

Carbon Isotope Effect in Single-Crystal Rb_3C_{60}

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We have synthesized single crystals of isotopically enriched Rb_3C_{60} . The very sharp superconducting transitions in single crystal superconducting fullerenes allow us to determine the isotope effect on the superconducting transition temperature, T_c , with unprecedented accuracy. We find that the carbon isotope shift exponent α_{carbon} for 99% ^{13}C substitution is 0.21 ± 0.012 , significantly smaller than other values reported in the literature^{1–6}. This, coupled with the near-zero rubidium isotope effect reported by B. Burk et. al.⁷, should place considerable constraints on any theoretical model of superconductivity in the alkali fullerenes.

1. EXPERIMENTAL

Commercially available 99% enriched ^{13}C powder was used as a starting material in the preparation of $^{13}\text{C}_{60}$. Rods of $^{13}\text{C}_{60}$ were formed using a method similar to that reported by C.-C. Chen et.al.⁵ The rods were arc-burned in a helium atmosphere to produce fullerene soot. C_{60} was extracted from the soot using HPLC chromatography. A similar batch of natural abundance C_{60} was prepared as a control from graphite rods. It should be noted that as natural abundance carbon is approximately 1.1% ^{13}C , both samples have similar isotopic purity (99%).

Crystals were grown from the C_{60} powder using a vapor transport method under flowing argon. Crystals were intercalated with rubidium following a previously reported method⁸.

2. RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the resistive transitions of two samples each of natural abundance carbon and 99% ^{13}C enriched Rb_3C_{60} . The resistively measured transitions are much narrower in

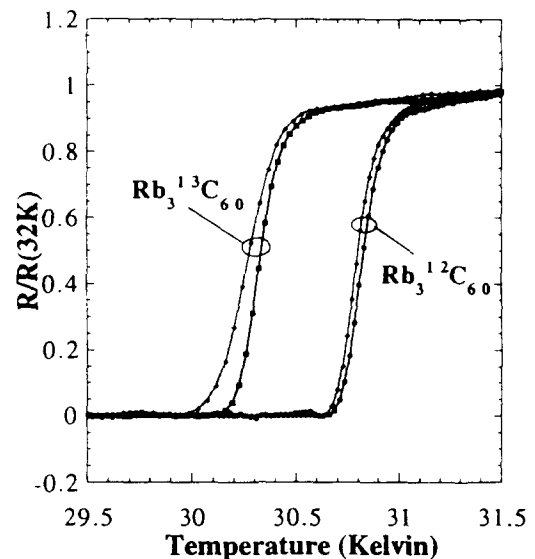


Figure 1. Resistive transitions in $\text{Rb}_3^{12}\text{C}_{60}$ and $\text{Rb}_3^{13}\text{C}_{60}$.

temperature than the isotope shift. The transitions are also nearly parallel, reducing the dependence of the measured isotope shift value on the choice of definition of T_c . We chose to define T_c as the maximum in the first derivative of resistance with temperature,

which gave a value which was most consistent from sample to sample of the same composition. The measured shift in T_c is then 505 ± 30 mK. Assuming that the transition temperature depends on the isotope mass to the negative power of α , this gives a value of $\alpha_{\text{carbon}} = 0.21 \pm 0.012$.

3. DISCUSSION

We find a value of α_{carbon} lower than, and outside the error margins of, any reported in the literature¹⁻⁶. Using the frequency distribution of the electron-phonon coupling function due to Schluter, et. al.⁹, we calculate $\lambda = 1.05$ and $\mu^* = 0.21$. These values are 20-25% larger than those obtained assuming $\alpha_{\text{carbon}} = 0.3$, and should place serious constraints on theories of superconductivity in A_3C_{60} .

The need for large values of λ and μ^* to explain the high T_c and small α_{carbon} of Rb_3C_{60} hints that the alkali metal phonons may be playing a larger role in the superconductivity than is indicated by their small isotope effect. The possibility of a large alkali metal mode contribution to λ masked by an anharmonic potential is intriguing. In fact, experiments by our group⁷ indicate that α_{Rb} may be negative, as is the hydrogen isotope effect in palladium hydride, where the hydrogen ions see a strongly anharmonic potential. No such experiments to determine the potassium isotope effect in K_3C_{60} have been published; such an experiment could shed light on this possibility.

The sharp transitions in single crystals of A_3C_{60} should also help to elucidate the previously reported⁶ possibility of an anomalous isotope shift in isotopically disordered samples.

4. CONCLUSION

We have measured the carbon isotope using high-quality single crystals of 99% isotopic

purity. We find $\alpha_{\text{carbon}} = 0.21 \pm 0.012$, a value lower than any reported in the literature. This low value of α_{carbon} should have a significant impact on theories of superconductivity in C_{60} compounds, and also raises the interesting possibility of a significant contribution to superconductivity in A_3C_{60} by the alkali metal modes, whose isotope effect may be masked by the effects of an anharmonic potential.

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