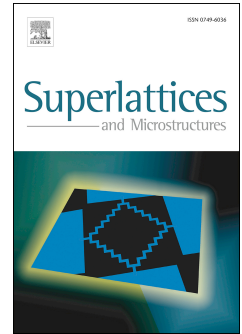


Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0749-6036(15)30305-0

DOI: [10.1016/j.spmi.2015.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spmi.2015.12.003)

Reference: YSPMI 4093

To appear in: *Superlattices and Microstructures*

Received Date: 30 November 2015

Accepted Date: 9 December 2015

Please cite this article as: E.D. Cherotchenko, T. Espinosa-Ortega, A.V. Nalitov, I.A. Shelykh, A.V. Kavokin, Superconductivity in semiconductor structures: the excitonic mechanism, *Superlattices and Microstructures* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.spmi.2015.12.003.

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Superconductivity in Semiconductor Structures: the Excitonic Mechanism

E. D. Cherotchenko^{a,*}, T. Espinosa-Ortega^b, A. V. Nalitov^a, I. A. Shelykh^{b,d},
A. V. Kavokin^{a,c,e}

^a*Physics and Astronomy School, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO171BJ, UK*

^b*Division of Physics and Applied Physics, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore 637371*

^c*CNR-SPIN, Viale del Politecnico 1, I-00133 Rome, Italy*

^d*Science Institute, University of Iceland, Dunhagi-3, IS-107 Reykjavik, Iceland*

^e*Spin Optics Laboratory, State University of Saint-Petersburg, 1, Ulianovskaya, St-Petersburg, Russia*

Abstract

We theoretically study the dependency of the superconductivity transition critical temperature (T_C) on the electron and exciton-polariton densities in layered systems, where superconductivity is mediated by a Bose-Einstein condensate of exciton-polaritons. The critical temperature increases with the polariton density, but decreases with the electron gas density, surprisingly. This makes doped semiconductor structures with shallow Fermi energies better adapted for observation of the exciton-polariton-induced superconductivity than metallic layers. For realistic GaAs-based microcavities containing doped and neutral quantum wells we estimate T_C as close to 50 K. Superconductivity is suppressed by magnetic fields of the order of 4 T due to the Fermi surface renormalization.

Keywords: 2D semiconductor structures; excitons; Bose-Einstein condensates; superconductivity

1. Introduction

High temperature superconductivity (HTSC) has been desperately searched for during decades since the appearance of the seminal work of Bardeen-Cooper-

*Corresponding author

Email address: E.Cherotchenko@soton.ac.uk (E. D. Cherotchenko)

Schrieffer (BCS) [1] in early 50s. Among many different paths physicist have
5 tried to achieve it, the excitonic mechanism of superconductivity (SC) deserves
particular attention[2, 3, 4]. According to Ginzburg [5, 6], the excitons are
expected to be suitable for realization of HTSC. The reason is that the charac-
teristic energy, above which the electron attraction mediated by excitons van-
ishes, is several orders of magnitude higher than the Debye energy limiting the
10 attraction mediated by phonons.

Despite optimistic expectations, to the best of our knowledge, the exciton
mechanism of SC has never worked until now, most likely due to the reduced
retardation effect [4, 7]. Phonons in the BCS model are very slow compared
to electrons on the Fermi surface. Hence there is a strong retardation effect in
15 the phonon-mediated electron-electron attraction, so that the size of a Cooper
pair is very large (of the order of 100 nm), and the Coulomb repulsion may be
neglected at such distances. In contrast, excitons with wave-vectors comparable
with the Fermi wave-vector in metals are very fast quasi-particles. Therefore
the replacement of phonons with excitons leads to the loss of retardation and
20 smaller sizes of Cooper pairs, that is why the Coulomb repulsion starts play-
ing an important role. In realistic multilayer structures the Coulomb repulsion
appears to be stronger than the exciton-mediated attraction so that Cooper
pairs cannot be formed. In literature [8, 9] one finds reports on layered metal-
insulator structures where SC occurs at 50 K in the layered metal-insulator
25 structures, nevertheless there is still no evidence that the excitonic mecha-
nism is responsible for this effect. Recently, the novel mechanism to achieve
superconductivity mediated by exciton-polaritons has been proposed in refer-
ences [10, 11]. Exciton-polaritons are quasiparticles that arise due to the strong
coupling of excitons with light. Particularly interesting phenomena related to
30 exciton-polaritons have been observed in semiconductor quantum wells (QW)
embedded in microcavity[12, 13]. Bose-Einstein condensation of cavity polari-
tons at room temperature has been observed [14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19], making the
exciton-polariton a promising boson to bind Cooper pairs at high temperatures.
Moreover, it has been shown that the strength of electron-electron interactions

35 mediated by a condensate of cavity polaritons can be controlled optically.

The systems considered previously in references [10, 11] consist of micro-cavities where free electrons in a thin layer interact with exciton-polaritons contained in the adjacent semiconductor layer. Both layers are brought sufficiently close to each other to assure the efficient coupling between the electrons
40 and exciton-polaritons. In this way, phonons are replaced with the excitations of an exciton-polariton condensate providing the exciton-mediated attraction of free electrons. While the retardation effect characteristic of the weak-coupling BCS model is essentially suppressed in this regime, the exciton-mediated attraction appears to be strong enough to overcome the Coulomb repulsion for
45 Cooper pairs of a characteristic size of 10 nm. In comparison to the mechanism considered by Bardeen [1] and Ginzburg [5, 6], electron-electron attraction mediated by excitons is much stronger in the presence of the exciton-polariton bosonic condensate for two reasons: firstly, the exchange energy needed for creation of an excited state of the condensate is much smaller than the energy
50 needed to create a virtual exciton. Secondly, the exciton-electron interaction strength increases proportionally to the occupation number of the condensate. This exciton-polariton mechanism of superconductivity was studied theoretically in a model structure where the electron-electron attraction potential was calculated and then substituted into the gap equation that yielded the critical
55 temperature of the superconductivity phase transition. The proof of concept calculation showed a high potentiality of the excitonic mechanism of SC.

In order to proceed with the experimental verifications of this prediction, several issues still need to be clarified. Namely, it has been unclear how the electron density in the two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG) QW influences
60 the critical temperature T_C and what structure is the most appropriate for experimental observation of the predicted effect: the one where the metallic layer is put in contact with the semiconductor, or an entirely semiconductor multilayer structure containing doped and undoped QWs.

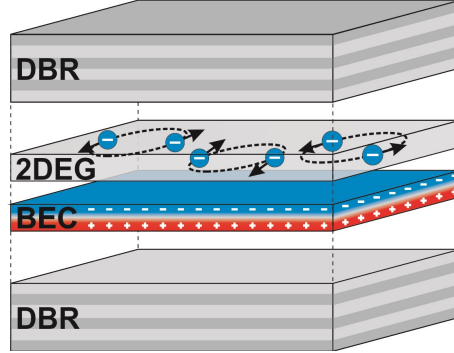


Figure 1: The scheme of the model microcavity structure with an n-doped QW interacting with an exciton-polariton BEC localized in an adjacent QW.

2. Results

In this manuscript we analyse the behaviour of superconducting gap and T_C as a function of exciton-polariton and electron densities and conclude on the most convenient structure design for observation of the exciton-mediated SC. The system we study is a microcavity where an electron gas confined to a quantum well (2DEG) interacts with a polariton condensate localized in an adjacent semiconductor QW, as shown in Fig.1. The microscopic Hamiltonian that describes this system is derived in ref.[11]. Here we only need the expression for the reduced Hamiltonian that appears after the Bogoliubov transformation and describes the coupling of electrons via bogolons, excitations of a polariton condensate:

$$H = \sum_{\mathbf{k}} E_{el}(\mathbf{k}) \sigma_{\mathbf{k}}^{\dagger} \sigma_{\mathbf{k}} + \sum_{\mathbf{k}} E_{bog}(\mathbf{k}) b_{\mathbf{k}}^{\dagger} b_{\mathbf{k}} + H_c + \sum_{\mathbf{k}, \mathbf{q}} M(\mathbf{q}) \sigma_{\mathbf{k}}^{\dagger} \sigma_{\mathbf{k}+\mathbf{q}} (b_{-\mathbf{q}}^{\dagger} + b_{\mathbf{q}}). \quad (1)$$

Here E_{el} is the free electron energy, the bogolon dispersion is given by the formula:

$$E_{bog}(\mathbf{k}) = \sqrt{\tilde{E}_{pol}(\mathbf{k})(\tilde{E}_{pol}(\mathbf{k}) + 2UN_0A)}, \quad (2)$$

where $\tilde{E}_{pol} = E_{pol}(\mathbf{k}) - E_{pol}(\mathbf{0})$, U is the polariton-polariton interaction potential, N_0 is the concentration of exciton-polaritons in the condensate, A is

a normalization area, H_c is the Coulomb repulsion term, $\mathbf{q} = \mathbf{k}_1 - \mathbf{k}_2$, where
 80 \mathbf{k}_1 and \mathbf{k}_2 are the momenta of two interacting electrons at the Fermi surface,
 $q = \sqrt{2k_F(1 + \cos\theta)}$. The renormalized bogolon-electron interaction in (1) is
 given by $M(\mathbf{q})$. It is important that $M(\mathbf{q}) \sim \sqrt{N_0}$. The exciton concentration
 can be controlled by the external optical pumping, which is why the strength
 of Cooper coupling in exciton-mediated superconductors may be tuned in large
 85 limits.

The total effective interaction potential including Coulomb repulsion is:

$$V_{eff}(\omega) = \frac{AN}{2\pi} \int_0^{2\pi} [V_A(\mathbf{q}, \omega) + V_C(\mathbf{q})] d\theta, \quad (3)$$

where $\mathcal{N} = m_e/\pi\hbar^2$, $V_A(\mathbf{q}, \omega)$ is the effective electron interaction given in ref.
 [11], the Coulomb repulsion is given by $V_C(q) = e^2/2\epsilon A(|\mathbf{q}| + \kappa)$, κ is the
 screening constant. In ref. [10, 11] it is shown that the magnitude of the
 90 attraction potential increases linearly with N_0 . This is illustrated by Fig. 2a,
 where it is clear that the higher N_0 is, the higher the magnitude is and the larger
 the attraction region is. On the contrary, Fig. 2b shows that a high electron
 density leads to the decreasing magnitude of the negative part of potential that
 corresponds to the attraction between electrons. This effect is observed in a
 95 wide range of polariton density values. The only essential limitation to this
 mechanism of SC is the Mott transition from an exciton (exciton-polariton)
 condensate to an electron-hole plasma. The obtained result is significant for
 designing microstructures exhibiting HTSC, as it demonstrates advantage of
 fully semiconductor heterostructures over metal-semiconductor ones.

100 To obtain the critical temperature of the SC phase transition one needs to
 substitute this potential into the gap equation:

$$\Delta(\xi, T) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{U_0(\xi - \xi')\Delta(\xi', T) \tanh(E/2k_B T)}{2E} d\xi', \quad (4)$$

where $E = \sqrt{\Delta(\xi', T)^2 + \xi'^2}$ and U_0 is the electron-electron interaction poten-
 tial.

In the case of a strongly non-monotonous potential $U_0 = V_{eff}(\omega)$ shown in
 105 Fig. 2a and 2b this equation may be solved numerically. Here we solve it using

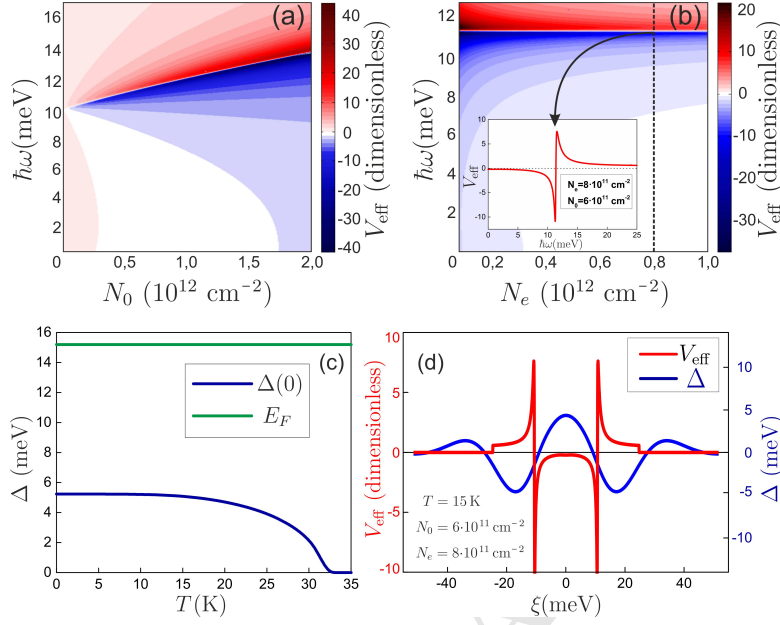


Figure 2: The magnitude of effective interaction potential as a function of a) polariton density N_0 and b) electron density N_e in 2DEG quantum well. The color shows the magnitude in dimensionless units. Blue region corresponds to the effective attraction between electrons, red region represents the repulsion. The inset presents the profile of the potential at the particular density N_e . Graphs (c) and (d) show the solution of the gap-equation. (c) $\Delta(0)$ as a function of temperature. The critical temperature T_C in this case is equal to 33 K. (d) solution of the Eq. (5) at $T=15$ K. The results are presented for the potential with $N_e = 8 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ and $N_0 = 6 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$.

the iteration method. The example of solution is shown in Fig. 2c and 2d.

We assume that only the electrons on the Fermi surface form Cooper pairs. Here it means that only the point $\Delta(0)$ has a physical meaning. If $\Delta(0) > 0$, Cooper pair can be formed. The critical temperature T_C can be defined as
 110 the temperature below which $\Delta(0)$ is non-zero. Fig. 3 represents the critical temperature of the SC transition as a function of electron concentration in a 2DEG QW. The green line shows the temperature that corresponds to the Fermi energy, the other lines represent the dependencies of T_C on the electron density for different values of exciton-polariton density. One can see that increasing
 115 N_e leads to the reduction of the critical temperature. The colored area shows

the range of parameters where our theory is applicable. We note that our model has two important limitations. Firstly, the thermal energy of electrons at the critical temperature must be lower than the Fermi energy. Otherwise, one cannot assume that electrons forming the Cooper pairs are located at the Fermi surface. Also, the absolute value of the gap-energy must be lower than the Fermi-energy. In Fig. 3 the area of validity of our approach is limited by $E_F = k_B T$ line. The density $N_0 = 4 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ is apparently beyond the Mott transition threshold, therefore high T_C predicted by this line is unrealistic and is presented only for showing the tendency of T_C growth. On the other hand, the exciton-polariton density $N_0 = 4 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ is achievable in realistic QW structures based on GaAs, so critical temperatures of the order of a few tens of Kelvin must be achievable in semiconductor structures.

The superconducting currents may be observed in our structures until the critical current density is achieved. It can be conveniently derived from the superconducting gap $\Delta(0)$ as [20]

$$j_c = \frac{e N_e \Delta(0)}{\hbar k_F}, \quad (5)$$

Fig.4a shows j_c calculated as a function of the electronic density N_e and temperature. One can see that the highest current density appears at the lowest concentrations and lowest temperatures on the graph, that fully agrees with calculations .

Let us now discuss the behavior of exciton-mediated superconductors in the presence of external magnetic fields. It is known that in bulk superconductors the Meissner effect exists until the critical magnetic field is achieved. This field is linked to the critical current. Namely, the critical field induces a surface current equal to j_c . Once the surface currents induced to provide a full screening of the magnetic field inside the superconductor exceed the critical current, the superconductivity is suppressed. In 2D system we consider the magnetic field direction perpendicular to the QW plane. The superconducting layer is much

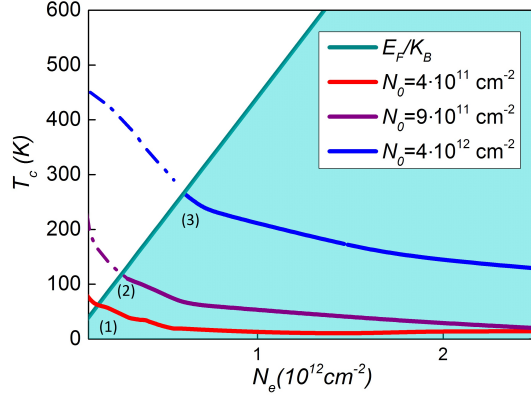


Figure 3: The dependency of T_C on the electron density in 2DEG QW, plotted for three different polariton densities N_0 . Dashed parts of the curves show the region where the theory is not applicable. Red curves (1,2) represent the parameters of a condensate that are achievable in a realistic GaAs-based semiconductor structures.

thinner than the typical penetration length of the magnetic field into the superconductor. So Meissner effect can't be observed. The superconductivity is still
 145 suppressed by the magnetic field in this case, but the gap vanishes at the critical field B_{cr} [21]. In order to find B_{cr} and the critical temperature we will account for the magnetic field in the gap equation, using the condition: $\Delta(0, T, B_{cr}) = 0$.

The field reduces the density of electronic states in the 2DEG layer which leads to the increase of the radius of the Fermi circle. A minor effect is the
 150 modification of electron-exciton interaction potential due to the shrinkage of the exciton Bohr radius. To account for the magnetic field effect on k_F , we use the expression for the radii of the circles in the reciprocal space, that correspond to Landau levels in the quasi-classical approximation [22]:

$$k_p^2 = \left(p + \frac{1}{2}\right) \frac{2eB}{\hbar c}, \quad p = 0, 1, 2, \dots \quad (6)$$

Electrons may occupy quantum states in the Γ vicinity of these circles, where Γ
 155 is the Dingle broadening of Landau levels dependent on the structural disorder and scattering processes. The area occupied by electrons in the reciprocal space

at each circle at zero temperature may be found as

$$S_p = 2\pi k_p \delta k_p, \quad (7)$$

where $\delta k_p = \frac{2m\Gamma}{\hbar^2 k_p}$. The Fermi wave vector is expressed as $k_F = k_M$, where the index M can be found from the condition:

$$\frac{2}{(2\pi)^2} \sum_{p=0}^{M-1} S_p < N_e \leq \frac{2}{(2\pi)^2} \sum_{p=0}^M S_p. \quad (8)$$

160 Fig. 4b shows k_F and T_c as functions of magnetic field B for the fixed electron and polariton densities. All parameters are the same that we used for potential calculation for GaAs-structure. In this case $N_e = 8 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$, $N_0 = 6 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$, the Dingle broadening of Landau Levels is taken to be to 0.3 meV. At low magnetic fields given by the condition $\hbar\omega_c < \Gamma$ we assume that
 165 $k_F = k_F(B = 0)$, neglecting the weak oscillations of k_F due to the oscillating electron density of states[23].

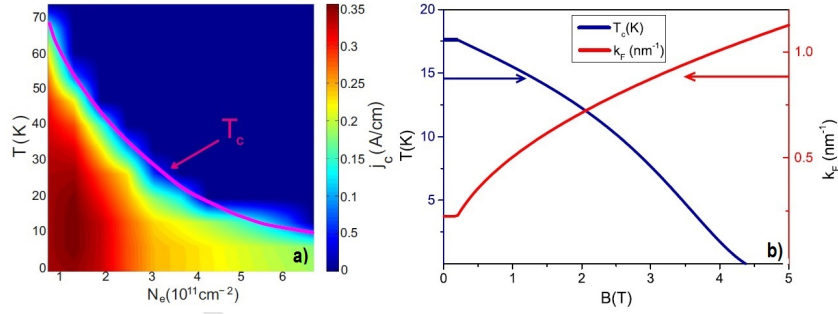


Figure 4: (a) The dependency of the critical current j_c on the temperature and electron concentration. (b) Fermi wave vector (red curve) and critical temperature (blue curve) as a function of magnetic field B . $N_e = 8 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$, $N_0 = 6 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$. The Dingle broadening of Landau Levels Γ is taken to be 0.3 meV, that corresponds to the cyclotron energy $\hbar\omega_c$ at $B=0.2\text{T}$.

3. Discussion

Contrary to the previous expectations, fully semiconductor structures, combining doped and undoped quantum wells provide higher critical temperatures

170 than metal-semiconductor structures. This can be explained by the fact that
exciton-mediated attraction weakens with the increasing of the Fermi energy
faster than the Coulomb repulsion does. In the absence of magnetic field we
predict the critical temperatures of the order of 50 K in realistic GaAs-based
microcavities.

175 We show that magnetic fields strongly increase the Fermi wave vector k_F ,
which is why the critical temperature decreases and eventually vanishes at $B_c \approx$
4 T. The increase of k_F accounts for the reduction of the effective area occupied
by each electron in the real space due to the cyclotron motion. We note, that
the validity of the quasi-classical approximation is limited at strong quantizing
180 magnetic fields. As long as quantum Hall regime is not established and the
number of filled Landau levels $N \gg 1$, quasi-classical approach is applicable. In
our case, the number of occupied Landau levels is over 10 even at $B \approx 4$ T, which
allows one to consider the quasi-classical result as a trustworthy approximation.
Other effects which may influence B_c include the electron Zeeman splitting
185 and edge current effects. GaAs/AlGaAs quantum wells are characterized by
low Lande factors $g \approx 0.01$ depending on the actual heterostructure parameters.
The electron Zeeman splitting in the considered range of magnetic fields $B \approx 4$ T
is of the order of a few μeV and is negligible with respect to other characteristic
energy scales. Edge current effects are beyond the scope of the present work. In
190 conclusion, multilayer semiconductor heterostructures appear to be promising
candidates for the observation of exciton-mediated superconductivity.

4. Acknowledgements

T.E.-O. and I.A.S. thanks Tier1 project "Polaritons for novel device appli-
cations", Rannis project "Bose, Fermi and hybrid systems for spintronics" and
195 FP7 ITN NOTEDEV. T.E-O acknowledge Dr. O. Kyriienko for valuable dis-
cussions, E.C. and A.K. thank the EPSRC Established Career Fellowship pro-
gram on Quantum polaritonics for the financial support. A.K. acknowledges
support from the Russian Ministry of Science and Education (contract No.

11.G34.31.0067), A.N. acknowledges support from the ITN "INDEX".

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Theoretical calculation of effective electron-electron interaction in GaAs-based microcavities;

Theoretical evaluation of critical temperature of transition to superconducting state;

The investigation of magnetic field influence; theoretical estimations of critical magnetic field;

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