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Security against eavesdropping in quantum cryptography

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1 Introduction to quantum cryptography

Quantum cryptography is a method for providing two parties who want to communicate securely with a secret key to be used in established protocols of classical cryptography. For more reviews of this topic see [1, 2, 3]. Bennett and Brassard showed that it is possible, at least ideally, to create a secret key, shared by sender and receiver, without both parties sharing any secret beforehand. We refer to this protocol as the *BB84* protocol. [4] To achieve this goal, sender and receiver are linked by two channels. The first channel is a public channel. The information distributed on it is available to both parties *and* to a potential eavesdropper. To demonstrate the principle of quantum cryptography we assume that the signals on this channel can not be changed by third parties. The second channel is a channel with strong quantum features. An eavesdropper can interact with the signal in an effort to extract information about the signals. The signal states are chosen in such a way that there is always, on average, a back reaction onto the signal states. We assume the quantum channel to be noiseless and perfect so that the back reaction of the eavesdropper's activity manifests itself as an induced error rate in the signal transmission.

The BB84 protocol uses the polarisation states of single photons as signal states. The signal states are, for example, linear vertical or horizontal polarised photons or right or left circular polarised photons. The sender sends a sequence of single photons with a polarisation chosen randomly from the four given ones. The receiver uses randomly one out of two given polarisation analysers for each signal photon. One of the analysers distinguishes between the two linear polarisations, the other between the circular polarisations. Therefore the sequence of signals contains two types of transmissions. In the first type the photon is prepared in a polarisation state which the polarisation analyser, chosen by the receiver, is able to distinguish unambiguously. An example is that a horizontal polarised photon is sent and the receiver chooses to use the linear polarisation analyser. Signals

of this type will be referred to as deterministic signals since, the outcome of the polarisation measurement is fully determined by the state of the signal photon. The remaining signals are non-deterministic signals. An example for this is a horizontal linear polarised photon which triggers with equal probability the outcome “right circular” and “left circular” in the polarisation analyser distinguishing in the circular polarisation basis. Sender and receiver can distinguish between deterministic and non-deterministic signals using the public channel without giving away any information about the specific signal. They just compare the polarisation basis of the signal and the measuring polarisation analyser, both of which can be “linear” or “circular”. The signal sequence of the deterministic bits can then be transformed into a binary key by assigning “0” for linear horizontal or right circular polarised photons and “1” for the remaining linear vertical or left circular polarised photons.

In this idealisation the security of quantum cryptography is given by the fact that the four polarisation states are not four orthogonal states and so there exists no quantum non-demolition measurement which could distinguish between them. Even more importantly, each attempt to distinguish between any of the states will change, in average, the states of the signals. This state-change destroys the perfect correlation between the signal and the measurement outcomes for the deterministic signals. A test checking this correlation will reveal any attempt at eavesdropping. If the test shows that the correlation is still perfect then sender and receiver can be sure that there was no eavesdropping attack and their shared binary key is perfectly secret.

In the practical realisation of quantum cryptography we face two specific problems. The public channel needs to be implemented in such a way that sender and receiver can ensure that the messages being received are really coming from each other. This is the problem of *authentication* for which various techniques are in use. In general, however, there will be the need for the two parties to share a limited amount of secret knowledge, for example in form of a secret key, before the authentication can take place. Quantum cryptography then generates a large secret key from a small secret key.

The work presented here deals with the second problem arising from the fact that all realistic quantum channels are noisy. Therefore the correlation between the signals and the measurement outcomes for the deterministic signals will not be perfect. Noise has the same effect on the signals as the activity of an eavesdropper. It is therefore necessary to think of all state change of the signals to be due to eavesdropping activity. It is intuitively clear that an eavesdropper can only have gained a small amount of information on the key if the correlation tested by sender and receiver are still strong, that is, if there are only a few transmission errors for the deterministic signals. One can hope to give a bound on the eavesdropper’s Shannon information as a function of the error rate in the deterministic signals. Such bounds have been obtained assuming that the eavesdropper is restricted to von Neumann measurements only [5] or to a restricted class of more general measurements [6]. Here we present a sharp bound [7, 8] on the Shannon information of an eavesdropper which is valid for all eavesdropping attacks which access each signal photon independently

of each other. It therefore does not include coherent attacks in which the product state of all signal photons is attacked. The sharp bound does not take into account that an eavesdropper can make use of the later acquired knowledge about the polarisation basis of the signal photons to *change* the measurement of the signal. However, we are able to give a rough upper bound for this situation. The reason that this is possible is that the eavesdropper has to decide how to interact with the signal states before he acquires the additional knowledge about the polarisation basis.

2 Generalised measurements

The key input to derive the bounds given in this paper is the most general description of a measurement on a given system. Any measurement can be described by a set of operators A_l defined on the Hilbert space \mathcal{H} of the system the measurement is performed on. The only restriction on the operators is that

$$\sum_{l \in K} A_l^\dagger A_l = \mathbb{1}_{\mathcal{H}} . \quad (1)$$

where K is some finite or countable infinite index set. The link between these operators and a measurement is given by the following formulas which describe the probabilities that a particular outcome of a measurement is triggered, and which give the final state of the measured system after that outcome was registered. For the sake of simplicity we assume the set of outcomes to be discrete. The probability that the outcome k is triggered by an input state with density matrix ρ is given by

$$p_k = \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} \left(\rho \sum_{l \in K_k} A_l^\dagger A_l \right) \quad (2)$$

where the K_k are disjunct subsets of K with $K = \bigcup_k K_k$. The final density matrix $\tilde{\rho}^{(k)}$ of the selected states belonging to this outcome is given by

$$\tilde{\rho}^{(k)} = \frac{\sum_{l \in K_k} A_l \rho A_l^\dagger}{\text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} \left(\rho \sum_{l \in K_k} A_l^\dagger A_l \right)} . \quad (3)$$

The density matrix of the final state, which does not select any states, but describes the whole ensemble for all outcomes is given by

$$\tilde{\rho} = \sum_k p_k \tilde{\rho}^{(k)} = \sum_{l \in K} A_l \rho A_l^\dagger . \quad (4)$$

It is important to choose the correct Hilbert space \mathcal{H} to describe the measurement. To describe a spin measurement of an electron and the back reaction onto that spin we will

choose \mathcal{H} to be the Hilbert space of the spin of electron. If we are interested in the position or momentum of the electron as well we have to add the Hilbert space of spatial modes. It is a bit less obvious in quantum optics. If \mathcal{H} is the one-photon polarisation Hilbert space then we implicitly assume that precisely one photon remains after the measurement. An eavesdropper may absorb the photon and so the final state is the vacuum. Therefore the adequate Hilbert space is the full Hilbert space of a light mode plus the polarisation degree of freedom. It turns out that we can derive the bounds presented here by restricting the Hilbert space to that of a single photon and later generalise it to the full Hilbert space.

3 Estimate of the Shannon information

The relevant expression for the Shannon information per signal is given with the help of the function $h(x) = -x \log x$, where \log refers to basis 2, as

$$I = \sum_{\Psi=0,1} h[p(\Psi)] + \sum_{\substack{\alpha=o,+ \\ k}} h[p(k_\alpha)] - \sum_{\substack{\Psi=0,1 \\ k,\alpha}} h[p(\Psi, k_\alpha)] . \quad (5)$$

An eavesdropper gains this Shannon information on the binary key whose signals are given by $\Psi = 0, 1$ when he learns, from communication on the public channel, the polarisation basis $\alpha = o, +$ (linear or circular) used for each signal, and registers the outcome k on the measurement apparatus triggered by each signal. The probabilities that a “0” or a “1” is sent are denoted by $p(\Psi)$, the probability that outcome k is triggered by a photon prepared as basis state of the linear or circular polarisation basis is written as $p(k_\alpha)$, and the joint probability distribution for both events is $p(\Psi, k_\alpha)$.

We would like to give an upper bound on this Shannon information as a function of the *measured* disturbance of the quantum channel given as the error rate in the deterministic signals. This error rate is basically the fidelity measure D_{fid} of the channel, given by

$$D_{\text{fid}} = 1 - \frac{1}{4} \sum_{j=1}^4 \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (\rho_j \tilde{\rho}_j) . \quad (6)$$

The definition of D_{fid} assumes here the use of the one photon polarisation Hilbert space. The expression $\text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (\rho_i \tilde{\rho}_i)$ is the overlap between the input state ρ_i , which is one of the four signal states, and the final state $\tilde{\rho}_i$ of the eavesdropper’s measurement performed on this input state ρ_i . This can be interpreted as the probability that the final state is still recognised as the initial state in apparatus of the receiver. Then D_{fid} is the error rate averaged over the four signal states.

It can be shown [8] that the optimal eavesdropping strategy can be given by operators A_k which can be described by real matrices in a representation for which the signal states are real density matrices. Each operator A_k , which can always be expressed in the form

$$A_k = \sqrt{a_k} O_k + \left(\sqrt{b_k} - \sqrt{a_k} \right) O_k P_k \quad (7)$$

with real, positive numbers a_k and b_k , ($b_k \geq a_k$), projection operators P_k and orthogonal operators O_k . The optimal strategy satisfies the symmetry that for each such operator the set of operators A_k contains as well the operator

$$\tilde{A}_k = \sqrt{a_k} O_k + (\sqrt{b_k} - \sqrt{a_k}) O_k \bar{P} \quad (8)$$

which employs the orthogonal complement $\bar{P} = \mathbb{1}_{\mathcal{H}} - P_k$. The optimal eavesdropping strategy associates a measurement outcome with each of the operators A_k separately so that we do not need to employ any partitions $K^{(k)}$. For such an eavesdropping strategy the measured disturbance D_{fid} is given by

$$D_{\text{fid}} = \sum_i \left[\frac{1}{4} \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (\rho_i E_i) - \sum_{k \in K} \left(\frac{1}{4} \sqrt{a_k b_k} \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (O_k \rho_i O_k^{\text{T}} E_i) + \frac{1}{4} \frac{(\sqrt{b_k} - \sqrt{a_k})^2}{2} \left(\text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (O_k P_k \rho_i P_k O_k^{\text{T}} E_i) + \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (O_k \bar{P}_k \rho_i \bar{P}_k O_k^{\text{T}} E_i) \right) \right) \right].$$

Here E_i is the projection operator describing the effect of the polarisation analyser. For the one photon space we have $E_i = \rho_i$. The Shannon information is given by the expression

$$I = \sum_k \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \left[1 - \log(1 + \eta_k^2) + \frac{1}{2(1 + \eta_k^2)} \left\{ (\eta_k^2 + c_k - \eta_k^2 c_k) \log(\eta_k^2 + c_k - \eta_k^2 c_k) + (1 - c_k + \eta_k^2 c_k) \log(1 - c_k + \eta_k^2 c_k) + (\eta_k^2 + d_k - \eta_k^2 d_k) \log(\eta_k^2 + d_k - \eta_k^2 d_k) + (1 - d_k + \eta_k^2 d_k) \log(1 - d_k + \eta_k^2 d_k) \right\} \right]. \quad (9)$$

In this expression we used the definitions of the overlaps $c_k = \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (\rho_1 P_k)$ and $d_k = \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} (\rho_3 P_k)$ and of the characteristic parameters $\eta_k = \sqrt{\frac{a_k}{b_k}}$ with $\eta \in [0, 1]$. For $\eta_k = 1$ an operator A_k takes the characteristics of the identity operator, which corresponds to non-interference of the eavesdropper, and for $\eta_k = 0$ the eavesdropping strategy tends to a von Neumann projection measurement. The overlaps are restricted by the inequality

$$(d_k - \frac{1}{2})^2 + (c_k - \frac{1}{2})^2 \leq \frac{1}{4}. \quad (10)$$

We can find the optimal choice of orthogonal operators O_k and P_k . The optimal choices are given in a later section. As a result we find now for the disturbance the inequality

$$D_{\text{fid}} \geq \sum_{k \in K} \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{1}{4} \frac{(1 - \eta_k)^2}{1 + \eta_k^2}. \quad (11)$$

Note that the condition (1) implies that

$$\sum_k \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} = 1 \quad (12)$$

so that the expressions $\frac{a_k + b_k}{2}$ have the property of a probability. The Shannon information can be estimated by

$$I \leq \sum_k \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{1}{2} \left(1 - \log(1 + \eta_k^2) + \frac{\eta_k^2}{1 + \eta_k^2} \log \eta_k^2 \right). \quad (13)$$

It can be shown that the optimal choice of the characteristic parameters η_k is for them to take the same value $\tilde{\eta}$. The proof uses variation methods. Then we find the inequalities

$$D_{fid} \geq \frac{1}{4} \frac{(1 - \tilde{\eta})^2}{1 + \tilde{\eta}^2} \quad (14)$$

$$I \leq \frac{1}{2} \left(1 - \log(1 + \tilde{\eta}^2) + \frac{\tilde{\eta}^2}{1 + \tilde{\eta}^2} \log \tilde{\eta}^2 \right). \quad (15)$$

If we actually measure the average error rate D_{fid} and find the value D_m we can bound the value of $\tilde{\eta}$ by

$$\tilde{\eta} \geq \bar{\eta} := \begin{cases} \frac{1 - 2\sqrt{2}\sqrt{(1 - 2D_m)D_m}}{1 - 4D_m} & D_m \leq \frac{1}{4} \\ 0 & D_m \geq \frac{1}{4} \end{cases} \quad (16)$$

which leads to the bound of the eavesdropper's Shannon information [7, 8] as

$$I_S \leq \frac{1}{2} \left(1 - \log(1 + \bar{\eta}^2) + \frac{\bar{\eta}^2}{1 + \bar{\eta}^2} \log \bar{\eta}^2 \right). \quad (17)$$

It can be shown that this bound can be further estimated by the linear bound

$$I \leq \frac{2}{\ln 2} D_m \quad (18)$$

where $\ln 2$ is the natural logarithm of 2. For small D_m this bound is nearly as good as the bound (17) which will later be shown to be sharp. The sharp bound and the linear approximation are plotted in figure 3 as a function of the measured fidelity disturbance. Typical values for experimental realisations using the BB84 protocol achieve an error rate of 4 % for 30 km or 1.5 % for 10 km distance between sender and receiver.

4 Privacy amplification

For the purpose of secret communication the amount of Shannon information possibly leaked to an eavesdropper according to the previous estimate is far too high. However,

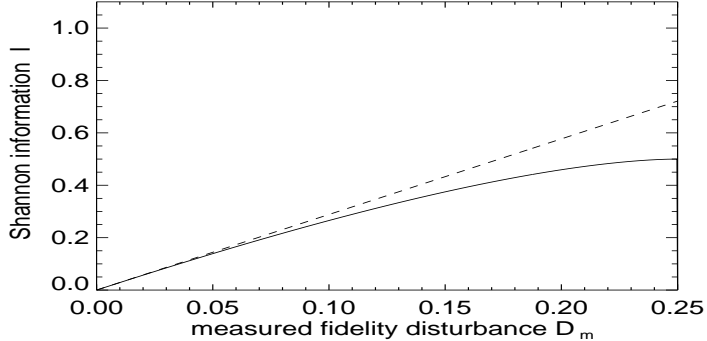


Figure 1: The bound on the Shannon information in the sharp (continuous line) and the linear bound (dashed line) as a function of the measured disturbance D_m .

making use of the technique of *privacy amplification* [9] it is possible to reduce Eve's total amount of Shannon information on the remaining key. For that the key has to be shortened using *hash functions*. The characteristic quantity for the fraction by which the key has to be shortened is the parameter τ_1 . If we shorten the key by the fraction τ_1 then the eavesdropper is left at most with a Shannon information of 1 bit on the *whole* key. Each bit by which the key is shortened additionally decreases this remaining Shannon information exponentially. The parameter τ_1 can be expressed with the help of the *collision probability* $\langle p_c(y) \rangle_y$ as

$$\tau_1 = 1 + \log \langle p_c(y) \rangle_y^{\frac{1}{N}} . \quad (19)$$

The collision probability $\langle p_c(y) \rangle_y = \sum_x p(x|y)^2$ refers to the probability distribution $p(x|y)$ over all possible signal string x , conditioned on the event that the eavesdropper measured a particular string of measurement results y .

Before they can apply the technique of privacy amplification, the sender and the receiver have to perform some type of error correction on their shared key. We assume that this process can be done without the eavesdropper gaining any additional knowledge and without the creation of any correlations between the signals. A possible realisation would be to use block parity comparison where the compared parity bit is encoded using some short shared secret key from the same source which gives the key used in the authentication of the public channel. In this case the collision probability is given by

$$\langle p_c(y) \rangle_y^{\frac{1}{n}} = \sum_{k,\alpha,\psi} \frac{p^{(c)}(\psi, k_\alpha)^2}{p^{(c)}(k_\alpha)} , \quad (20)$$

where the probabilities $p^{(c)}(\psi, k_\alpha)$ and $p^{(c)}(k_\alpha)$ now refer to the corrected key, and it takes only those signal transmissions which were correctly received into account. The

joint probability distribution $p^{(c)}(\psi, k_\alpha)$ is given, with a normalisation constant C , by

$$p^{(c)}(\psi, k_\alpha) = \frac{1}{C} \text{Tr}_{\mathcal{H}} \left(A_k \rho_{\psi_\alpha} A_k^\dagger \rho_{\psi_\alpha} \right). \quad (21)$$

It is again possible to show general properties of the A_k which lead to an optimal information gain by the eavesdropper, along with minimal disturbance of the signal transmission. The optimal A_k can be shown to be real (in the real representation of the signal states) and to consist of symmetric or anti-symmetric matrices. The symmetric matrices can have eigenvalues of different or of the same sign so that they can be written as

$$A_k^{(\pm)} = \sqrt{a_k} \mathbb{1}_{\mathcal{H}} - \left(\sqrt{a_k} \pm \sqrt{b_k} \right) P_k \quad (22)$$

with the a_k and b_k satisfying, as before, $b_k \geq a_k \geq 0$ and P_k is a projection operator. To each such operator the set of operators A_k contains an operator

$$\tilde{A}_k^{(\pm)} = \sqrt{a_k} \mathbb{1}_{\mathcal{H}} - \left(\sqrt{a_k} \pm \sqrt{b_k} \right) \overline{P}_k \quad (23)$$

using the orthonormal complement $\overline{P}_k = \mathbb{1}_{\mathcal{H}} - P_k$. I refrain from giving to give the expressions for the collision probability and the disturbance D_{fid} in the general form and give instead the forms optimised with respect to the choice of projection operators P_k . At this stage they are given with the help of the characteristic parameter η_k which satisfies $\eta_k^2 = \frac{a_k}{b_k}$ and takes values in the range $\eta_k \in [-1, 1]$ which is in contrast to the calculations leading to the bound on the Shannon information. The disturbance satisfies the inequality

$$D_{\text{fid}} = \sum_{k \in K^{(\pm)}} \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{1}{4} \frac{(\eta_k - 1)^2}{\eta_k^2 + 1} + \sum_{k \in K^{(a)}} \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{1}{4}. \quad (24)$$

where $K^{(\pm)}$ is the index set of the symmetric operators and $K^{(a)}$ the index set of the anti-symmetric operators. The collision probability is bound by

$$\left\langle p_c^{(c)}(y) \right\rangle^{\frac{1}{n}} \leq \frac{\sum_k \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{1}{2} \frac{1}{1 + \eta_k^2} \frac{17 + 12\eta_k + 6\eta_k^2 + 12\eta_k^3 + 17\eta_k^4}{3 + 2\eta_k + 3\eta_k^2}}{\sum_k \frac{a_k + b_k}{2} \frac{3 + 2\eta_k + 3\eta_k^2}{1 + \eta_k^2}}. \quad (25)$$

We use again a variation method to show that the optimal eavesdropping strategy employs characteristic parameters η_k with the same value $\tilde{\eta}$. Also it is clear that it is of disadvantage to the eavesdropper to use anti-symmetric operators A_k . This leads to the estimates

$$D_{\text{fid}} \geq \frac{1}{4} \sum_{k \in K} \frac{(\tilde{\eta} - 1)^2}{\tilde{\eta}^2 + 1} \quad (26)$$

and

$$\langle p_c^{(c)}(y) \rangle^{\frac{1}{N}} \leq \frac{1}{2} \frac{17 + 12\tilde{\eta} + 6\tilde{\eta}^2 + 12\tilde{\eta}^3 + 17\tilde{\eta}^4}{(3 + 2\tilde{\eta} + 3\tilde{\eta}^2)^2}. \quad (27)$$

The measured disturbance D_m leads to a bound on $\tilde{\eta}$ given by

$$\tilde{\eta} \geq \bar{\eta} := \begin{cases} \frac{1-2\sqrt{2}\sqrt{(1-2D_m)D_m}}{1-4D_m} & D_m \leq \frac{1}{2} \\ -1 & D_m \geq \frac{1}{2} \end{cases}. \quad (28)$$

This finally allows us to bound the parameter τ_1 (19) by the inequality [8]

$$\tau_1 \leq \begin{cases} \log \left(\frac{17+12\bar{\eta}+6\bar{\eta}^2+12\bar{\eta}^3+17\bar{\eta}^4}{(3+2\bar{\eta}+3\bar{\eta}^2)^2} \right) & D_m \leq \frac{1}{3} \\ 1 & \frac{1}{3} \leq D_m \leq 1 \end{cases} \quad (29)$$

This bound is shown in figure 4. Typical error rates in the BT experiment are $e \in [0.01, 0.05]$ which corresponds to $\tau_1 \in [0.05, 0.26]$.

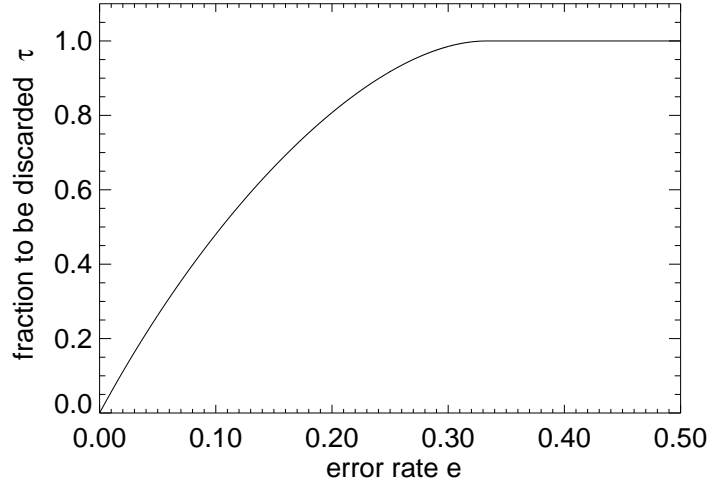


Figure 2: The parameter τ_1 as a function of the error rate. The error rate e is equal to the disturbance measure D_{fid} .

5 Validity of the bounds

The derivation of the bounds presented above assumes that the eavesdropper interacts with the signal photons but does not absorb them. In the experimental realisation, however, an absorption of about 90 % is observed. The validity of the bounds can be extended

to accommodate the possibility of absorption by re-defining the average error rate as referring only to those signals where the polarisation analyser successfully measured a signal. It can be shown that the eavesdropper cannot increase the trade-off between information and induced error rate by forwarding signal states to the receiver which contain more than one photon. The basic tool for this extension of the validity of the bounds is that one can show that each eavesdropper strategy is equivalent to an eavesdropper strategy which results in final states which are Fock states of fixed photon number.

6 Delayed measurements

The description of a delayed measurement needed here is that the eavesdropper has effectively two eavesdropping strategies at hand: one for each signal set of linear or circular polarisation. They are given by the A-operators $\{A_k\}_{k \in K}$ and $\{B_l\}_{l \in L}$ with two index sets K and L which are not necessarily of the same size. The strategies cannot be chosen independently of each other since they must be alternative descriptions of the quantum channel viewed as a non-selective measurement. This means that the equality

$$\sum_{k \in K} A_k \rho A_k^\dagger = \sum_{l \in L} B_l \rho B_l^\dagger \quad (30)$$

must hold for all density matrices ρ . An example of relations between the sets $\{A_k\}_{k \in K}$ and $\{B_l\}_{l \in L}$ satisfying this equality is the choice $B_l = \sum_k c_{lk} A_k$ with $\sum_k c_{lk} \bar{c}_{kn} = \delta_{ln}$. One can give a crude estimate of the Shannon information and of the collision probability because the disturbance is independent of the overlaps c_k and d_k . To give the bounds let the eavesdropper choose the projection operators P_k of the set of operators A_k and B_k independently. Quantum mechanics will put some restrictions on that relation so that the resulting bounds are no longer sharp. Thus the eavesdropper's Shannon information may increase by a factor 2. The collision probability is bounded by

$$\langle p_c^{(c)}(y) \rangle^{\frac{1}{n}} \leq \frac{1 + \tilde{\eta}^4}{(1 + \tilde{\eta}^2)^2} \quad (31)$$

where $\tilde{\eta}$ is bounded by the measured disturbance D_{fid} as given in (28). The resulting bound for the fraction τ_1 of bits to be discarded during privacy amplification is plotted in figure 6. In this estimate we can prove security against eavesdropping as long as the error rate is less than 25 %. This result is likely to remain valid if we allow n -photon operations as in the previous chapter. Formal proof, however, should be postponed until a sharp bound for delayed choice eavesdropping strategies can be given. Clearer understanding of the restrictions imposed by (30) is essential for the derivation of the sharp bound.

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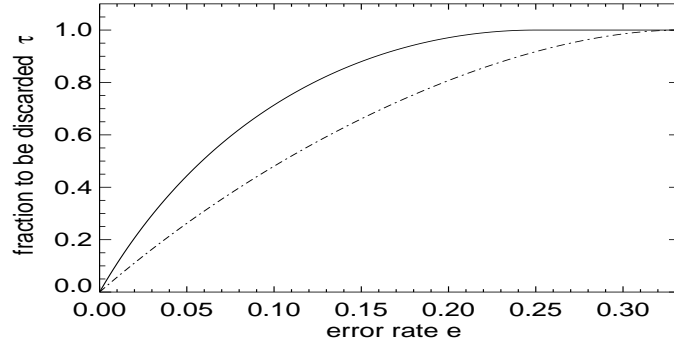


Figure 3: *The crude bound of the fraction τ_1 of bits to be discarded during privacy amplification allowing for delayed measurements (solid line). This is compared to the sharp bound for non-delayed measurements (dashed line).*

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