Similarity and contrasts between thermodynamic properties at the critical point of liquid alkali metals and of electron-hole droplets

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The recent experimental study by means of time-resolved luminescence measurements of an electron-hole liquid (EHL) in diamond by Shimano et al. [Phys.Rev.Lett. 88, 057404 (2002)] prompts us to compare and contrast critical temperature $T_c$ and critical density $n_c$ relations in liquid alkali metals with those in electron-hole liquids. The conclusion drawn is that these systems have similarities with regard to critical properties. In both cases the critical temperature is related to the cube root of the critical density. The existence of this relation is traced to Coulomb interactions and to systematic trends in the dielectric constant of the electron-hole systems. Finally a brief comparison between the alkalis and EHLs of the critical values for the compressibility ratio $Z_c$ is also given.

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Two of us1,2 have been concerned in earlier work with the behavior of the thermodynamic quantities $T_c$, $n_c$ and $p_c$, at the critical points of the fluid alkali metals. Relationships were shown to exist between critical temperature $T_c$ and critical number density $n_c$ for the five fluid alkalis, the form anticipated in the earlier investigation of Chapman and March1, namely

$$T_c n_c^{1/3} = \text{constant} \quad (1)$$

being confirmed in.1

The present study has been prompted by the very recent experiment of Shimano et al.3, who report on the formation of an EHL in diamond, by means of time-resolved luminescence measurements under an intense femtosecond photocexcitation above the band gap. Then, by time-resolved spectral shape analysis, a very high carrier density $n_0 = 1.0 \times 10^{20} \text{cm}^{-3}$ at $T = 0$ is revealed, together with the high value of the critical temperature $T_c$ already recorded above.

In addition to the important findings for the EHL in diamond, Shimano et al.3 comment in their introduction on the similarities between the physical properties of the EHL and liquefied metals. It is their comment which has motivated the present study, in which we compare and contrast EHL properties with those of the fluid alkali metals. The Eq. (1) above provides a natural starting point, but unfortunately while $T_c$ is known for at least 5 EHLs, the same is not true for the critical density $n_c$.

However, prompted by the form (1), we have taken data from Ref.3, and have collected $T_c$ and the zero temperature densities $n_0$ for 5 EHLs in Table 1 of the present paper. From these values, it can be readily shown that whereas $T_c$ increases by a factor $\sim 25$ in going from Ge to diamond, the zero temperature quantity $n_0$ increases by a factor $4 \times 10^2$. Due to the form (1), which we emphasize however contains the critical density $n_c$ in the fluid alkalis, we have studied first the question as to whether $T_c$ correlates with $n_0$ in the 5 EHLs referred to in Table 1. After some numerical investigation, we have constructed Fig. 1, which demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that $T_c$ and $n_0$ indeed correlate strongly. There is power law behavior between $T_c$ and $n_0$, although the $1/3$ power in Eq. (1) must be modified (empirically to $1/2$; see caption to Fig. 1 and the further comments below). However, while Fig. 1 displays similarities of shape with Eq. (1) for the fluid alkalis, this equation contains the critical density $n_c$ whereas for lack of experimental information, Fig. 1 correlates $T_c$ with the zero temperature density $n_0$.

In the absence of experimental information on $n_c$, we have sought a theoretical basis for bringing Eq. (1) and Fig. 1 into closer contact. We are considerably aided here by the work of Kalt et al.4. These authors observed picosecond electron-hole droplet formation in the indirect gap material $Al_xGa_{1-x}As$.

| $n_0$ (cm$^{-3}$) | $T_c$ (K) | $\varepsilon$ |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Ge   | $2.5 \times 10^{17}$ | 6.7 | 16.0 |
| Si   | $3.3 \times 10^{18}$ | 24.5 | 12  |
| GaP  | $6 \times 10^{18}$ | 40  | 9.1  |
| 3C-SiC | $7.8 \times 10^{18}$ | 41  | 9.72 |
| Diamond | $1.0 \times 10^{20}$ | 165 | 5.7  |

TABLE I: Values for the EHL number density $n_0$ at $T = 0$, the critical temperature $T_c$, and the dielectric constant $\varepsilon$ in five indirect-gap semiconductors (Extracted from Table 1 of Ref. 3).
With a reference to Forchel et al., obviously, if we adopt this so-called 'scaling law', then Eq. (1) and the result from Fig. 1 come into intimate context, and the conclusion is that there is a different exponent, say generally denoted by $\kappa$, for the relationship

$$T_c n_c^{-\kappa} = \text{constant}$$

with $\kappa = \frac{1}{3}$ for the 5 fluid alkalis and $\sim \frac{1}{2}$ from Fig. 1 and Eq. (2) for the EHLs. Already, Chapman and March had noted the totally different critical behavior for liquid alkali metals compared with condensed rare gases, for the latter case the exponent $\kappa$ being $-2$.

As this brief report was nearing completion, we became aware of two further contributions. In the first of these, written more than 20 years ago by Reinecke and Ying, the authors had anticipated a relation $T_c n_c^{-\frac{1}{3}} = \text{constant}$. This is the more remarkable because it can be seen from the present Fig. 1 that the 'diamond' point of Shimano et al. is crucial to fitting the parabolic form, and allowing the above constant to be made wholly quantitative. The writers who anticipated the parabolic relation, however, went on to express doubts as to whether such a relation had any fundamental basis. This leads us to the second contribution referred to above: that of Likal’ter.

Likal’ter studies what he emphasizes is the limiting situation of the EHL in which the hole mass $m_h \gg m_e$, the electron mass. He then gives individual formulae for the critical constants $T_c$ and $n_c$, discussed above, and also for the critical pressure $p_c$. Our interest in Likal’ter’s formulæ is to expose relations between these critical constants which can then be compared and contrasted with known results for the fluid alkali metals.

The first $T_c - n_c$ relation which follows from Likal’ter’s model is

$$T_c = \left[ \frac{4}{7} \right]^2 \left[ \frac{4\pi}{3} \right]^{1/3} \frac{e^2 \gamma n_c^{1/3}}{2 \varepsilon}$$

where $\gamma$ is a renormalized Madelung constant, given by Likal’ter as $\approx 0.55$. This formula differs qualitatively from the fluid metals finding of Chapman and March by the dielectric constant $\varepsilon$ of the semiconductors appearing in the denominator. The limiting prediction of Eq. (4) deduced from Likal’ter’s model will now be brought into close contact with the plot in Fig. 1. Thus in Fig. 2 we have used the data from Table 1, including the experimental dielectric constant values recorded in the final column, to plot $T_c$ vs. $n_0^{-\frac{1}{3}}$. There is clearly a linear relation as predicted by Likal’ter’s model. Accepting the scaling relation (2), the parabolic fit of the data in Fig. 1 can be reconciled with the linearity of Fig. 2 provided $\varepsilon$ and $n_0$ are related, of course approximately, by a $\frac{1}{3}$ power law. However, at present we have no fundamental justification for a relation $\varepsilon n_0^{\frac{1}{3}} = \text{constant}$, because, at least in principle, such a formula could contain the binding energy of excitons, or the effective electron mass.

Returning to the similarities and differences from the fluid metals, we have also employed Likal’ter’s individual formulæ for $T_c$, $n_c$, and $p_c$ to calculate the so-called compressibility ratio $Z_c$ defined as

$$Z_c = \frac{p_c}{n_c k_B T_c}$$

which was studied in detail for the five fluid alkalis in Ref. 4. The limiting formulæ (for $m_h \gg m_e$) then lead to the result

$$Z_c = \frac{7}{24}$$
This is near to the value for the heavier alkalis, 0.217 for Rb and 0.203 for Cs, but there is a wide variation through the alkali fluids, Li having a value of 0.064. The value in Eq. (6) is not so much smaller than the prediction from the van der Waals equation of state prediction, namely $3/8$.

The conclusion is firstly that there are some interesting similarities between the EHLs and the fluid alkali metals with regard to critical properties. In both cases $T_c$ is related to $n_{c}^{1/3}$, which reflects the fingerprints of Coulomb interactions. For the EHL however, in the limiting case studied by Likal’ter where $m_h \gg m_e$, this quantity $n_{c}^{1/3}$ is divided by the dielectric constant $\varepsilon$ of the semiconductors, high for Si and considerably reduced for diamond.

Secondly, the limiting formulae of Likal’ter for $T_c$, $n_c$ and $p_c$ are shown to yield the constant critical compressibility ratio $Z_c$ in Eq. (6), in contrast to the wide spread of values of $Z_c$ in the fluid alkalis.

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