interface,

$$N(E, k_+) = - \sum_{n=0,1} \text{ImTr} \hat{\mathcal{G}}(E, k_+)_{n,n},$$

where  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}(E, k_+)_{n,n'}$  is the local Green function at the interface with  $n, n' = 0, 1$ , and the trace is over the spin and orbital space. In the tunneling (weak coupling, small  $J$ ) limit, the interface spectrum includes a sharply defined Dirac cone as on the surface of TI. As  $J$  is increased, the linearly dispersing mode becomes ill defined and eventually replaced by a continuum of metal induced gap states.

Once the lattice Green function is known for given incident  $E$  and  $k_{\parallel}$ , the scattering (reflection) matrix can be constructed from  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}$  by [?],

$$\hat{S}(E, k_+) = \hat{\mathcal{G}}(E, k_+)_{0,0} g_M^{-1}(E, k_+) - \hat{1}$$

where  $g_M$  is the spin-degenerate bulk Green function of metal. Fig. 5 shows the evolution of  $|g(\theta)|$  and  $\alpha(\theta)$  for increasing  $J$ , where a level broadening of  $E/10$  is used. Most importantly, we observe that the existence of a critical angle  $\theta_c$ , where complete spin-flip occurs and  $\alpha$  jumps by  $\pi$ , is a robust phenomenon. It is independent of the details of the contact, the metal Fermi surface, or other high energy features in the band structure.

To understand the perfect spin flip, we first focus on the tunneling limit,  $J \ll t_M$ . In this limit, the local spectrum at layer  $n = 1$  as shown in the right panel of Fig. 4 approaches the TI surface spectrum, namely the helical Dirac cone. An incident up spin tunneling across the barrier will develop resonance with the helical mode, which is a quasi-stationary state with long life time, if its momentum and energy satisfy  $k_{\parallel} = E/A_2$ . Moreover, it has to flip its spin, since only down spin can propagate in the  $k_x$  direction (suppose  $k_y = 0$ ). The  $\pi$  jump in the phase shift is also characteristic of the resonance. Indeed, we have checked that precisely at  $\theta_c$  the resonance criterion,  $k_f \sin \theta_c = E/A_2$ , is met. We also varied  $\mu_M$  for fixed  $J$  and  $t_M$ , bigger  $\mu_M$  yields a bigger Fermi surface and a smaller  $\theta_c$ . This is consistent with the resonance criterion above.

As  $J$  is increased, the width of the resonance grows and eventually it is replaced by a broad peak (dip) in  $|f|$  ( $|g|$ ), but the vanishing of  $|g|$  and  $\pi$  shift in  $\alpha$  at  $\theta_c$  persist to good contacts, even though

in this limit the interface is flooded by MIGS (left panel of Fig. 4) and bears little resemblance to the Dirac spectrum. With all other parameters held fixed,  $\theta_c$  increases with  $J$ . Qualitatively, coupling to TI renormalizes the metal spectrum near the interface, producing a smaller effective  $k_f$  (hence a larger  $\theta_c$ ) compared to its bulk value. It is remarkable that perfect spin flip at the critical angle persists all the way from poor to good contacts. Indeed, the main features observed here for good contacts using the lattice model agree well with the results obtained in previous section by wave function matching.

## 1.5 discussions

We now discuss the experimental implications of our results. The M-TI interface spectrum can be measured by ARPES (or scanning tunneling microscope) experiments on metal film coated on a topological insulator. Our results also suggest that a topological insulator can serve as a perfect mirror to flip the electron spin in metal. Such spin-active scattering at the M-TI interface may be exploited to make novel spintronic devices. The magnitude of  $g$  or  $f$  can be measured by attaching two ferromagnetic leads to a piece of metal in contact with TI, forming a multi-terminal device. One of the ferromagnetic leads produces spin-polarized electrons incident on the M-TI interface at some angle, while the other lead detects the polarization of reflected electron, as in a giant magneto-resistance junction. The spin rotation angle  $\alpha$  can be measured indirectly by comparing the predicted current-voltage characteristics of M-TI-M or Superconducto-TI-Superconductor junctions, which are sensitive to the phase shift  $\alpha$ . It can also be inferred from the spin transport in a TI-M-TI sandwich, as discussed for QSH insulator in Ref. [?]. Detailed calculations of the transport properties of these structures, using the scattering matrix obtained here, will be subjects of future work.

## 1.6 acknowledgements

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## Chapter 2

# Superconducting Proximity Effect

We present microscopic, self-consistent calculations of the superconducting order parameter and pairing correlations near the interface of an  $s$ -wave superconductor and a three-dimensional topological insulator with spin-orbit coupling. We discuss the suppression of the order parameter by the topological insulator and show that the equal-time pair correlation functions in the triplet channel, induced by spin-flip scattering at the interface, are of  $p_x \pm ip_y$  symmetry. We verify that the spectrum at sub-gap energies is well described by the Fu-Kane model. The sub-gap modes are viewed as interface states with spectral weight penetrating well into the superconductor. We extract the phenomenological parameters of the Fu-Kane model from microscopic calculations, and find they are strongly renormalized from the bulk material parameters. This is consistent with previous results of Stanescu et al for a lattice model using perturbation theory in the tunneling limit.

### 2.1 Introduction

Fu and Kane showed that at the interface between a three-dimensional topological band insulator (TI) and an  $s$ -wave superconductor (S) forms a remarkable two-dimensional non-Abelian superconductor [?]. It hosts Majorana zero modes at vortex cores, as in a  $p_x + ip_y$  superconductor [?], but respects time-reversal symmetry. As argued in Ref. [?], the presence of superconductor induces a pairing interaction between the helical Dirac fermions at the surface of the topological insulator, and gaps out the surface spectrum. Then, the interface can be modeled elegantly by a simple matrix Hamiltonian in Nambu space (we follow the convention of Ref. [?]),

$$H_{FK}(\mathbf{k}) = \begin{pmatrix} h_s(\mathbf{k}) & i\sigma_y \Delta_s \\ -i\sigma_y \Delta_s^* & -h_s^*(-\mathbf{k}) \end{pmatrix}, \quad (2.1)$$

where  $\mathbf{k} = (k_x, k_y)$  is the two-dimensional momentum in the interface plane,  $\sigma_i$  are the Pauli matrices,  $h_s(\mathbf{k})$  is the surface Hamiltonian for the topological insulator describing the helical Dirac fermions [?, ?],

$$h_s(\mathbf{k}) = -\mu_s + v_s(\sigma_x k_y - \sigma_y k_x). \quad (2.2)$$

Fu and Kane also proposed to use S-TI proximity structures to generate and manipulate Majorana fermions which obey non-Abelian statistics and are potentially useful for fault tolerant quantum computation [?]. This proposal and a few others that followed based on superconductor-semiconductor heterostructures [?, ?, ?, ?, ?] have revived the interest in superconducting proximity effect involving insulating/semiconducting materials with spin-orbit coupling. More complex S-TI

proximity structures with ferromagnets [?, ?] or unconventional superconductors [?] have been investigated.

Experiments are beginning to realize various S-TI proximity structures [?, ?]. In light of these developments, it is desirable to understand to what extent the effective model  $H_{FK}$  holds, and what are the values of  $(\Delta_s, \mu_s, v_s)$  for given materials. Answering these questions is crucial for future experiments designed to probe and manipulate Majorana fermions. As a first step in this direction, Stanescu et al considered a microscopic lattice model for the TI-S interface [?]. In this model, TI and S are described by a tight binding Hamiltonian defined on the diamond and hexagonal lattice respectively. The two materials are coupled by tunneling term in the Hamiltonian. These authors found that for small  $\mathbf{k}$ ,  $H_{FK}(\mathbf{k})$  is valid but its parameters are significantly renormalized by the presence of the superconductor. This is supported by leading order perturbation theory in the weak coupling (tunneling) limit. They also discussed the induced  $p$ -wave correlation within the framework of perturbation theory. The  $p$ -wave correlation has also been noted in an analogous proximity structure in two dimension between a quantum spin Hall insulator and a superconductor [?].

In this work, we consider S-TI proximity structures where S and TI are *strongly* coupled to each other, rather than being separated by a tunneling barrier. This is the desired, presumably the optimal, configuration to realize the Fu-Kane proposal, e.g. to achieve maximum value of  $\Delta_s$  in  $H_{FK}$  for given superconductor. In the strong coupling limit, the modification of superconductivity by the TI becomes important. This includes the suppression of the superconducting order parameter, the induction of triplet pair correlations by spin-active scattering at the interface, and the formation of interface states below the bulk superconducting gap. In order to accurately answer questions raised in the preceding paragraph for strongly coupled S-TI structures, one has to self-consistently determine the the spatial profile of the order parameter near the interface.

Our work is also motivated by recent experimental discovery that Copper-doped topological insulator  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  becomes superconducting at a few Kelvins [?, ?, ?]. It seems possible then to combine such superconductors with topological insulator  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  to achieve strong proximity coupling. We set up microscopic, continuum models for the S-TI structures and solve the result Bogoliubov-de Gennes (BdG) equation numerically. We first compute the superconducting order parameter as a function of the distance away from the interface. We then verify the validity of the Fu-Kane effective model and extract its parameters from the low energy sector of the energy spectrum. The emergence of  $H_{FK}$  will be viewed as the result of the “inverse proximity effect”, namely strong modification of superconductivity by the presence of TI. This is in contrast to the previous viewpoint of pairing between surface Dirac fermions, which is a more proper description in the tunneling limit. The spectral weight of these low energy modes (with energy below the bulk superconducting gap) are shown explicitly to peak near the interface but penetrate well into the superconductor. We will also show analytically that the induced triplet pair correlations are of  $p_x \pm ip_y$  orbital symmetry, and systematically study their spatial and momentum dependence. Our results connect the phenomenological theory of Fu and Kane [?] to real materials. Our results for continuum models and strong coupling limit are also complementary to the results of Stanescu et al [?] for lattice models and tunneling limit.

In what follows, we first outline the formulation of the problem and then present the main results. Technical details on numerically solving the BdG equation are relegated to the appendix.

## 2.2 Model and Basic equations

The band gaps of topological insulators are much larger than the superconducting gap of all weak coupling  $s$ -wave superconductors. For the purpose of studying the proximity effect between such superconductors and topological insulators, it is sufficient to describe the topological insulator using the low energy effective  $\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{p}$  Hamiltonian. Following Zhang et al [?], we model  $\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  by

$$H_{TI}(\mathbf{k}) = \begin{pmatrix} M(\mathbf{k}) & 0 & A_1 k_z & A_2 k_- \\ 0 & M(\mathbf{k}) & A_2 k_+ & -A_1 k_z \\ A_1 k_z & A_2 k_- & -M(\mathbf{k}) & 0 \\ A_2 k_+ & -A_1 k_z & 0 & -M(\mathbf{k}) \end{pmatrix} - \mu \hat{I}. \quad (2.3)$$

Here  $k_{\pm} = k_x \pm ik_y$ ,  $M(\mathbf{k}) = M - B_1 k_z^2 - B_2(k_x^2 + k_y^2)$ , and  $\hat{I}$  is  $4 \times 4$  unit matrix. The numerical values of the parameters are obtained from first principle calculations [?, ?],  $M = 0.28$  eV,  $A_1 = 2.2$  eVÅ,  $A_2 = 4.1$  eVÅ,  $B_1 = 10$  eVÅ<sup>2</sup>,  $B_2 = 56.6$  eVÅ<sup>2</sup>. We work in basis  $\{|1 \uparrow\rangle, |1 \downarrow\rangle, |2 \uparrow\rangle, |2 \downarrow\rangle\}$ , where 1 (2) labels the  $P1_z^+$  ( $P2_z^+$ ) orbital [?]. Note that we have neglected the unimportant diagonal term  $\epsilon_0(\mathbf{k})$  in Ref. [?] which only slightly modifies the overall curvature of the band dispersion. We also keep the chemical potential  $\mu$  as a tuning parameter.

We consider a simple model of superconductor derived from a metallic state obtained by turning off the spin-orbit coupling ( $A_1 = A_2 = 0$ ) in  $H_{TI}$  and tuning the Fermi level well into the conduction band [?]. The metal Hamiltonian

$$H_M(\mathbf{k}) = \text{diag}[M(\mathbf{k}), M(\mathbf{k}), -M(\mathbf{k}), -M(\mathbf{k})] - E_f \hat{I}, \quad (2.4)$$

with  $E_f > M$ . This mimics electron-doping the topological insulator [?] or equivalently electrochemically shifting its chemical potential by applying a gate voltage [?]. As shown in Fig. ??, the valence band (band 1 with dispersion  $M(\mathbf{k}) - E_f$ ) is well below the Fermi level and remains inert as far as superconductivity is concerned. Next, within the framework of Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer theory, we assume attractive interaction between the electrons in the conduction band (band 2) near the Fermi surface described by the reduced Hamiltonian,

$$H_{int} = \sum_{\mathbf{k}} \psi_{2\uparrow}^\dagger(\mathbf{k}) \psi_{2\downarrow}^\dagger(-\mathbf{k}) \Delta + h.c. \quad (2.5)$$

Here  $\Delta$  is the superconducting order parameter,  $\psi_{l\sigma}^\dagger$  is the electron creation operator for orbital  $l = 1, 2$  and spin  $\sigma = \uparrow, \downarrow$ . The superconductor is then described by

$$H_S = \sum_{\mathbf{k}, l, \sigma} \psi_{l\sigma}^\dagger(\mathbf{k}) H_M(\mathbf{k})_{l\sigma, l\sigma} \psi_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}) + H_{int}. \quad (2.6)$$

Note that  $H_S$  and  $H_{TI}$  are in the same basis.

This model can serve as a generic model for  $s$ -wave superconductors with negligible spin-orbital coupling. Whether it can actually describe the superconductor  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  has to be settled by future experiments. The transition temperature of  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  at optimal doping  $x = 0.12$  is  $T_c = 3.8\text{K}$ , which corresponds to a zero temperature superconducting gap  $\Delta \sim 0.6\text{meV}$  [?, ?, ?]. The Fermi level is  $0.25\text{eV}$  above the bottom of the conduction band, and the Fermi wave vector  $k_f \sim 0.12\text{\AA}^{-1}$ . The pairing symmetry of  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  is to our best knowledge is unknown at present (it appears to be fully gapped from the specific heat measurement [?] and might be a topological superconductor [?]). If it turns out to be a conventional  $s$ -wave superconductor, its main features will be captured by  $H_S$  above with suitable choice of  $E_f$  and  $\Delta$ .

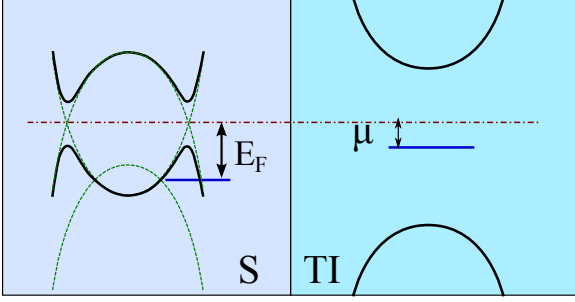


Figure 2.1: Schematic (not to scale) band diagrams in a superconductor-topological insulator (S-TI) proximity structure.  $E_f$  is the Fermi energy of the metal described by  $H_M$  measured from the band crossing point.  $\mu$  is the chemical potential of TI measured from the band gap center. The superconducting gap is much smaller than the band gap of TI.

Now consider a proximity structure consisting of a superconductor at  $z < d$  and a topological insulator at  $z > d$  (Fig. ??). The interface at  $z = d$  is assumed to be specular, so the momentum  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} = (k_x, k_y)$  parallel to the interface is conserved. The Hamiltonian for the whole system

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{H} = \int d\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} dz \Big\{ & \sum_{\sigma} \psi_{1\sigma}^{\dagger}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) [h_0 - \mu(z)] \psi_{1\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \\ & - \sum_{\sigma} \psi_{2\sigma}^{\dagger}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) [h_0 + \mu(z)] \psi_{2\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \\ & + \Delta(z) \psi_{2\uparrow}^{\dagger}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \psi_{2\downarrow}^{\dagger}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) + h.c. \\ & + A_1(z) [\psi_{1\uparrow}^{\dagger}(-i\partial_z) \psi_{2\uparrow} + \psi_{1\downarrow}^{\dagger}(i\partial_z) \psi_{2\downarrow} + h.c.] \\ & + A_2(z) [\psi_{1\uparrow}^{\dagger} k_- \psi_{2\downarrow} + \psi_{1\downarrow}^{\dagger} k_+ \psi_{2\uparrow} + h.c.] \Big\}. \end{aligned} \quad (2.7)$$

Here  $h_0(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, \partial_z) = M - B_1 \partial_z^2 - B_2 k_{\parallel}^2$ ,  $\mu(z)$  and  $A_i(z)$  are piece-wise constant,

$$\mu(z) = E_f \theta(d - z) + \mu \theta(z - d), \quad (2.8)$$

$$A_i(z) = A_i \theta(z - d), \quad i = 1, 2 \quad (2.9)$$

in terms of the step function  $\theta$ . The order parameter obeys the gap equation

$$\Delta(z) = g(z) \int d\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} \langle \psi_{2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \psi_{2\downarrow}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \rangle. \quad (2.10)$$

We assume  $g(z) = g\theta(d - z)$ , the coupling constant  $g$  determines the bulk gap.

To self-consistently solve Eq. (??) and (??), we introduce Bogoliubov transformation

$$\psi_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \sum_n u_{n,l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \gamma_{n,\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}} + v_{n,l\sigma}^*(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \gamma_{n,\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}}^{\dagger} \quad (2.11)$$

to diagonalize  $\mathcal{H}$  as

$$\mathcal{H} = E_g + \int d\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} \sum_n \epsilon_n(k_{\parallel}) \gamma_{n,\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}}^{\dagger} \gamma_{n,\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}}, \quad (2.12)$$

where  $E_g$  is the ground state energy, and  $\gamma_{n,\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}}^{\dagger}$  is the creation operator of Bogoliubov quasiparticles with energy  $\epsilon_n(k_{\parallel})$ . The wave function  $u$  and  $v$  satisfy the following Bogliubov-de Gennes (BdG) equation,

$$\hat{H}_B(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \hat{\phi}_n(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \epsilon_n(k_{\parallel}) \hat{\phi}_n(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z). \quad (2.13)$$

Here, the BdG Hamiltonian

$$\hat{H}_B = \begin{pmatrix} h_0 - \mu & \mathbf{d} \cdot \boldsymbol{\sigma} & 0 & 0 \\ \mathbf{d} \cdot \boldsymbol{\sigma} & -h_0 - \mu & 0 & -\Delta i\sigma_y \\ 0 & 0 & \mu - h_0 & \mathbf{d} \cdot \boldsymbol{\sigma}^* \\ 0 & \Delta^* i\sigma_y & \mathbf{d} \cdot \boldsymbol{\sigma}^* & \mu + h_0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad (2.14)$$

and the wave function (dropping the arguments)

$$\hat{\phi}_n = (u_{n,1\uparrow}, u_{n,1\downarrow}, u_{n,2\uparrow}, u_{n,2\downarrow}, v_{n,1\uparrow}, v_{n,1\downarrow}, v_{n,2\uparrow}, v_{n,2\downarrow})^T. \quad (2.15)$$

The vector  $\mathbf{d}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)$  is defined as

$$d_x = A_1(z)k_x, \quad d_y = A_1(z)k_y, \quad d_z = A_2(z)(-i\partial_z). \quad (2.16)$$

Other quantities such as  $h_0(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)$ ,  $\mu(z)$ , and  $\Delta(z)$  are defined above. In terms of the wave functions, the zero temperature gap equation becomes

$$\Delta(z) = g(z) \int d\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} \sum'_n u_{n,2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) v_{n,2\downarrow}^*(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z), \quad (2.17)$$

where the summation denoted by prime is restricted to  $0 < \epsilon_n < \omega_D$  with  $\omega_D$  being the Debye frequency.

We will exploit a particular symmetry of the BdG Hamiltonian to simplify calculations. Define the polar angle  $\varphi_k$  for the in-plane wave vector  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}$ ,

$$k_x + ik_y = k_{\parallel} e^{i\varphi_k}. \quad (2.18)$$

Then the BdG Hamiltonian for arbitrary  $(k_x, k_y)$  is related to that for  $(k_x = k_{\parallel}, k_y = 0)$  by unitary transformation

$$\hat{U}^\dagger(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) \hat{H}_B(k_x, k_y) \hat{U}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) = \hat{H}_B(k_{\parallel}, 0). \quad (2.19)$$

Here  $U$  is a block diagonal matrix,

$$U(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) = \text{diag}[e^{-i\sigma_z \frac{\varphi_k}{2}}, e^{-i\sigma_z \frac{\varphi_k}{2}}, e^{i\sigma_z \frac{\varphi_k}{2}}, e^{i\sigma_z \frac{\varphi_k}{2}}]. \quad (2.20)$$

Thus, the eigen energy  $\epsilon_n$  only depends on the magnitude of  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}$ . Once the wave function for  $\varphi_k = 0$  is known, the wave function for  $\varphi_k \in (0, 2\pi)$  can be obtained by simple unitary transformation.

We solve the matrix differential equation (??) by conserving it into an algebraic equation, following the treatment of superconductor-ferromagnet structure by Halterman and Valls [?]. The whole S-TI proximity structure is assumed to have finite dimension  $L$  in the  $z$  direction. The superconductor occupies the region  $0 < z < d$ , while the topological insulator occupies  $d < z < L$ . Hard wall boundary conditions are enforced at the end points,  $z = 0$  and  $z = L$ . The exact boundary conditions at the end points only affect the local physics there, provided that the boundaries are sufficiently far away from the S-TI interface. We expand the wave function and order parameter in Fourier series [?],

$$u_{n,l\sigma}(z) = \sum_m u_{nm}^{l\sigma} \phi_m(z), \quad (2.21)$$

$$v_{n,l\sigma}(z) = \sum_m v_{nm}^{l\sigma} \phi_m(z), \quad (2.22)$$

$$\Delta(z) = \sum_m \Delta_m \phi_m(z), \quad (2.23)$$

$$\phi_m(z) = \sqrt{2/L} \sin(k_m z). \quad (2.24)$$

The integer  $m = 1, 2, \dots, N$  labels the quantized longitudinal (along  $z$ ) momentum  $k_m = m\pi/L$ . The cutoff  $N$  is chosen as [?]

$$B_1 k_N^2 = M + E_f + \omega_D. \quad (2.25)$$

By expansion Eq. (??)-(??), the BdG equation becomes an  $8N \times 8N$  matrix equation. With a reasonable guess of the order parameter profile, the eigen energies and eigen wave functions are obtained by solving the matrix eigen value problem. Then a new order parameter profile is computed from the gap equation. The procedure is iterated until convergence is achieved. Relevant technical details can be found in the appendix.

To analyze the spectrum of the system, it is convenient to define the retarded Green's function

$$G_{l\sigma}^R(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, t) = -i\theta(t)\langle\{\psi_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, t), \psi_{l\sigma}^{\dagger}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, 0)\}\rangle \quad (2.26)$$

where the time-dependent field operators are in Heisenberg picture. For given  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}$  and  $z$ , the spectral functions are defined as

$$N_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, \omega) = -\text{Im}G_{l\sigma}^R(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, \omega), \quad (2.27)$$

$$N(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, \omega) = \sum_{l\sigma} N_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, \omega). \quad (2.28)$$

In terms of the wave functions and eigen energies,

$$N_{l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z, \omega > 0) = \sum_n |u_{n,l\sigma}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)|^2 \delta(\omega - \epsilon_n). \quad (2.29)$$

We also introduce the equal-time pair correlation functions for the conduction electrons

$$F_{\alpha\beta}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \langle\psi_{2\alpha}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)\psi_{2\beta}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)\rangle. \quad (2.30)$$

For example, at zero temperature we have

$$F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \sum_n^I u_{n,2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)v_{n,2\uparrow}^*(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z), \quad (2.31)$$

$$F_{\downarrow\downarrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \sum_n^I u_{n,2\downarrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)v_{n,2\downarrow}^*(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z). \quad (2.32)$$

Triplet components of  $F$  will be induced near the S-TI interface by spin-active scattering [?].

## 2.3 the order parameter

First we present the spatial profile of the superconducting order parameter  $\Delta(z)$  after the convergence is achieved. In all following calculations,  $E_f$  is fixed at 0.4eV, which is modeled after optimally doped  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$  [?]. And the Debye frequency is set as  $\omega_D = 0.1E_f$  [?]. Fig. ?? shows an example with  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 300\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.95L$ , and a bulk gap of 0.6meV as found in  $\text{Cu}_x\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ . Going from the superconductor into the topological insulator,  $\Delta$  first gets suppressed as the interface is approached before it drops to zero inside TI. The suppression is roughly 20% at the interface. Note that the fine wiggles of  $\Delta$  in the simulation results are due to the finite momentum cutoff of the longitudinal momentum  $k_m$ . As previously discussed by Stojkovic and Valls [?], the number of oscillations is  $\sim N/2$ , and the oscillation amplitude vanishes in the bulk as  $N$  is increased. In this

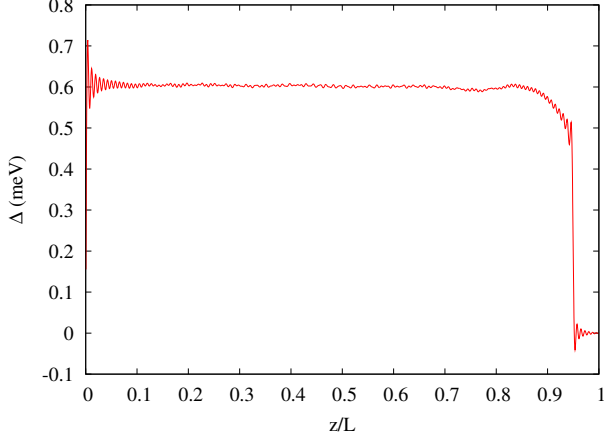


Figure 2.2: The superconducting order parameter  $\Delta(z)$  near an S-TI interface at  $z = d = 0.95L$ . The superconductor occupies  $0 < z < d$ , and topological insulator occupies  $d < z < L$ .  $L = 300$  nm,  $\mu=0$ , the bulk gap  $\Delta_0=0.6\text{meV}$ .

case,  $N$  is chosen to be 258 according to Eq. (??). So the matrix to be diagonalized is 2064 by 2064.

Fig. ?? show the result for  $\mu = 0$ ,  $d = 0.9L$ , and a superconductor with bulk gap  $\Delta_0 \sim 2.4\text{meV}$ . Since the coherence length is much smaller than the previous example, it is sufficient to consider  $L = 160\text{nm}$ , and correspondingly  $N = 138$ . The order parameter profile depends weakly on  $\mu$ , as shown in Fig. ?? for a superconductor with bulk gap  $\sim 5.2\text{meV}$ . From these examples, one observes that the length scale over which  $\Delta$  is significantly suppressed does *not* scale with  $\xi_0$ , the zero temperature coherence length of the superconductor. Rather it stays roughly the same, on the order of 30nm, as  $\xi_0$  is varied over one decade from Fig. ?? to Fig. ?? (note the horizontal axis is  $z/L$ ). This is not very surprising since  $\xi_0$  is not the only length scale at play here. The interface represents a strong (as compared to  $\Delta_0$ ) perturbation that significantly distorts the bulk wave functions. The self-consistent microscopic BdG approach provides a reliable way to capture the details of  $\Delta(z)$  near the interface.

It is illuminating to compare the proximity effect in S-TI structure with that in S-F structure [?], where F stands for a ferromagnetic insulator. The presence of F breaks time-reversal and spin rotation symmetry and significantly suppresses the order parameter. The suppression is sensitive to the spin mixing angle which is related to the band gap and exchange field of F [?]. In contrast, despite the spin-active scattering of electrons by TI which introduces spin-flips and spin-dependent phase shifts [?], spin-orbit coupling is not pair breaking. The suppression of  $\Delta$  near the interface is to a large extent due to the reorganization of local wave functions enforced by the boundary conditions at  $z = d$  for piece-wise potentials  $\mu(z)$ ,  $A_i(z)$ ,  $g(z)$ . It depends on for example how the wave functions decay inside the TI for given  $E_f$  and  $\mu$ , and involves “high-energy” physics beyond the scale of  $\Delta$  but below the scale of the band gap. To test this, we have investigated the proximity effect between the same superconductor and a hypothetical ordinary insulator modeled by  $H_{TI}$  with  $A_1 = A_2 = 0$  and the same band gap. The suppression of  $\Delta$  by such an ordinary insulator turns out to be very similar.

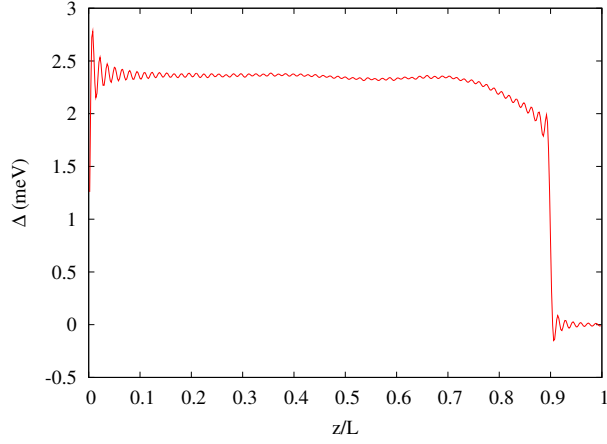


Figure 2.3: The order parameter  $\Delta(z)$  near an S-TI interface at  $z = d = 0.9L$ .  $L = 160$  nm,  $\mu=0$ ,  $\Delta_0 \sim 2.4$  meV.

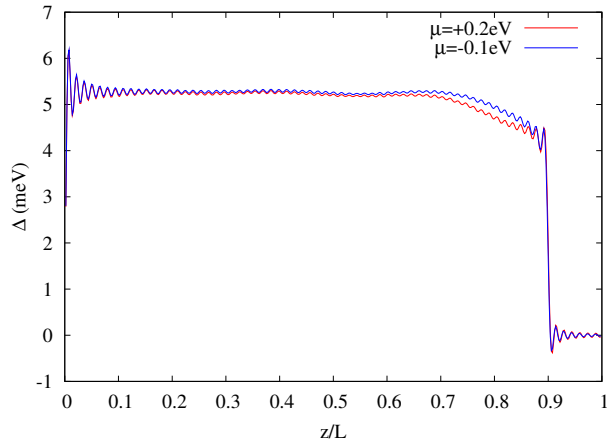


Figure 2.4: The order parameter profile for two different chemical potentials of the topological insulator,  $\mu = -0.1$  eV and  $\mu = 0.2$  eV.  $L = 160$  nm,  $\Delta_0 \sim 5.2$  meV.



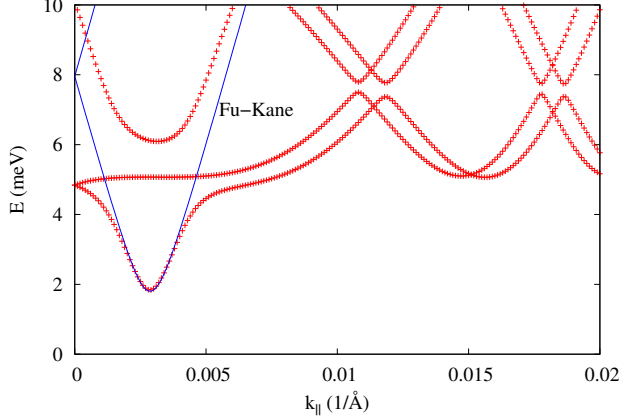


Figure 2.5: The lowest few energy levels  $\epsilon_n(k_{\parallel})$ .  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 160\text{nm}$ , and the bulk superconducting gap  $\Delta_0 \sim 5.2\text{meV}$ . A well-defined interface mode is clearly visible at sub-gap energies. Solid lines show a fit to the Fu-Kane model, with  $\Delta_s = 1.8\text{meV}$ ,  $v_s = 2.7\text{eV}\text{\AA}$ , and  $\mu_s = 7.5\text{meV}$ .

## 2.4 The interface mode and the Fu-Kane model

Next we analyze the energy spectrum of the system,  $\epsilon_n(k_{\parallel})$ , obtained from the BdG calculation. Take the case of  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 160\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.9L$ ,  $\Delta_0 \sim 5.2\text{meV}$  as an example. Fig. ?? shows the first several energy levels of the composite system versus the transverse momentum  $k_{\parallel}$ . There are many continuously dispersing modes at energies above the bulk gap. They are the usual Bogoliubov quasiparticles for different quantized longitudinal momenta. One also sees a series of avoided level crossings. At small  $k_{\parallel}$  emerges a well-defined mode below  $\Delta_0$ . We will identify it as the interface mode first discussed by Fu and Kane [?].

The Fu-Kane model Eq. (??) predicts the dispersion

$$E(k) = \sqrt{|\Delta_s|^2 + (v_s k \pm \mu_s)^2}. \quad (2.33)$$

We fit the very low energy portion of the spectrum to this prediction to extract the phenomenological parameters in the Fu-Kane model. The result is shown in Fig. ?. We find that, not surprisingly,  $\Delta_s = 1.8\text{meV}$  which is much smaller than  $\Delta_0 = 5.2\text{meV}$ , and  $v_s = 2.7\text{eV}\text{\AA}$  which deviates significantly from  $A_2 = 4.2\text{eV}\text{\AA}$  predicted for the surface dispersion of TI. Moreover,  $\mu_s = 7.5\text{meV}$  despite that the chemical potential of TI is  $\mu = 0$ . Therefore, our results show that the values of  $(\Delta_s, v_s, \mu_s)$  are strongly renormalized by the presence of the superconductor. This is consistent with the findings of Stanescu et al for weakly coupled S-TI structures [?].

We have checked the validity of the Fu-Kane model for a variety of chemical potentials. Representative examples are plotted in Fig. ?. In each case, the sub-gap mode can be well accounted by the Fu-Kane model with suitable choice of parameters. While  $\mu_s$  is always different from  $\mu$ , numerically we find it scales linearly with  $\mu$ . At the same time,  $\Delta_s$  and  $v_s$  show no strong dependence on  $\mu$  for this set of parameters. To make sure that the sub-gap mode is indeed localized near the interface, we plot in Fig. ?? the  $z$  dependence of the spectral function  $N(k_{\parallel}, z, \omega)$ . The spectral weight of the sub-gap mode is peaked near the interface and decays over a length scale  $\sim \xi_0$  into the superconductor. This result clearly shows that for strongly coupled S-TI interfaces, the Fu-Kane model actually describe a rather “fat” interface mode. Note that the spectral weight on the TI side (not shown in the figure) is finite, but it is much smaller in magnitude and decays very fast inside

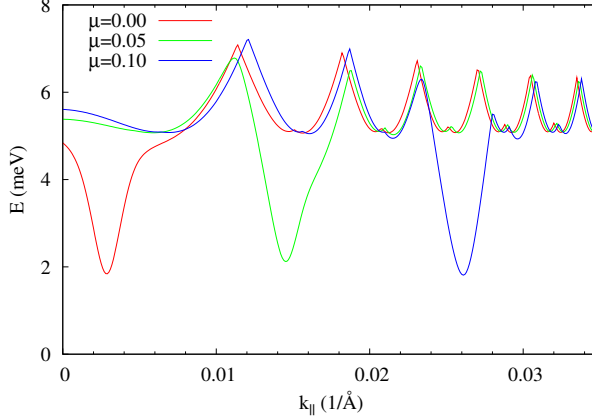


Figure 2.6: The dispersion of the lowest energy level for different  $\mu$  (in eV). Other parameters are the same as in Fig. ??,  $L = 160\text{nm}$  and  $\Delta_0 \sim 5.2\text{meV}$ . Fu-Kane model well describes the lowest energy mode. As  $\mu$  is increased,  $\Delta_s$  and  $v_s$  stay roughly the same, while  $\mu_s$  scales linearly with  $\mu$ .

TI. Finally, Fig. ?? shows the local density of states near the interface. The interface mode leads to finite density of states below the bulk gap, but the spectral weight is very small.

We have carried out similar analysis for superconductors with larger coherence length. Fig. ?? shows the evolution of the sub-gap mode with  $\mu$  for  $\Delta_0 = 2.4\text{meV}$ . In this case, the values of  $(\Delta_s, v_s, \mu_s)$  all varies with  $\mu$ . Superconductors with larger  $\xi_0$  and smaller  $\Delta_0$  are thus more sensitive to changes in  $\mu$  and other microscopic details near the interface. The exact values of the effective parameters in the Fu-Kane model in general depend on such microscopic details.

## 2.5 Triplet pair correlations

It is well known that in heterostructures of  $s$ -wave superconductors, pairing correlations in other orbital channels, e.g.  $p$ -wave correlations, will be induced by scattering at the interfaces [?, ?]. For example, inversion/reflection symmetry ( $z \leftrightarrow -z$ ) is lost in an S-TI proximity structure, and the appearance of  $p$ -wave correlations seems natural from partial wave analysis. Moreover, scattering by a topological insulator is spin-active. The spin-orbit coupling inside a TI acts like a momentum-dependent magnetic field to flip the electron spin and introduce different phase shifts for spin up and down electrons. The scattering matrix has been worked out by us previously [?]. Thus, a singlet  $s$ -wave Cooper pair can be converted into a pair of electrons in spin-triplet state at the S-TI interface. However, it is important to recall that by assumption attractive interaction only exists (or is appreciable) in the  $s$ -wave channel. There is no binding force to sustain a triplet Cooper pair or a triplet superconducting order parameter. Similar (but different) pairing correlations in superconductor-ferromagnet hybrid structures have been extensively studied [?]. The appearance of  $p$ -wave correlations in S-TI systems has been pointed out previously by Stanescu et al using a perturbative analysis [?].

We focus on the equal-time pair correlation functions defined in Eq. (??). By exploiting the symmetry of the BdG Hamiltonian, Eq. (??), we are able to find analytically the orbital structure

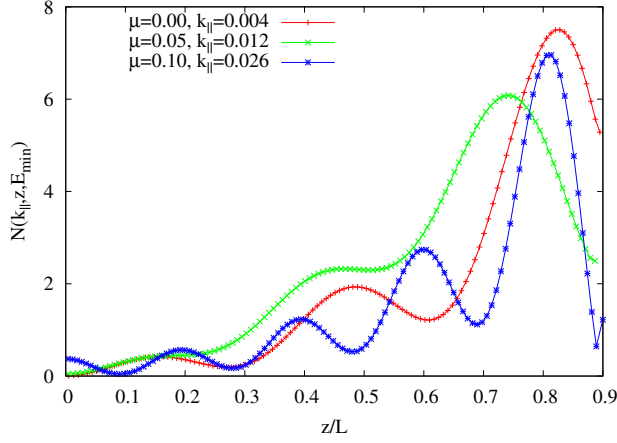


Figure 2.7: The spectral function  $N(k_{\parallel}, z, \omega)$  of the lowest energy level,  $\omega = E_{min}$ , shown in Fig. ???. The interface is at  $z = 0.9L$ ,  $L=160\text{nm}$ . The spectral function oscillates rapidly with  $z$ , so only its envelope is plotted.

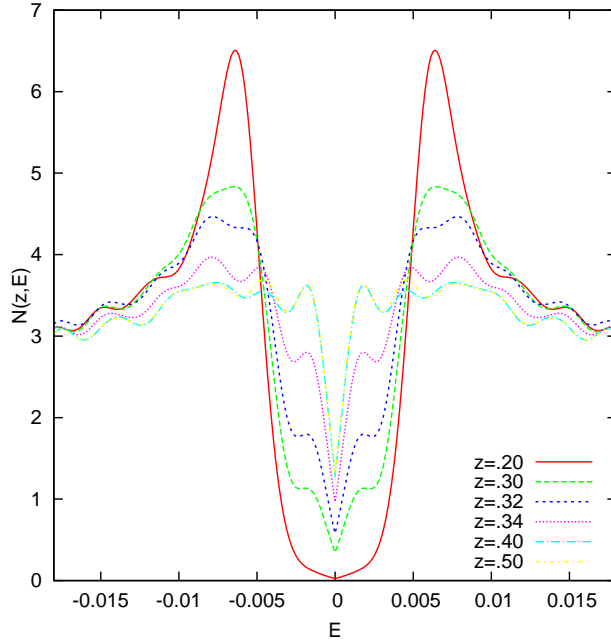


Figure 2.8: The local density of states  $N(E, z)$  at  $z = 0.8d$  and  $z = 0.85d$  (the interface is at  $z = 0.9d$ ).  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 160\text{nm}$ , and  $\Delta_0 \sim 5.2\text{meV}$ . The subgap states are due to the interface mode. A level broadening  $\sim 0.01\Delta_0$  is used.

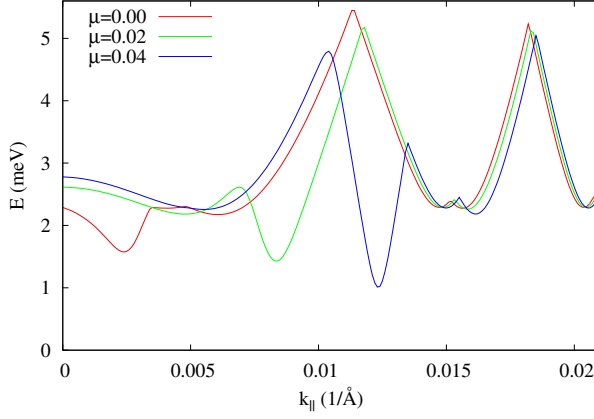


Figure 2.9: The lowest energy level of an S-TI structure with  $L = 160\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.9L$ ,  $\Delta_0 = 2.4\text{meV}$ .  $\mu$  is the chemical potential of the TI and measured in eV.

of the triplet correlation functions. The unitary transformation Eq. (??) yields

$$\begin{aligned}
 u_{2\uparrow}(k_x, k_y) &= u_{2\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, 0)e^{-i\varphi_k/2}, \\
 u_{2\downarrow}(k_x, k_y) &= u_{2\downarrow}(k_{\parallel}, 0)e^{+i\varphi_k/2}, \\
 v_{2\uparrow}(k_x, k_y) &= v_{2\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, 0)e^{+i\varphi_k/2}, \\
 v_{2\downarrow}(k_x, k_y) &= v_{2\downarrow}(k_{\parallel}, 0)e^{-i\varphi_k/2}.
 \end{aligned} \tag{2.34}$$

Using these relations, we find

$$F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)e^{-i\varphi_k}, \tag{2.35}$$

$$F_{\downarrow\downarrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = F_{\downarrow\downarrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)e^{+i\varphi_k}. \tag{2.36}$$

Namely  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}$  ( $F_{\downarrow\downarrow}$ ) has  $p_x - ip_y$  ( $p_x + ip_y$ ) orbital symmetry. Finally, the remaining triplet correlation function

$$\langle \psi_{2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)\psi_{2\downarrow}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) + \psi_{2\downarrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)\psi_{2\uparrow}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \rangle \tag{2.37}$$

turns out to be zero. Note that the so-called odd-frequency pairing correlations [?, ?, ?], which vanishes in the equal-time limit, are also interesting in S-TI structures, but we will not discuss their behaviors here.

We find that  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)$  is purely imaginary and identical to  $F_{\downarrow\downarrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)$ . The results for  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 160\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.9L$ ,  $\Delta_0 = 5.2\text{meV}$  are plotted in Fig. ?? .  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}$  vanishes at  $k_{\parallel} = 0$  as well as for large  $k_{\parallel}$ , namely when  $k_{\parallel} > \sqrt{(E_F + \omega_D + M)/B_2}$ . This is consistent with lack of pairing in both limits. The behavior of  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}$  for small  $k_{\parallel}$  is illustrated in Fig. ?? for  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 300\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.95L$ ,  $\Delta_0 = 0.6\text{meV}$ . As comparison, we also plotted the singlet pair correlation function

$$F_{\uparrow\downarrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) = \sum_n^l u_{n,2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z)v_{n,2\downarrow}^*(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, z) \tag{2.38}$$

which is  $s$ -wave and purely real.

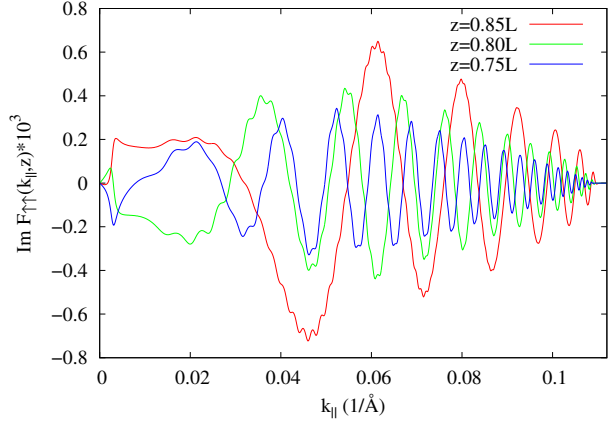


Figure 2.10: The imaginary part of triplet pair correlation function  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)$ . The S-TI interface is at  $d = 0.9L$ .  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 160\text{nm}$ ,  $\Delta_0 = 5.2\text{meV}$ .

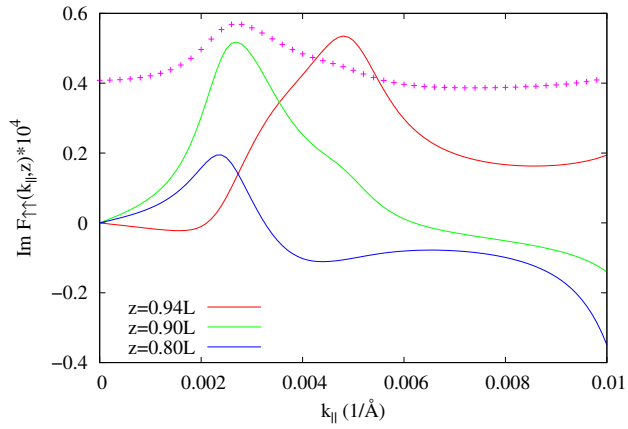


Figure 2.11: The imaginary part of  $F_{\uparrow\uparrow}(k_{\parallel}, z)$ .  $\mu = 0$ ,  $L = 300\text{nm}$ ,  $d = 0.95L$ ,  $\Delta_0 = 0.6\text{meV}$ . As comparison, the data points show the singlet pair correlation function  $F_{\uparrow\downarrow}(k_{\parallel}, z = 0.9L)/3$ .

## 2.6 Summary and outlook

In summary, we have investigated the proximity effect between an *s*-wave superconductor and a topological insulator using a microscopic continuum model. Strong coupling between the two materials renders the surface state of TI a less useful concept for this problem. Our focus has been on the various modifications to superconductivity by the presence of TI. These include the suppression of the order parameter, the formation of interface modes below the bulk superconducting gap, and the induction of triplet pairing correlations. It is gratifying to see the Fu-Kane effective model emerges in the low energy sector albeit with a set of renormalized parameters. Our results are complementary to previous theoretical work on the proximity effect [?, ?] and confirm the validity of the Fu-Kane model.

We made a few simplifying assumptions in our calculation. The superconductor is described by a two-band model with the valence band well below the Fermi level. Since only electrons near the Fermi surface are relevant for weak coupling superconductivity, we believe our main results are general. As idealizations, the chemical potential, the spin-orbit coupling, and the attractive interaction are assumed to be step functions with a sudden jump at the interface. More elaborate and realistic models can be considered within the framework of BdG equations. For example, one can add a tunneling barrier between S and TI, or include a Rashba-type spin-orbit coupling term (due to the gradient of chemical potential) at the interface. We will not pursue these generalizations here. Finally, the approach outlined here can be straightforwardly applied to study non-Abelian superconductivity in other superconductor-semiconductor heterostructures where spin-orbit coupling also plays a significant role [?, ?, ?, ?, ?].

## 2.7 acknowledgements

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\*

## Appendix

We follow the numerical scheme of Halterman and Valls to solve the matrix BdG equation [?]. The wave functions and the order parameter are expanded in the orthonormal basis  $\{\phi_m(z)\}$ , with  $m = 1, \dots, N$ . For example, function  $u_{n,1\uparrow}(z)$  is represented by  $N$  numbers,

$$(u_{n,1}^{1\uparrow}, u_{n,2}^{1\uparrow}, \dots, u_{n,m}^{1\uparrow}, \dots, u_{n,N}^{1\uparrow}).$$

Accordingly, each term in  $\hat{H}_B$  is represented by a  $N \times N$  matrix with the matrix elements given by

$$\begin{aligned} h_0(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}, \partial_z) &\rightarrow \delta_{mm'}(M - B_1 k_m^2 - B_2 k_{\parallel}^2) \\ U(z) &\rightarrow E_f E_{mm'} + \mu F_{mm'} \\ A_2(z) \partial_z &\rightarrow A_2 G_{mm'} \\ A_1(z) k_{\pm} &\rightarrow A_z k_{\pm} F_{mm'} \\ \Delta &\rightarrow D_{mm'} \equiv \sum_{m''} J_{m,m',m''} \Delta_{m''} \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned}
E_{mm'} &= \int_0^d \phi_m(z) \phi_{m'}(z) dz \\
F_{mm'} &= \int_d^L \phi_m(z) \phi_{m'}(z) dz \\
G_{mm'} &= \int_d^L \phi_m(z) \partial_z \phi_{m'}(z) dz \\
J_{m,m',m''} &= \int_0^d \phi_m(z) \phi_{m'}(z) \phi_{m''}(z) dz
\end{aligned}$$

These integrals can be evaluated analytically. Then the BdG equation becomes an  $8N \times 8N$  matrix equation. The gap equation can be rewritten as

$$\Delta_m = g \int d\mathbf{k}_{\parallel} \sum_n' \sum_{m',m''} J_{m,m',m''} u_{nm'}^{2\uparrow}(\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}) v_{nm''}^{2\downarrow}(-\mathbf{k}_{\parallel})^*$$

The integral over  $\mathbf{k}_{\parallel}$  is first simplified to an integral over  $k_{\parallel}$  by the symmetry Eq. (??) and then evaluated numerically with high momentum cutoff  $\sqrt{(E_F + \omega_D + M)/B_2}$ .

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