

Doping fingerprints of spin and lattice fluctuations in moiré superlattice systems

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Twisted Van der Waals systems offer the unprecedented possibility to tune different states of correlated quantum matter with external noninvasive electrostatic doping. The nature of the superconducting order presents a recurring open question in this context. In this work, we assess quantitatively the case of spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing for Γ -valley twisted transition metal dichalcogenide homobilayers. We calculate self-consistently and dynamically the doping-dependent superconducting transition temperature T_c revealing a superconducting dome with a maximal $T_c \approx 0.1\text{--}1\text{ K}$ depending on twist angle. We compare our results with conventional phonon-mediated superconductivity, and we identify clear fingerprints in the doping dependence of T_c , which enable experiments to distinguish between different pairing mechanisms.

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Introduction. Twisting layers of two-dimensional (2D) materials leads to a moiré pattern, where flat bands can emerge close to the Fermi level [1–3]. The associated quenching of the kinetic energy leads to strong electronic correlations, which often interplay with topology [4–6]. Among these effects are Mott and topological Chern insulators, and different kinds of magnetic, nematic, and superconducting ordered states [7–28]. One can precisely tune between these states and change the filling of the flat bands from completely empty to filled by electrostatic doping [29], which is special in the domain of correlated materials.

The nature of superconducting states in twisted 2D systems is highly controversial. On the one hand, unconventional pairing mechanisms based on spin, orbital, and/or nematic fluctuations are regularly hypothesized [27,30–34]. The reasons are that superconductivity emerges next to a strongly correlated state [8,9,20,27,35] and that the ratio of critical temperature T_c and Fermi temperature T_F fits within the boundary of other unconventional superconductors [8,24,36]. On the other hand, recent experiments in magic-angle twisted bilayer graphene (MATBG) showed that the strongly correlated states and superconductivity are affected differently by the dielectric environment [17,18,28], which might point to a conventional origin, i.e., electron-phonon coupling.

Twisted 2D systems can be classified according to the symmetry of the low-energy Hamiltonian associated with the moiré pattern [37]. Honeycomb twisted 2D systems hold promise for hosting correlated Dirac fermions and topological

$d + id$ chiral superconductivity [30,38,39]. Examples of honeycomb systems are MATBG [3,40], twisted double bilayer graphene [41–43], magic-angle twisted trilayer graphene (MATTG) [44–46], and twisted transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs) [47–49]. Most of the experimental and theoretical work has been focused on graphite-based systems. However, their complicated low-energy electronic structure makes theoretical many-body studies difficult [42–46,50–52]. The low-energy electronic structure of twisted TMDC homobilayers is simpler than that of twisted graphitic systems since it can be described by an effective single-orbital model (see below) and it does not show topological obstruction preventing simple Wannier constructions [40,53]. As such, they are good candidates for establishing a link between experiments and theoretical many-body modeling. Recently, a zero-resistance state has been reported in a twisted TMDC homobilayer [20], the nature of which remains to be understood.

In this Letter we provide a quantitative study of the critical temperature T_c due to spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing in Γ -valley twisted TMDCs in terms of doping and twisting, which we obtain dynamically by means of the fluctuation exchange approximation (FLEX) [54,55]. We additionally provide a qualitative understanding of spin fluctuations versus electron-phonon coupling, and we propose that experimental measurements on the doping-dependent T_c can help to unveil the nature of the superconducting states.

Band Structures, Wannierization and Hartree Potential Effect. We consider the twisting of TMDC homobilayers with respect to the untwisted ($\theta = 0^\circ$) situation. In Fig. 1(a) we show the emergent moiré pattern, where the AA regions form a triangular superlattice surrounded by AB and BA regions arranged in a honeycomb pattern. We focus on the so-called Γ -valley twisted TMDCs (WS_2 , MoS_2 , and MoSe_2)

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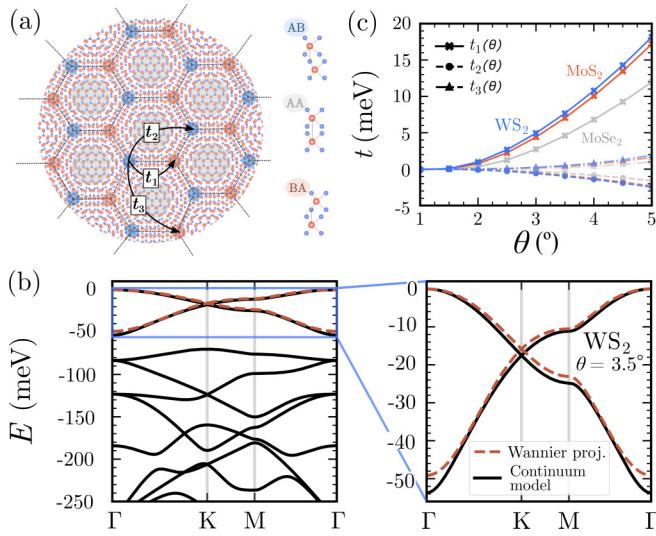


FIG. 1. Γ -valley twisted TMDCs. (a) Moiré pattern of twisted TMDCs. AA (gray shaded), AB (blue shaded), and BA (red shaded) regions in the moiré pattern correspond to different stackings of the two layers, as shown on the right side. Dashed black lines serve as a guide to the eye to identify the honeycomb superlattice. The most relevant hopping processes are sketched with black arrows. (b) Continuum model for WS_2 at a twist angle of $\theta = 3.5^\circ$ (black solid line) with a third-nearest-neighbor hopping tight-binding model (red dashed line) of the highest valence bands. The effective honeycomb lattice is formed by the AB and BA moiré sites. The right panel shows a zoom of the flat Dirac bands. (c) Twist-angle dependence of the hopping parameters for different Γ -valley twisted TMDCs, WS_2 , MoS_2 , and $MoSe_2$ obtained via Wannier projection.

[49,56,57], in which the valence band maximum of the un-twisted homobilayer is located at the center of the Brillouin zone Γ due to the hybridization between the transition metal d and chalcogen p orbitals. The valence band maximum is an antibonding state energetically separated from its bonding counterpart by hundreds of meV. Also the conduction band is separated from the valence band maximum by more than an eV [58,59]. Based on this observation, Angel and MacDonald constructed a low-energy continuum model in which only the antibonding state is included [49]. The emergent symmetry of these moiré valence bands is that of a 2D honeycomb lattice.

In the plane-wave basis defined by the moiré vectors $\mathbf{G} = m\mathbf{G}_1^M + n\mathbf{G}_2^M$, with integers m, n and $\mathbf{G}_{1,2}^M$ spanning the reciprocal lattice, the Hamiltonian of the continuum model takes the form

$$H = -\frac{\hbar^2 |\mathbf{k} + \mathbf{G}|^2}{2m^*} \delta_{\mathbf{G}, \mathbf{G}'} + V_M(\mathbf{G} - \mathbf{G}'), \quad (1)$$

where \mathbf{k} are the reciprocal vectors defined in the mini Brillouin zone, m^* is the effective mass, and $V_M(\mathbf{G})$ is the Fourier transformation of the moiré potential [60]. This Hamiltonian is expanded up to a plane-wave cutoff $G_c = 5G^M$, where $G^M = |\mathbf{G}_{1,2}^M|$.

The low-energy electronic structure of Γ -valley twisted TMDCs shows 2D honeycomb Dirac bands for the highest valence band; see Fig. 1(b). The Dirac point can be accessed by hole doping and the Dirac bands are well isolated from higher energy bands for twist angles $1^\circ < \theta < 5^\circ$. In this

twist angle range, the bandwidth of the flat Dirac bands varies between 0.5 and 100 meV [60].

We next construct a tight-binding Hamiltonian to describe the flat Dirac bands with one orbital per honeycomb superlattice site. Here, the AB and BA regions play the role of the A and B sublattice degrees of freedom in the honeycomb lattice. We include up to three nearest-neighbor hoppings t_1, t_2, t_3 in our model, which we obtain by Wannier projection [60]. The tight-binding and continuum model band structure agree very well in the twist angle range $1^\circ < \theta < 5^\circ$ [60]. We observe that, when comparing among different Γ -valley twisted TMDCs, the transition metal does not influence the hopping amplitudes significantly, while the chalcogen atoms do. We also find dominant nearest-neighbor hopping $t_1 \gg t_2, t_3$, and that $t_1 \sim \alpha \sin^2(\theta) \approx \alpha \theta^2$ with $\alpha \approx 2 \text{ eV}/\text{rad}^2$.

In other twisted 2D systems, such as MATBG [61–64] or MATTG [34], the effect of the purely electrostatic and long-range (Hartree) potential in doped flat bands is important. Thus, we also consider its influence in our model [60]. We find that, contrary to MATBG and MATTG, the flat Dirac bands remain unaffected. Therefore, we disregard doping-dependent long-range Coulomb reconstructions on the flat bands from now on.

Doping- and Interaction-dependent Spin Fluctuations. Since the nearest-neighbor hopping $t_1(\theta)$ dominates over t_2 and t_3 for twist angles $1^\circ < \theta < 5^\circ$, we neglect t_2 and t_3 here. We discuss their influence in the Supplemental Material [60]. We study the Hubbard Hamiltonian

$$H_U = - \sum_{\langle im, jn \rangle, \sigma} t(c_{im\sigma}^\dagger c_{jn\sigma} + \text{H.c.}) + U \sum_{im} n_{im\uparrow} n_{im\downarrow}, \quad (2)$$

where the hopping amplitude $t \equiv t_1(\theta)$ sets the energy scale, and $\langle im, jn \rangle$ denotes that the sum is limited to neighboring lattice sites of a moiré unit cell i, j and sublattice m, n . $c_{im\sigma}^\dagger$ ($c_{im\sigma}$) creates (annihilates) an electron with spin σ , and U is the local Coulomb repulsion between electrons on the same lattice site. In the simplified tight-binding model, the system is particle-hole symmetric with respect to the Dirac point and has a logarithmically diverging density of states (DOS) at the Van Hove singularities (VHS) that are present in the M points of the Brillouin zone [65]. We redefine our zero-doping level $\delta = 0$ to correspond to a Fermi energy at the Dirac point; see Fig. 1(b). Then, the VHS are at $\delta = 0.25$.

The Hubbard model for the honeycomb lattice has previously been studied, indicating a rich phase diagram of competing many-body instabilities [39,66–72]. The emergence of spin-density waves (SDWs) and superconductivity in close proximity suggests an unconventional pairing mechanism mediated by spin fluctuations. Following this premise, we study the magnetic and superconducting excitations using FLEX [60] in the model described above [73–75] as a representation of spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing in Γ -valley twisted TMDCs. A recently developed sparse sampling method [76,77] enabled us to perform the numerically demanding calculations at low temperatures.

In FLEX, the exchange of spin and charge fluctuations is treated dynamically and self-consistently with an effective electron-electron interaction of a random phase approximation (RPA) type. Estimates of the Hubbard interaction

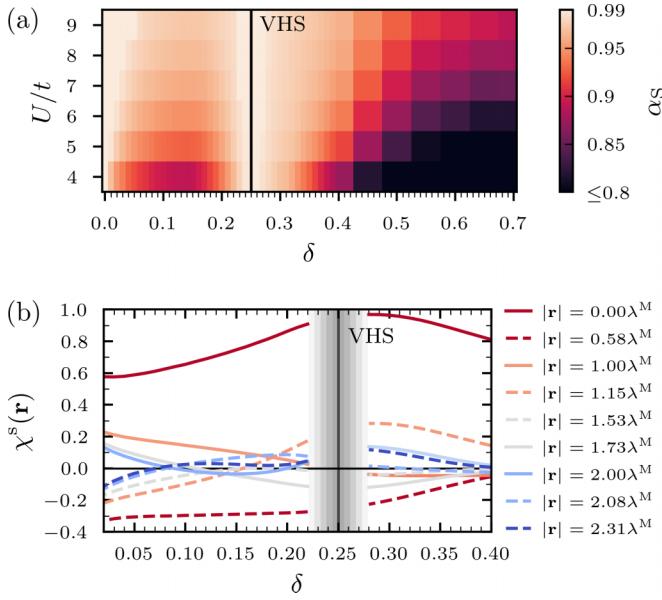


FIG. 2. Spin fluctuation characteristics of Γ -valley twisted TMDCs at $T/t = 0.003$. (a) Leading Stoner enhancement factor $\alpha_S = \max_{\mathbf{q}}\{U\chi^0(\mathbf{q})\}$ for different Coulomb interaction strengths U/t and dopings δ with respect to the Dirac point as obtained from FLEX. A transition to a quasiordered magnetic state is assumed for $\alpha_S \geq 0.99$. (b) Real-space components of the static spin susceptibility $\chi^s(\mathbf{r})$ for $U/t = 6$. Up to eighth-nearest-neighbor components are shown, with $|\mathbf{r}|$ denoting the distance between two spins in terms of the moiré unit length λ^M . Solid (dashed) lines correspond to the AA (AB) components of χ^s , i.e., correlations between same (different) sublattice sites. The area around the Van Hove singularities (VHS) is not accessible because of too strong fluctuations; it is marked by a gray shaded area [cf. panel (a)].

parameter given in the Supplemental Material [60] show that U is highly tunable via twist angle and the dielectric environment [17,18,28,78–84]. For example, for $\theta = 5^\circ$, the interaction strength is tunable in the range $4 < U/t < 8$ [60]. In addition, vertex corrections that are neglected in FLEX could contribute to further screening [85–87]. In what follows, we treat U as a free parameter.

We analyze the emergence of magnetic fluctuations by inspecting the leading Stoner enhancement factor $\alpha_S = \max_{\mathbf{q}}\{U\chi^0(\mathbf{q})\}$ with the static irreducible susceptibility $\chi^0(\mathbf{q})$; see Fig. 2(a). If $\alpha_S \geq 0.99$, the transition to a quasiordered magnetic phase is assumed [60]. This situation occurs in two locations of the phase diagram: at the Dirac point ($\delta = 0$) and in the vicinity of the VHS ($\delta = 0.25$). Between these two points, α_S is strong but does not reach the quasiordering criterion. When doping beyond the VHS ($\delta \gtrsim 0.3$), the relative spin fluctuation strength decreases rapidly and the system stays paramagnetic. Increasing the interaction strength amplifies α_S , but the doping dependence remains largely unaffected.

The presence of strong spin fluctuations can induce an effective electron-electron interaction with nonlocal attractive regions, which gives rise to superconducting pairing [88,89]. FLEX captures this effect with the dominant contribution to the effective interaction coming from the spin susceptibility χ^s . Optimal pairing conditions can be inferred from

its real-space profile. In Fig. 2(b), we show the doping dependence of up to eighth-nearest-neighbor components of $\chi^s(\mathbf{r})$ for $U/t = 6$. For doping levels in the vicinity of the Dirac point, antiferromagnetic fluctuations with respect to the sublattices A and B emerge, i.e., the AB (intersublattice) components have a negative sign, whereas the AA (intrasublattice) components are positive. Upon doping, initially the longest range and successively the more short-range components of χ^s change their sign. Hence, antiferromagnetic fluctuations are suppressed, and an admixture of ferromagnetic components to χ^s is triggered away from the Dirac point. Beyond the VHS, fluctuations turn increasingly ferromagnetic and their relative strength weakens. Further insight into the emerging SDWs and their origin from nesting conditions can be gained by inspecting the momentum-resolved structure of χ^s [60].

To investigate the dominant superconducting pairing symmetry and transition temperature T_c , we solve the linearized Eliashberg equation for different possible order parameters. In all our calculations, the degenerate singlet d -wave pairings ($d_{xy}, d_{x^2-y^2}$) emerge as the dominant pairing symmetries [60]. This is in agreement with the antiferromagnetic fluctuations as they favor singlet-pairing symmetries. Below T_c , the order parameter forms a time-reversal symmetry-broken chiral $d + id$ pairing state [38,39,69].

In Fig. 3(a), we show the doping dependence of T_c for different U/t . We find a superconducting dome that is characterized by a nonmonotonous behavior with a maximal value T_c^{\max} at an optimal doping δ_{opt} . The existence of such a maximum results from the interplay of the pairing interaction pattern and the electronic DOS at the Fermi level [60]. Doping away from the Dirac point increases the DOS at the Fermi level, which supports d -wave pairing via antiferromagnetic spin fluctuations. As the doping level increases further, however, an increasing amount of pair-breaking ferromagnetic spin fluctuations emerges [cf. Fig. 2(b)]. Thus, we reach a situation of optimal doping around $\delta_{\text{opt}} = 0.06$ and a decrease in T_c upon further doping.

We obtain increasing T_c with increasing interaction U until the highest T_c curve for $U/t = 8$ with a maximal value of $T_c^{\max}/t = 4.8 \times 10^{-3}$ at $\delta_{\text{opt}} = 0.06$ is reached. For larger interactions $U/t \gtrsim 9$, the superconducting transition temperatures decrease again.

Near the VHS, possible superconducting order [39,67,68,90] is masked by magnetic fluctuations in FLEX, that is, α_S exceeds 0.99. As the spin fluctuations turn ferromagnetic towards and beyond the VHS doping, singlet-pairing emerging from antiferromagnetic spin fluctuation exchange is strongly suppressed. In addition, triplet superconductivity does not arise for any temperature $T/t > 10^{-3}$ due to the weakened fluctuation strength [60]. The material and twist-angle-dependent hopping amplitudes given in Fig. 1(c) set the temperature scale. T_c takes values on the order of 0.1–1 K, which is in agreement with reports on other twisted 2D systems [8,9,20,27].

Spin Fluctuations Versus Electron-phonon Coupling. The previous discussion showed that superconductivity arising from a spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing mechanism exhibits a characteristic doping-dependent transition line with a clear maximum near Dirac filling. To contrast this pairing scenario,

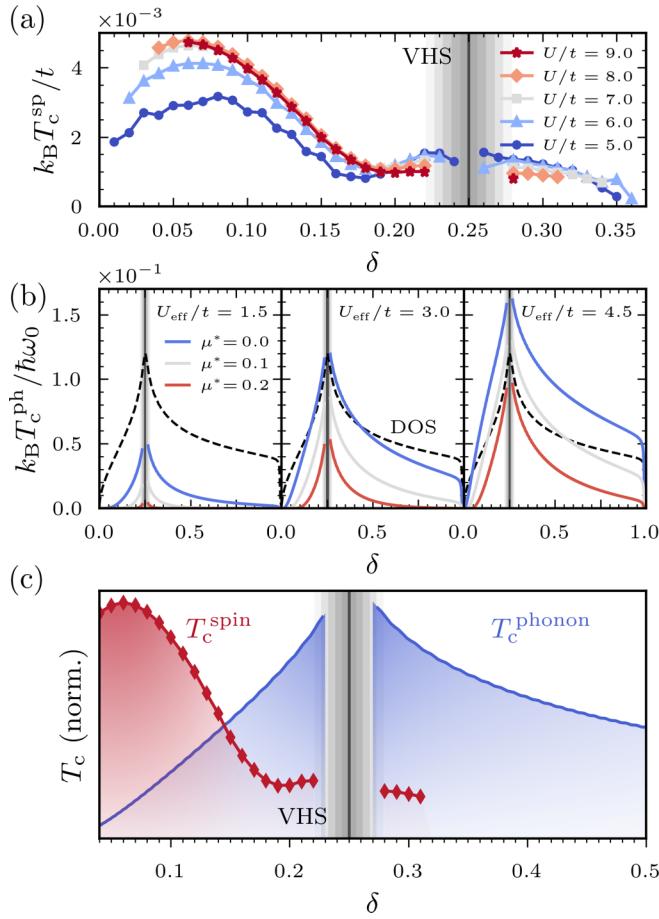


FIG. 3. Doping dependence of the superconducting transition temperature T_c in Γ -valley twisted TMDCs. (a) Phase diagram for spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing for different local Coulomb interaction strengths U/t from FLEX calculations. The critical temperature T_c/t belongs to the dominant singlet d -wave pairing symmetry. (b) Phonon-mediated T_c for an Einstein-Holstein phonon mode ω_0 and for different Coulomb pseudopotentials $\mu^* = 0.0$ (blue), 0.1 (gray), and 0.2 (red). From left to right, the effective attractive interaction U_{eff} from electron-phonon coupling is increased. The trend of the density of states (DOS) is indicated by black dashed lines. (c) Comparison of the doping-dependent phase diagram of the maximum T_c obtained for spin fluctuations and phonons. This phase diagram holds qualitatively for all Γ -valley twisted TMDCs.

we assess how the doping characteristics appear in the conventional case of phonon-mediated superconductivity.

We estimate the transition temperature T_c^{ph} by means of McMillan's formula [91,92]

$$T_c^{\text{ph}} = \frac{\hbar\langle\omega\rangle}{1.20k_B} \exp \left\{ \frac{-1.04(1+\lambda)}{\lambda - 0.62\lambda\mu^* - \mu^*} \right\}, \quad (3)$$

where $\langle\omega\rangle$ is an effective phonon frequency, λ denotes the effective pairing strength, and μ^* is the Tolmachev-Morel-Anderson Coulomb pseudopotential [93,94]. $\langle\omega\rangle$ and λ are generally obtained from the phonon spectral function $\alpha^2 F(\omega)$. Here, we consider the limiting case of an Einstein-Holstein phonon mode, i.e., with a constant electron-phonon coupling g and a constant phonon frequency ω_0 . We discuss the opposite

limit of nonlocal Peierls coupling with dispersive phonons in the Supplemental Material [60].

When discussing phonon-mediated superconductivity, it is simplest to do so in terms of a BCS-like effective attractive interaction U_{eff} such that $\lambda = U_{\text{eff}}N(\delta)$ with the DOS $N(\delta)$ per spin and unit cell for a particular doping δ . In the Einstein-Holstein model, we explicitly have $U_{\text{eff}} = 2g^2/\hbar\omega_0$ and $\langle\omega\rangle = \omega_0$. The exact values of ω_0 , U_{eff} , and μ^* are material-specific and they depend on factors such as twist angle or external screening [95–101]. Twisted TMDCs display phonon modes at energies on the order of a few 10 meV as in the bulk and in addition feature moiré phonons in the range 2–5 meV [100–102]. We estimate U_{eff} to be in the large range of 0.05–87 [60], and typical values of μ^* are in the range 0.0–0.2 [94].

The key observation is that the generic doping dependence of T_c^{ph} derives mainly from the DOS. To illustrate this point, we show in Fig. 3(b) results for T_c^{ph} in units of ω_0 for different U_{eff} and μ^* together with the DOS. We tune U_{eff} to yield weak to intermediate coupling strengths ($\lambda \lesssim 1$). Increasing μ^* suppresses T_c^{ph} , while increasing U_{eff} has the opposite effect. The quantitative details may vary, but the qualitative shape of the T_c^{ph} curve is unaffected in both cases, mainly following $N(\delta)$. Our findings for nonlocal coupling [60] support the robustness of the doping dependence of T_c^{ph} : A peaked structure emerges around the VHS and extends over the whole range of dopings $\delta \in [0, 1]$, i.e., in particular also beyond the VHS in the region of $\delta > 0.25$. The relevant temperature scale is set by ω_0 , with T_c^{ph} taking values on the order of 0.1–10 K. Note that we excluded the immediate region around the VHS in our discussion since the competition of different instabilities complicates the determination of the doping dependence [103–105].

A direct comparison of the doping-dependent superconducting phase diagram obtained for the different pairing mechanisms—spin fluctuations and phonons—is given in Fig. 3(c). We use the normalized results of Fig. 3(a) for $U/t = 8$ and those of Fig. 3(b) for $U_{\text{eff}}/t = 3$ and $\mu^* = 0.0$. Each pairing mechanism shows unique fingerprints for which we identify two key differences. First, phonon-mediated superconductivity shows a clear increase towards the VHS, whereas for spin-fluctuation-mediated pairing, a global maximum appears close to the Dirac point at δ_{opt} . Second, phonon-induced superconductivity persists over a wider doping range and is closely linked to the DOS, while spin-fluctuation-mediated superconductivity is confined to a narrow doping region near an antiferromagnetic instability, which diminishes rapidly after the VHS due to the emergence of pair-breaking ferromagnetic fluctuations.

Summary and Outlook. We have shown that the superconducting response to doping in Γ -valley twisted TMDCs depends decisively on the quantum nature of the pairing fluctuations. Superconducting pairing mechanisms and their experimental determination present a major open problem in twisted 2D systems. Thus, the question is, are there simple experimental ways to discern different pairing mechanisms?

Our analysis demonstrates that different pairing mechanisms can be distinguished by simple doping-dependent

transport experiments of T_c . Fingerprints unique to the particular microscopic mechanism can be found with respect to the doping levels of maximal T_c or the doping extent over which superconductivity persists.

This possibility has not been explored in other unconventional superconductors [106] because of the difficulties of performing systematic doping-dependent studies. The consideration of multiple local and nonlocal electron-phonon coupling profiles [60] indicates that the distinct doping dependence between T_c^{sp} and T_c^{ph} is generic. Hence, our conclusions are not only valid for the Γ -valley twisted TMDCs, but they can help to elucidate pairing mechanisms in other twisted 2D Van der Waals materials, such as MATBG or MATTG.

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