Enhancing $T_c$ in field-doped Fullerenes by applying uniaxial stress

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Capitalizing on the two-dimensional nature of superconductivity in field-effect doped C$_{60}$, we show that it should be possible to increase the transition temperature $T_c$ by applying uniaxial stress perpendicular to the gate electrode. This method not only holds the promise of substantially enhancing $T_c$ (by about 30 K per GPa), but also provides a sensitive check of the current understanding of superconductivity in the doped Fullerenes.

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In a remarkable series of experiments Schön and collaborators have demonstrated superconductivity in field-effect devices based on Fulleren crystals. In a first step they field-doped pure C$_{60}$ with electrons, observing a maximum $T_c$ of 11 K at a doping of about 3 electrons per molecule in the layer under the gate electrode [1]. Reversing the polarity of the gate voltage, they achieved hole-doping, finding superconductivity with a transition temperature of up to 52 K at a doping level of about 3 to 3.5 holes per molecule [2]. In these crystals, the volume per C$_{60}$ molecule is increased due to the presence of the intercalated molecules. Superconductivity was observed for electron- as well as for hole-doping and it was found that in both cases $T_c$ increases almost linearly with the distance between neighboring C$_{60}$ molecules, reaching 80 K for C$_{60}$·2CHCl$_3$ and 117 K for C$_{60}$·2CHBr$_3$. After this discovery a 'race to beat the cuprates' has been announced [3], and the search is on for ways to further increase the transition temperature in the Fullerenes. Here we show that a feasible method for doing so is the application of uniaxial stress perpendicular to the gate electrode. While this proposal might at first seem counterintuitive, we will demonstrate that it is a natural consequence of the two-dimensional nature of superconductivity in the field-doped Fullerenes.

So far superconductivity in field-doped Fullerenes has been discussed in close analogy to alkali-doped C$_{60}$. This was motivated by the remarkable similarities between these two classes of materials [4]: (i) in both $T_c$ is largest when the $t_{1u}$ band is half-filled, and (ii) $T_c$ increases with the distance between the C$_{60}$ molecules in the crystal, which is explained as a consequence of the corresponding increase in the density of states at the Fermi level. Experimentally it is found that for a given nearest-neighbor distance the transition temperature for the alkali- and the electron-field-doped Fullerenes are almost identical [5]. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the two classes of materials: the alkali-doped Fullerenes are bulk-superconductors, while in the field-effect devices superconductivity is restricted to two dimensions. It appears that in the field-doped Fullerenes only the first monolayer under the gate electrode is doped. This is confirmed by tight-binding simulations where it is found that the deeper layers carry negligible charge density [6]. Experimentally it is supported by the fact that for the increase in $T_c$ upon intercalation of CHCl$_3$ and CHBr$_3$ only the change in the nearest neighbor distance seems to matter, while the change in crystal structure appears to have no effect. At the temperatures where superconductivity occurs, pure C$_{60}$ is simple cubic with four molecules (sitting on fcc sites) per unit cell [7], while the intercalated crystals are (almost) hexagonal [8, 9]. This suggests that superconductivity in field-doped Fullerenes is restricted to a single, triangular layer: a (111) plane in C$_{60}$ and a (001) plane in C$_{60}$·2CHCl$_3$ and C$_{60}$·2CHBr$_3$.

Given that only a single lattice plane is involved in the superconductivity and given that the transition temperature $T_c$ increases with the distance between neighboring molecules, it should be possible to increase $T_c$ simply by pushing on the gate electrode of the field-effect device. Such uniaxial stress will decrease the spacing of the lattice planes parallel to the gate, but at the same time it will increase the distance of the molecules in the planes. This is the Poisson effect [10]. We again stress the fundamental difference between the alkali- and the field-doped Fullerenes. The alkali-doped materials are bulk superconductors. Thus under pressure, even under uniaxial stress, the volume per molecule is reduced, lowering the density of states at the Fermi level and hence $T_c$. In contrast, in the field-doped Fullerenes only the layer under the gate electrode is doped, and therefore hopping to the deeper layers is suppressed by the strong electrostatic potential of the induced space charge [8]. Thus, reducing the distance between the layers will have a negligible effect on the (practically two-dimensional) density of states, which is, however, strongly increased by the increasing distance of the molecules in the plane.

At this point the obvious questions are: Will uniaxial stress really affect the molecules under the gate electrode? And if so, how large will the effect be? The first problem that comes to mind is that the molecules under the gate might be held in place through interactions with the Al$_2$O$_3$ gate oxide. In this case the response of
the molecules to stress would rather be determined by the hard oxide than by the elastic constants of the soft organic crystal. Strong bonding of the C\textsubscript{60} molecules to the gate dielectric seems, however, quite unlikely, and there is even direct evidence for the mobility of the molecules to stress would rather be determined by the hard oxide than by the elastic constants of the soft organic crystal. Pressures of the order of 1 GPa can, however, large spread in the predicted elastic constants, which vary by more than 0.3%, see Fig. 1) [7], while the thermal expansion of aluminum oxide does not show any significant structure in that temperature range [11]. Nevertheless, the ordering transition shows up in the resistivity of field-doped C\textsubscript{60} (Fig. 5 of Ref. 2), indicating that the molecules in the relevant layer indeed remain mobile.

The next question is whether it is experimentally feasible to apply pressure of any significant magnitude to field-effect devices based on delicate organic crystals. As it turns out, the necessary techniques are well established for the investigation of quasi-two-dimensional organic conductors: The whole device is embedded in a suitable epoxy or frozen in oil, and the application of pressures of up to 1 GPa at temperatures down to 0.5 K to samples of millimeter dimensions is straightforward [12, 13].

Ironically, one of the major problems in such experiments seems to be the suppression of the Poisson effect [13], the very effect which is desired in the present case. Thinking about C\textsubscript{60} under pressure one might worry about polymerization. Pressures of the order of 1 GPa can, however, be considered low [14]. Moreover, under uniaxial stress the crystal will rather loose cohesion and be squeezed, than that the resilient C\textsubscript{60} molecules will form chemical bonds.

How large an effect on \textit{Tc} can we expect? For an estimate we calculate the Young modulus \textit{E} and the Poisson ratio \sigma for C\textsubscript{60} under uniaxial stress. In terms of the elastic constants, the elastic response to stress in the [100] direction is given by

\[ E_{[100]} = \frac{(c_{11} - c_{12})(c_{11} + 2c_{12})}{c_{11} + c_{12}}, \quad \sigma_{[100]} = \frac{c_{12}}{c_{11} + c_{12}}. \]

For stress in the [111] direction we find

\[ E_{[111]} = \frac{3(c_{11} + 2c_{12})c_{44}}{c_{11} + 2c_{12} + c_{44}}, \quad \sigma_{[111]} = \frac{c_{11} + 2(c_{12} - c_{44})}{2(c_{11} + 2c_{12} + c_{44})}. \]

Table 1 gives a list of representative theoretical values for the elastic constants of C\textsubscript{60} from the literature and from calculations using the Girifalco [17] and the Pacheco-Ramalho [18] potentials. There is a remarkably large spread in the predicted elastic constants, which vary by up to a factor of two. The Young moduli fall in the ranges \( E_{[100]} \approx 10 \ldots 16 \text{ GPa} \) and \( E_{[111]} \approx 18 \ldots 30 \text{ GPa} \). The Poisson ratios differ, however, by only about ten percent: \( \sigma_{[100]} \approx 0.32 \) and \( \sigma_{[111]} \approx 0.2 \). Using the slope \( c \approx 230 \text{ K/Å} \) of \( T_c \) as a function of \( a = \sqrt{2}d \), where \( d \) is the distance to the nearest molecule in the doped layer, that was found experimentally [2], we can estimate the increase in transition temperature under uniaxial stress: \( \Delta T_c / p = \frac{ca_0 \sigma}{E} \). For a hole-doped C\textsubscript{60} crystal under uniaxial stress in the [111] direction we thus find

\[ \Delta T_{c[111]} / p \approx 22 \ldots 36 \text{ K/GPa} \].

Should the [100] plane be the relevant for superconductivity, the effect would be even larger: \( \Delta T_{c[100]} / p \approx 65 \ldots 105 \text{ K/GPa} \).

The effect of uniaxial stress on the transition temperature in field-doped Fullerenes should thus be large, indeed. Already a modest force of 20 Newton on a crystal with an area of a square millimeter should increase \( T_c \) by about half a Kelvin or more. Such an effect should be observable when monitoring the source-drain resistivity of the field-effect device just above the ambient-pressure transition temperature. The increase in \( T_c \) is of course limited by the yield stress of the C\textsubscript{60} crystal. To get a feeling for the behavior of C\textsubscript{60} under finite stress, Fig. 2 shows the increase in the intermolecular distance \( d \) in the plane and the decrease in distance between the lattice planes as a function of the applied stress in [111] direction. For finite stresses the increase in \( d \) is even larger than expected from the elastic constants. Eventually the slope of \( \Delta d / d_0 \) becomes, however, infinite, which means that the crystal is squeezed.

In our estimate of the change in transition temperature under uniaxial stress we have assumed that the in-
The only relevant parameter for determining distance of the molecules in the doped lattice plane is the Young modulus, the symbols show the calculated deformations under finite stress. The lines show the deformation expected from the potential. The lines show the deformation expected from the potential. The lines show the deformation expected from the potential. The lines show the deformation expected from the potential.

![Graph](image)

FIG. 2: Response to uniaxial stress in [111] direction calculated using the Girifalco (open symbols and dotted lines) and the Pacheco-Ramalho (filled symbols and dashed lines) potential. The lines show the deformation expected from the Young modulus, the symbols show the calculated deformations under finite stress.

...interpretation given in Ref. 3 is correct, namely that the distance of the molecules in the doped lattice plane is the only relevant parameter for determining $T_c$. A recent structural analysis of the low temperature phases of C$_{60}$-2CHCl$_3$ and C$_{60}$-2CHBr$_3$ has, however, cast doubts on this interpretation [9]. It might therefore be possible, that other effects, like the different molecular orientations or the presence of the intercalants substantially influence superconductivity. In that respect, investigating the change in $T_c$ under uniaxial stress could help to clarify the situation.

In summary, the application of uniaxial stress is a straightforward and feasible way for enhancing the transition temperatures of field-doped Fullerenes even further. We have shown that the enhancement is significant, about 30 K per GPa, so that already the effect of very small pressures should be measurable. Besides the potential for achieving record $T_c$'s, such experiments would deepen our understanding of the physics behind the increase in transition temperature, since they would allow to study the effect of an increased spacing between the molecules without having to introduce additional molecules. Due to the softness of the Fullerenes it is tempting to speculate that it might even be possible to push the field-doped Fullerenes across the Mott transition [15]. Then, by continuously varying the distance between the molecules (by the applied stress) and the doping (by the gate voltage) it should be possible to study the physics of a doped Mott insulator. From the alkali-doped Fullerenes we know that $T_c$ decreases when the lattice constant is increased too much [20, 21]. It will thus be interesting to see whether $T_c$ in the field-doped Fullerenes will be limited by the Mott transition, or if the maximum $T_c$ is realized in the Mott insulating regime — at some optimal doping.

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