

Thermoelectric transport properties of the *n*-type impurity Al in PbTe

Christopher M. Jaworski¹ and Joseph P. Heremans^{1,2,*}

¹*Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Scott Laboratory, 201 West 19th Avenue, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 43210-1142, USA*

²*Department of Physics, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 43210, USA*

(Received 22 October 2011; revised manuscript received 18 November 2011; published 23 January 2012)

Because Tl and In are known to be resonant levels in IV–VI semiconductors, here we synthesize and electrically characterize lead telluride doped *n*-type with aluminum. The results show that Al behaves as a normal donor in PbTe, reaching a maximum electron concentration of $4 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. At 300 K, the thermopower, when plotted as function of electron concentration (the Pisarenko relation), follows the calculated line for the conduction band of PbTe, and no enhancement is observed that could indicate the presence of a resonant level.

DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevB.85.033204](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevB.85.033204)

PACS number(s): 72.20.-i, 71.55.Ht, 72.15.Jf

In the field of thermoelectricity, one desires to maximize a material's figure of merit $zT = S^2\sigma T/\kappa$, where S is the Seebeck coefficient or thermopower, $\sigma = 1/\rho$ the electrical conductivity ($\rho =$ resistivity), and κ the thermal conductivity. After the identification of Tl as a *p*-type resonant impurity in PbTe that can increase zT ,¹ we sought other impurities that could act as *n*-type resonant levels. This increase in zT is due to an increase in hole effective mass from a distortion in the density of states caused by the Tl impurity in the valence band. The group III elements, when substituted for Pb as dopants in PbTe, introduce energy levels that increase monotonically in energy with reference to the hydrogen level as their electronegativity (and mass) decreases.^{2,3} Tl is in the valence band of PbTe.¹ Indium is in the conduction band at low temperature; due to the increase in the band gap of PbTe, it shifts into the gap at elevated temperature.⁴ The case of Ga is more complicated than that of In and Tl, and the existing literature is reviewed in Ref. 2: Ga is a donor that can pin the Fermi energy at one of two possible values. The electron concentration in Ga-doped PbTe can be pinned at either 10^{13} cm^{-3} (at 77 K) or in the 10^{18} to 10^{19} cm^{-3} range, depending on the sample preparation method.² In the Russian literature, Al is reported by optical measurements to have a level that lies $\sim 300 \text{ meV}$ above the conduction band minimum at low T .⁵ Since optimum resonant levels for maximizing the thermoelectric performance of semiconductors are known to be based on *s-s* or *s-p* interactions between guest specie and host semiconductor electron levels,⁶ the purpose of this investigation is to determine if Al acts as a resonant level in PbTe and effectively increases the thermopower and the effective mass.

Ingots of $\text{Pb}_{1-x}\text{Al}_x\text{Te}_1$ with $x \leq 0.01$ were synthesized by loading stoichiometric amounts of pure elements of 99.999% purity or greater into carbon-coated fused quartz ampoules, which were then sealed under a vacuum of at least 10^{-6} torr. The samples were heated to 1000°C , and subsequently annealed at 800°C . Samples underwent the heat treatment simultaneously to eliminate any variation in sample preparation. X-ray fluorescence measurements were attempted to determine the Al concentration x , but the element is too light to obtain reliable values; only nominal values for x will be used here.

Transport properties were measured on parallelepipeds cut from the ingots ($1.5 \times 1.5 \times 6 \text{ mm}^3$) in a liquid nitrogen-cooled

cryostat from 80–420 K and -1.5 to $+1.5$ T. We report here on four transport properties: electrical resistivity (ρ) and Hall coefficient (R_H) were measured using an AC bridge while Seebeck (S) and adiabatic transverse Nernst-Ettingshausen (Nernst or N) coefficients were measured using the static heater and sink method. We measured ΔT with two copper-constantan thermocouples of $0.001''$ diameter. The diameters of the wires are kept as small as possible to minimize heat leakage. The copper leads of the type- T thermocouples also measure the Seebeck voltage, and we estimate the error on thermopower to be 3%. Electrical resistivity was taken using an AC 4-wire bridge measurement, and the error is estimated to be 10%, mainly from inaccuracies in measurement of sample geometry. R_H and N were measured with transverse copper leads, and we estimate the error in these measurements to be 5%. We applied the standard correction⁴ to convert from adiabatic to isothermal N and further define R_H and N to be the low field slopes of the Hall resistance and Nernst voltage, respectively.

Galvanomagnetic and thermomagnetic data on materials with 1-1 substitution of Al for Pb are shown in Fig. 1 as a function of temperature at zero magnetic field. We will begin our interpretation of the data with the electron carrier concentration (n), which is calculated from the R_H using $n = r_H/eR_H$ and assuming a Hall prefactor r_H of unity. Because n has only negligibly small temperature dependence, due to the change of the dominant scattering mechanism which affects the Hall prefactor r_H , we take n at 300 K for this discussion. For $x = 0.125\%$ (or 1.85×10^{19} Al atoms per cm^3), the doping efficiency is approximately two electrons for three Al atoms (inset Fig. 1), which, given the uncertainty on both n and x , is not a significant deviation from unity. This efficiency repeats for $x = 0.25\%$ and 0.5% , however, for the $x = 1\%$ the hole concentration saturates. The surface of the ingot with $x = 1\%$ became blackened upon cutting in water, presumably from reacting excess unbonded Al, which leads us to believe that the solubility limit of Al in PbTe is between 0.5% and 1% . The very slight increase in ρ in the 1% sample corroborates this hypothesis: additional Al atoms beyond about 0.5% may act as additional scattering centers that limit the mobility. We will therefore limit the majority of our analysis to the three samples with $x < 1\%$ Al.

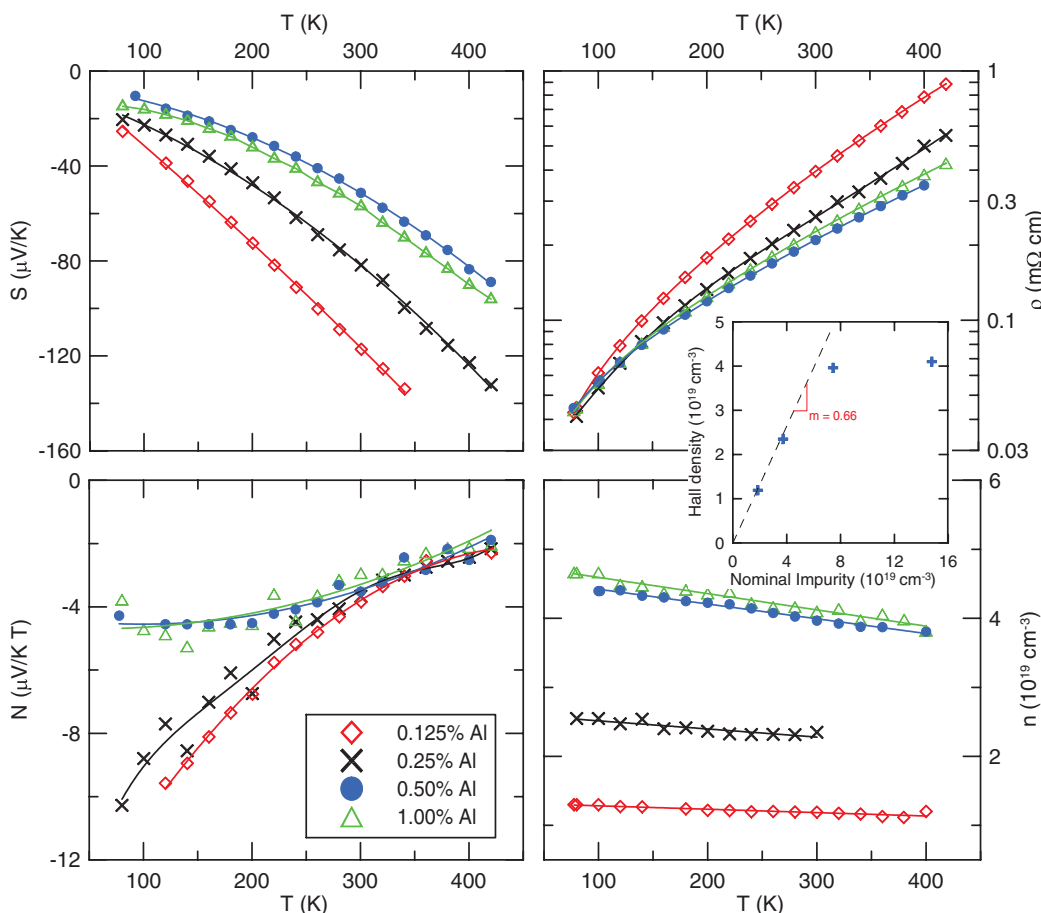


FIG. 1. (Color online) Thermopower S , resistivity ρ , Nernst-Ettingshausen coefficient N , and Hall coefficient R_H of $\text{Pb}_{1-x}\text{Al}_x\text{Te}$. The inset shows the carrier concentration from Hall measurements as a function of nominal Al concentration. Symbols are experimental points; lines are added to guide the eye.

Moving to the other transport properties, the electrical resistivity at 300 K monotonically decreases with Al concentration and thus carrier concentration. Electrical mobility (not shown

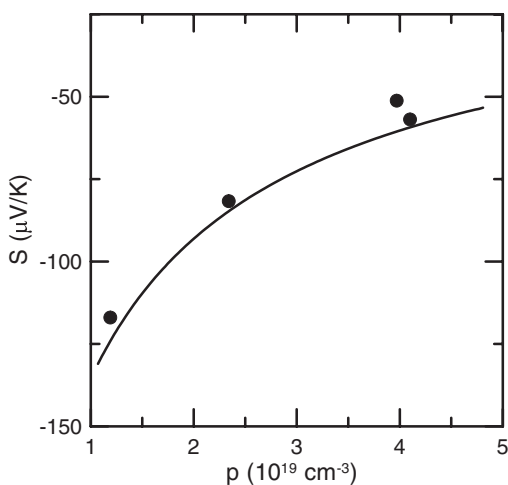


FIG. 2. Pisarenko plot for $\text{Pb}_{1-x}\text{Al}_x\text{Te}$. Symbols are experimental points; the solid line is calculated for the lowest conduction band in PbTe.

in Fig. 1) deduced from n and ρ at 300 K is quite high, $1300 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$ for $x = 0.125\%$, and dropping to $750 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$ for $x = 0.5\%$. We see this as initial evidence that the Fermi level is not near a resonant level, as the electrical mobility is a strong function of carrier effective mass and these values are too high for an increase in effective mass over the conduction band of PbTe at 300 K.⁷ Interestingly, ρ for all samples converges at low temperature to very similar values. S above 200 K is approximately linear with temperature, as expected from the metallic resistivity and the Mott relation for degenerate semiconductors. Below 200 K, we note nonlinearity in S , which can possibly be ascribed to a change from mostly acoustic phonon scattering at low temperature toward more optical phonon scattering at high T ; however, this also occurs at the temperatures where ρ converges. The magnitude of S decreases with increasing electron density, as expected for simple band conduction. Furthermore, a line drawn through high temperature slope of S does not pass through zero at 0 K, which probably arises from the previously discussed reasons for the nonlinearity in S . Nernst has two distinct temperature dependences, split between low and high amounts of Al impurity and has a similar magnitude to other similarly doped n -type PbTe.⁸ In Fig. 2 we plot S at 300 K as a function of n , a plot known as a “Pisarenko relation.”⁶ This relation

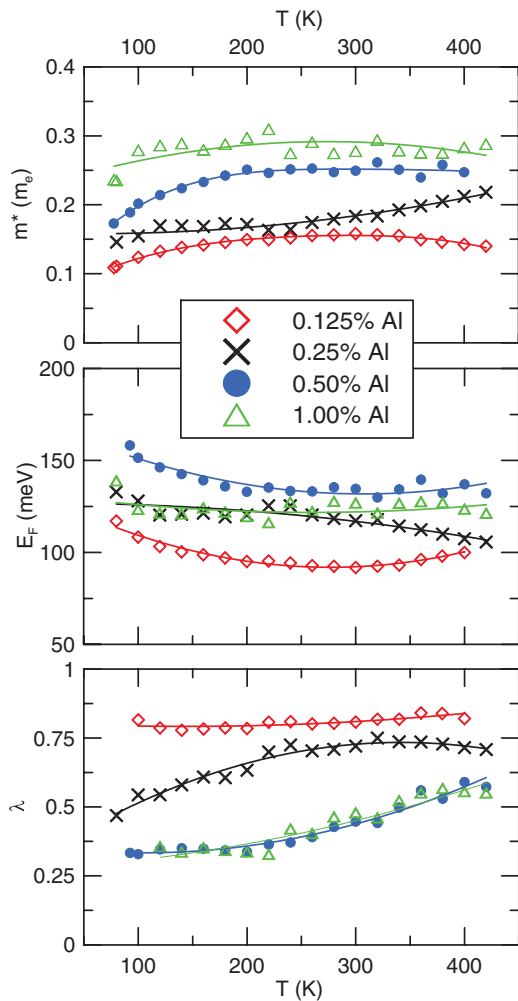


FIG. 3. (Color online) Results from the four-parameter fit to the data of Fig. 1. The accuracy of the fits is within $\pm 0.05 m_e$ for m^* , ± 20 meV for E_F , and ± 0.2 for λ . The results for $x = 0.5\%$ and 1% are therefore not significantly different.

can be calculated assuming acoustic phonon scattering and the known conduction band structure of PbTe,⁷ and the results are

shown as the full line in Fig. 2. The data points for Al-doped samples lie on the calculated line, and the enhancement of S customarily observed for resonant levels^{6,9} is thus absent here.

Further analysis of the data is possible using the “method of the four coefficients” for degenerate semiconductors.¹⁰ Here, the experimental Seebeck coefficient, electrical resistivity, Nernst-Ettingshausen coefficient, and Hall coefficient are related to the following fundamental properties: Fermi energy E_F , carrier mobility, effective mass m^* , and scattering exponent λ . The latter quantity is defined by the energy (E) dependence of the relaxation time $\tau = \tau_0 E^{\lambda-1/2}$, where $\lambda = 0$ for acoustic phonon scattering, 1 for optical phonon scattering, and 2 for ionized impurity scattering. The results are shown in Fig. 3. In all our samples, the Fermi energy E_F lies well below the 300 meV where optical measurements⁵ place the Al level: assuming that Al were a resonant impurity in PbTe with an energy level of 300 meV, one cannot introduce enough electrons by Al-doping to place the Fermi energy at that value. The effective mass in Fig. 3 is if anything a little lighter than the room temperature density-of-states band mass in the conduction band of undoped PbTe ($m^* \sim 0.28 m_e$ at $n = 2 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and $m^* \sim 0.32 m_e$ at $n = 4 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$),¹¹ the opposite of what is expected for a resonant level. The scattering parameter is indicative that the dominant scattering mechanisms are acoustic and optical phonon scattering, but λ is much lower than expected for resonant⁶ scattering or other energy-selective¹² scattering effects.

In summary, we have characterized the behavior of Al in PbTe from 80–420 K. Al is a nearly monovalent donor, whose energy level lies deep in the conduction band and does not increase the thermopower over the Pisarenko relation. If it is a resonant level at all, Al concentrations far above the solubility limit need to be used to place the Fermi level near the Al impurity level. In general, the mobility of Al-doped material is quite good, so that it might prove a practical and simple donor.

Work supported by the National Science Foundation/US Department of Energy joint program on Thermoelectrics, under contract NSF- CBET-1048622

*heremans.1@osu.edu

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¹¹*Landolt-Börnstein Numerical Data and Functional Relationships in Science and Technology*, edited by O. Madelung, M. Scults, and H. Weiss (Springer-Verlag, Berlin, 1983), Vol. 17, Subvol. f.

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