

# Adhesion of 2D MoS<sub>2</sub> to Graphite and Metal Substrates Measured by a Blister Test

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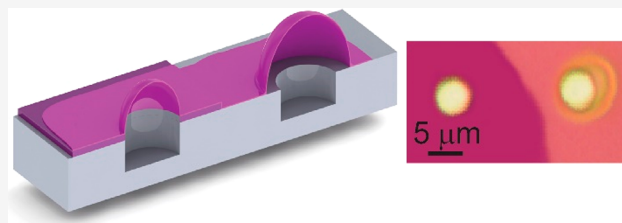
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Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** Using a blister test, we measured the work of separation between MoS<sub>2</sub> membranes from metal, semiconductor, and graphite substrates. We found a work of separation ranging from  $0.11 \pm 0.05$  J/m<sup>2</sup> for chromium to  $0.39 \pm 0.1$  J/m<sup>2</sup> for graphite substrates. In addition, we measured the work of adhesion of MoS<sub>2</sub> membranes over these substrates and observed a dramatic difference between the work of separation and adhesion, which we attribute to adhesion hysteresis. Due to the prominent role that adhesive forces play in the fabrication and functionality of devices made from 2D materials, an experimental determination of the work of separation and adhesion as provided here will help guide their development.

**KEYWORDS:** two-dimensional material adhesion, MoS<sub>2</sub> on graphite, MoS<sub>2</sub> on gold, Young's modulus, work of separation, work of adhesion



Two-dimensional (2D) materials<sup>1</sup> possess both remarkable mechanical properties<sup>2–4</sup> such as high tensile strength and impermeability<sup>5,6</sup> to gases and extraordinary electrical and thermal properties such as high thermal conductivities,<sup>7,8</sup> large charge carrier mobilities,<sup>9,10</sup> and band gaps tunable by strain.<sup>11</sup> While initial research on 2D materials focused on graphene, more recently this has been extended to 2D semiconductors such as transition-metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs).<sup>12</sup> Combining different 2D materials to fabricate heterostructure devices<sup>13,14</sup> and using 2D single layers as building blocks,<sup>15</sup> more complex devices with advanced functionality are created.<sup>16–18</sup> Manufacturing of electrical and mechanical devices from 2D materials typically requires that the 2D layers are transferred to substrates and in the case of heterostructure devices the transfer involves stacking dissimilar 2D materials on top of each other.<sup>19</sup> The fabrication and performance, therefore, depend critically on the interfacial adhesion between the 2D materials and the surface it is in contact with. For this reason, understanding and controlling interfacial adhesion is of paramount importance.<sup>20,21</sup>

One of the most well-studied TMDCs is atomically thin MoS<sub>2</sub>, which possesses exceptional mechanical strength,<sup>22</sup> flexibility,<sup>23</sup> high carrier mobility,<sup>24</sup> and a strain-tunable band gap.<sup>25</sup> While the adhesion of MoS<sub>2</sub> to various substrates such as other 2D materials and metals<sup>21,26,27</sup> has been previously studied, these studies have been limited to nanoscale areal regions or centimeter size surfaces. Though both the nanoscale and macroscopic techniques offer unique insights into the delamination mechanics, these techniques may not be directly applicable to adhesion involved in delamination at the microscale where many devices from 2D materials operate.

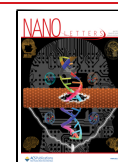
Here, we use the constant-N pressurized blister test<sup>28</sup> to measure the work of separation and the work of adhesion of MoS<sub>2</sub> from metal, semiconductor, and graphite substrates. The constant-N pressurized blister test was previously used to determine the Young's modulus,<sup>29</sup> adhesion energy,<sup>30</sup> and shear stress<sup>31,32</sup> of atomically thin 2D membranes. The ease of sample preparation and straightforward experimental configuration make this test ideally suited for such measurements at the microscale. Metals, semiconductor, and graphite are chosen as substrate materials because of their dissimilar electrical,<sup>26–28,33,34</sup> mechanical,<sup>29,30</sup> and optical<sup>31,32</sup> properties and their ubiquity as substrates for 2D material devices.<sup>35–38</sup>

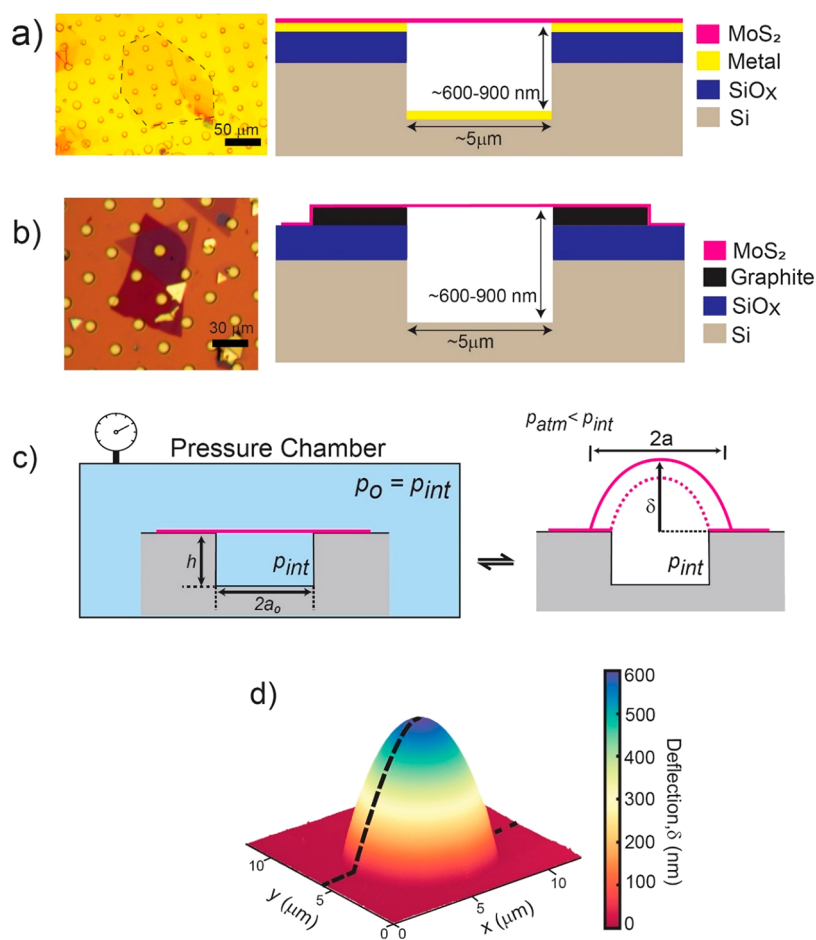
The blister test uses an applied pressure difference across a 2D membrane suspended over cylindrical microcavities.<sup>29,30,39</sup> For these experiments, we create etched cylindrical cavities on an oxidized silicon surface which is then coated with a metal or semiconductor such as gold (Au), chromium (Cr), titanium (Ti), germanium (Ge), or graphite. To fabricate the metal and Ge substrates, we pattern the silicon oxide (SiO<sub>x</sub>)/silicon (Si) wafer with cylindrical microcavities using photolithography. Metal or Ge is evaporated over the substrate to form a thin film. Subsequently, chemical vapor deposition (CVD) grown MoS<sub>2</sub> flakes are transferred over the well to seal the microcavities (Figure 1a). To fabricate graphite wells, we

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**Figure 1.** (a) (left) Optical image of MoS<sub>2</sub> over a gold substrate. The dashed lines show the boundary of the MoS<sub>2</sub> flakes. (right) Schematic image of the device with the gold substrate. (b) (left) Optical image of MoS<sub>2</sub> over a graphite substrate and (right) a schematic of the device. (c) Schematic illustration of the experimental procedure. Devices are placed into a pressure chamber and kept until  $p_0 = p_{int}$ . When the devices are taken out, the membrane bulges up due to  $p_{int} > p_{ext}$  ( $\sim p_{atm}$ ). This process is then repeated until the delamination. (d) AFM image of the blister. The dashed line represents a line cut passing through the center of the blister, from which the maximum deflection and radius are obtained.

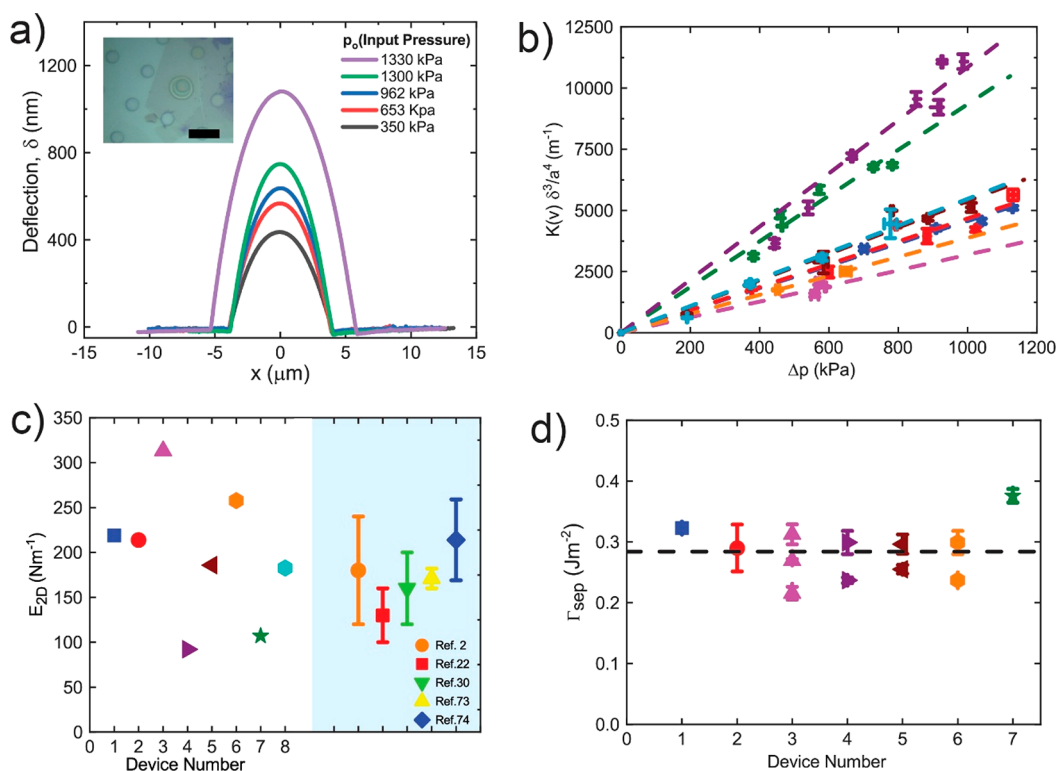
start with the mechanical exfoliation of graphite over SiO<sub>x</sub>/Si wafer. After this, microcavities are etched through the graphite, SiO<sub>x</sub>, and Si (see the Supporting Information for further fabrication details). Using an optical microscope,<sup>40</sup> we select graphite layers whose thicknesses ranged from ~10 to 30 nm. A custom-made transfer station is then used to transfer MoS<sub>2</sub> flakes over the etched graphite wells, thereby forming MoS<sub>2</sub> sealed microcavities (Figure 1b). Following the fabrication of both sets of devices, they are placed into a pressure chamber and charged to an input pressure ( $p_0$ ) with argon gas. We wait ~48 h for gas to diffuse into the sealed microcavity such that the internal pressure ( $p_{int}$ ) of the cavity and input pressure reach equilibrium ( $p_0 = p_{int}$ ) before moving the devices to atmospheric pressure ( $p_{ext} \equiv p_{atm} \approx 1$  atm),  $p_{int}$  is now larger than  $p_{ext}$  ( $\Delta p = p_{int} - p_{ext} > 0$ ) and results in the MoS<sub>2</sub> membrane bulging upward, which we measure with an atomic force microscope (AFM) (Figure 1c). After each set of AFM measurements, the devices are placed back into the pressure chamber, which is set to a higher  $p_0$ , and the test is repeated (Figure 2a). Initially, the membrane's radius stays constant ( $a_0$ ), which is the radius of the well, until a critical pressure is reached. Once the internal pressure exceeds this critical pressure, the membrane delaminates from the surface, overcoming the adhesion forces and creating a bulged blister. An AFM image of a bulged blister on a gold substrate showing

the maximum deflection,  $\delta$ , and radius,  $a$ , is shown in Figure 1d. (see the Supporting Information for the other tested substrates).

Utilizing Hencky's solution<sup>41,42</sup> for the deflection of a fully clamped circular membrane subjected to a pressure load  $\Delta p$ , we obtain the relationship between  $\Delta p$  and  $\delta$  as

$$\Delta p = \frac{K(\nu)E_{2D}\delta^3}{a^4} \quad (1)$$

where  $E_{2D}$  is the two-dimensional Young's modulus and  $K(\nu)$  is a constant which depends on the Poisson ratio (see the Supporting Information). For MoS<sub>2</sub>, we use  $K(\nu = 0.29) = 3.54$ .<sup>30</sup> Figure 2b shows  $\Delta p$  vs  $K(\nu)\delta^3/a^4$  for  $a = a_0$ . At each  $\Delta p$ , 3 AFM cross sections separated by ~10° and passing through the center are used to determine and average  $K(\nu)\delta^3/a^4$  along with a standard deviation. A linear fit to the data is used to determine  $E_{2D}$  for each device (Figure 2c). The values of  $E_{2D}$  are consistent with monolayer or bilayer MoS<sub>2</sub>. The scattering of  $E_{2D}$  values within the CVD-grown MoS<sub>2</sub> membranes may be caused by several factors such as the variations in the defect densities<sup>43</sup> and sulfur vacancies<sup>44,45</sup> from growth to growth, strain inhomogeneities which can be introduced during MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer over the wells,<sup>46</sup> and the possibility of bilayer flakes.



**Figure 2.** MoS<sub>2</sub> on a gold substrate. (a) AFM cross sections of the delaminated devices at various input pressure. Inset: optical image of the delaminated device over the gold substrate (the scale bar is 15 μm). (b)  $K(\nu)\delta^3/a^4$  vs  $\Delta p$  for CVD-grown MoS<sub>2</sub> membranes. Dashed lines are linear fits used to calculate  $E_{2D}$  for each device. Different colors/symbols represent the different devices. (c)  $E_{2D}$  for each device in (b). Reference values are plotted for comparison.<sup>2,22,30,73,74</sup> (d) The corresponding  $E_{2D}$  for each device is used in the calculation of its work of separation. Several devices were subjected to multiple delaminations from the surface (one device got broken before delamination). Data points are the mean values, and the error bars represent the standard deviations. The dashed line is the average of all devices.

To determine the work of separation between the MoS<sub>2</sub> membrane and substrate, we use a previously developed free energy model<sup>29,30,39</sup> which assumes that the membrane, the membrane–substrate interface, the trapped gas, and the external atmosphere form an isothermal thermodynamic system whose free energy is given by

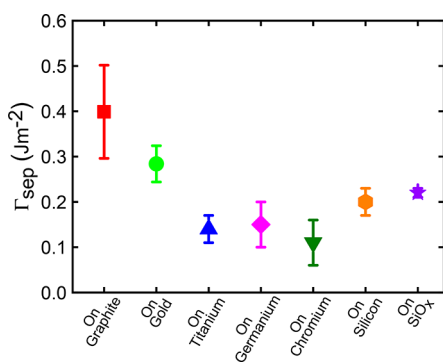
$$F = \frac{(p_{\text{int}} - p_{\text{ext}})V_b}{4} + \Gamma_{\text{sep}}\pi(a^2 - a_0^2) - p_0 V_0 \ln \left[ \frac{V_0 + V_b}{V_0} \right] + p_{\text{ext}} V_b \quad (2)$$

where  $V_0$  is the initial volume of the microcavity and  $V_b$  is the bulge volume that is created after the membrane expansion (see the [Supporting Information](#)). The terms on the right-hand side are (1) the strain energy of the membrane due to the pressure load, (2) the work of separation of the membrane from the substrate, where  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  is the separation energy per unit area, (3) isothermal work done by the trapped gas in the microcavity, and (4) work of the external pressure. When the critical pressure is exceeded, the membrane delaminates from the surface, and the blister expands until the free energy reaches its minimum value. Using eq 2, we find the local minima of the free energy of the delaminated configuration by taking the derivative with respect to  $a$  and setting it to zero ( $dF/da = 0$ ). Substituting eq 1 and the ideal gas law into the derivative yields

$$\Gamma_{\text{sep}} = \frac{5}{4}CKE_{2D} \left( \frac{\delta}{a} \right)^4 \quad (3)$$

where  $C(\nu = 0.29) = 0.522$ .<sup>30</sup> Using eq 3, we can determine the work of separation for devices showing delamination. For each delaminated device using the measured  $\delta$ ,  $a$ , and  $E_{2D}$  values of the corresponding devices (Figure 2c), we plot the mean values of  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  for the 7 devices that delaminated over the gold substrates, with error bars representing the standard deviation. The standard deviation was calculated by averaging the deflection and radius of the delaminated device along 3 cross sections separated by  $\sim 10^\circ$ . Some devices are measured at several increasing values of  $p_0$  and undergo multiple delaminations to larger delaminated radii,  $a$ , and these are shown as identically colored data points (Figure 2d). We find an average  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}} = 0.28 \pm 0.04 \text{ J/m}^2$  (Figure 2d), which agrees closely with previous work ( $0.27\text{--}0.67 \text{ J/m}^2$ ).<sup>47</sup> The difference in the work of separation within each device may be caused by several factors, including local roughness differences<sup>48</sup> due to the etching process of the wells where the rim of the well may be rougher than other nearby surfaces, carbon-based contamination on the surface,<sup>12</sup> or local differences in the chemical reactivity of the surface.<sup>49</sup> Measurements of strain-induced changes in photoluminescence (PL) of the MoS<sub>2</sub> membrane<sup>25,50</sup> confirm that the membrane remained well clamped to the substrate, thereby suggesting that Hencky's solution remains applicable throughout the delamination process (see the [Supporting Information](#)). As shown in the previous studies, the strain gets extended outside the well area; however, incorporating the extended strain into the regular Hencky solution has a minor effect ( $\sim 1\%$  change) on the work of separation.<sup>30,31,51</sup> We repeat the same experiment on the other metal and Ge substrates and find values lower than those

of gold and  $\text{SiO}_x$  with a noticeable difference in separation energies among the metals and Ge substrate tested (Figure 3).

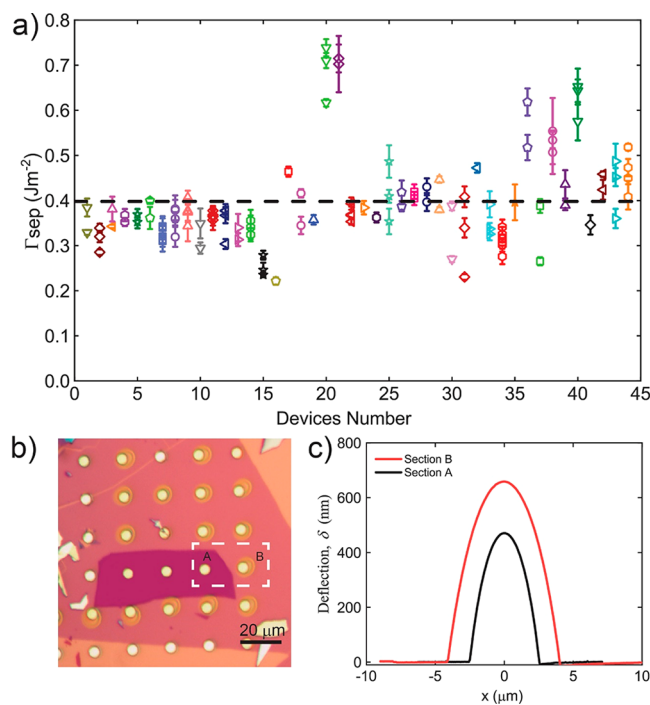


**Figure 3.** Comparison of work of separation among the graphite, Cr, Ti, Au, Ge,  $\text{SiO}_x$ , and Si substrates. Data points are mean values, and error bars represent the standard deviations.

Possible mechanisms for the variations in adhesion can be electrostatic interactions<sup>52,53</sup> resulting in different binding affinities<sup>54–56</sup> or a difference in surface roughness. It is notable that gold has the highest work function (5.47 eV) within our tested substrates and does not form a native oxide such as Ge and the other metals tested.

We also measure the adhesion of  $\text{MoS}_2$  on graphite, a semimetal. The graphite surface is atomically smooth, assuming it is uncontaminated by surface residue and does not form a native oxide, though our graphite surfaces were slightly oxidized during processing (see the Supporting Information). We perform the blister test on 44 graphite devices (see the Supporting Information for further details). Figure 4a shows the mean values of  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  for all of the  $\text{MoS}_2$ /graphite devices. As can be seen, almost all of the devices undergo multiple delaminations. We find an average  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}} = 0.39 \pm 0.1 \text{ J/m}^2$ , which is noticeably higher than that for the  $\text{MoS}_2$  on gold devices ( $\Gamma_{\text{sep}} = 0.28 \pm 0.04 \text{ J/m}^2$ ) and higher than that for the  $\text{MoS}_2$  on  $\text{SiO}_x$  ( $\Gamma_{\text{sep}} = 0.22 \pm 0.01 \text{ J/m}^2$ ) (Figure 3). A clear illustration of the difference in  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  between  $\text{MoS}_2$  on  $\text{SiO}_x$  and  $\text{MoS}_2$  over the graphite substrate is seen in Figure 4b,c, where the  $\text{MoS}_2$  is delaminated from the  $\text{SiO}_x$  to a larger radius but remains pinned to its original radius over the graphite well. This is due to the larger  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  for  $\text{MoS}_2$ /graphite than for  $\text{MoS}_2$ / $\text{SiO}_x$ .

One possibility for the differences in  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  between  $\text{MoS}_2$  and the metal or Ge substrates and graphite substrates is surface roughness. The surface roughness at the nanometer scale is critical to 2D material adhesion.<sup>48,57,58</sup> A freshly cleaved graphite surface should be atomically smooth and allow for better surface conformation<sup>55,59,60</sup> and perhaps better adhesion. Before the  $\text{MoS}_2$  layers are transferred onto them, we find a graphite surface roughness of  $0.21 \pm 0.04 \text{ nm}$ , which we attribute to photoresist contamination during processing. This roughness is similar to that of  $\text{SiO}_x$  ( $0.18 \pm 0.01 \text{ nm}$ ) and slightly less than the roughnesses of the other metal or Ge surfaces (see Table S2 in the Supporting Information for the details). The aluminum substrate had the largest surface roughness ( $3.8 \pm 0.8 \text{ nm}$ ), and we were unable to transfer  $\text{MoS}_2$  onto it, which we attribute to this large surface roughness, suggesting that surface roughness may play a role in our adhesion measurements. This suggests that the aluminum has a small work of adhesion. However, without



**Figure 4.** (a) Work of separation for the graphite devices. Most of the devices were subjected to multiple delaminations from the surface. Data points are mean values, and the error bars represent the standard deviations. The dashed line is the average of all devices. (b) Optical image of  $\text{MoS}_2$  over graphite. (c) Cross sections of the devices labeled with the dashed line in (b) at the same input pressure. The membrane over the  $\text{SiO}_x$  shows earlier delamination due to a lower work of separation.

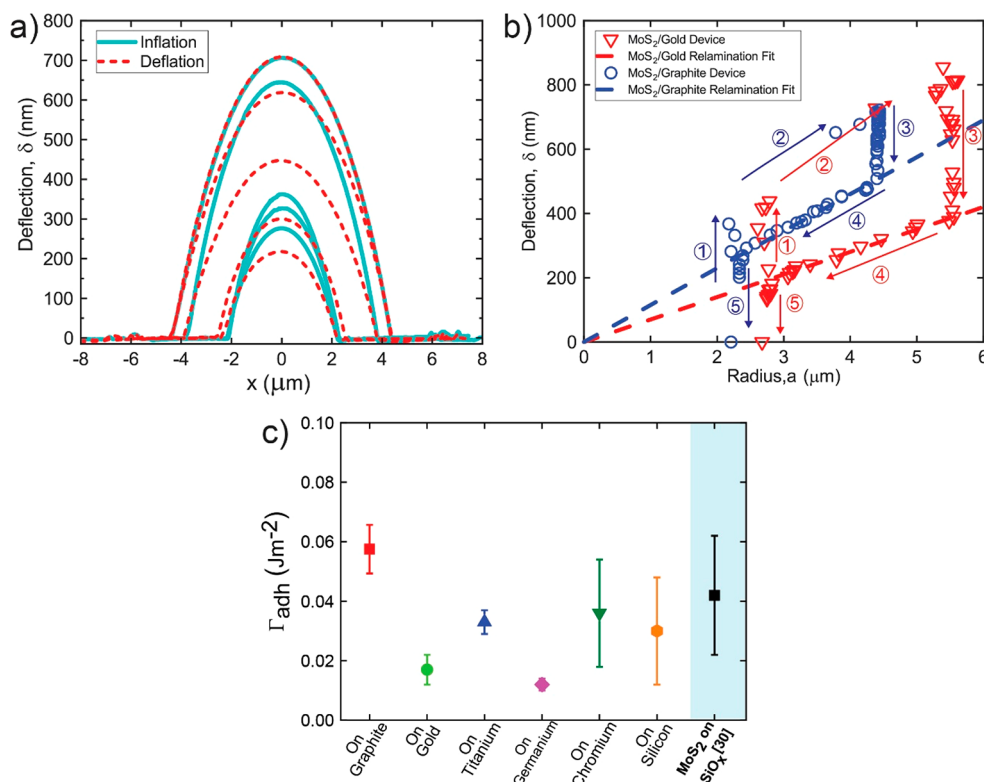
higher-resolution imaging of the surface such as that enabled by a scanning tunneling microscope, we are limited in the conclusion we can draw (see movies 1–4 in the Supporting Information for the transfer videos).

Another mechanism for adhesion differences is the work function difference and chemical bonding between the 2D material and the substrate. Previously, it was shown that  $\text{MoS}_2$  is more readily exfoliated onto freshly prepared gold substrates presumably due to a sulfur–gold bond that forms.<sup>55</sup> This could explain the larger adhesion we observe for gold over the other metals and Ge. Titanium, Cr, and Ge had similar surface roughnesses and correspondingly similar adhesions. They also all form a native oxide. Further studies are needed to confirm the exact roles that surface roughness, work function differences, and chemical bonding play in determining surface adhesion between 2D materials and their substrates.

In addition to measuring  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$ , we also measure the work of adhesion,  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}}$ . To do so, each device is monitored in the AFM under ambient conditions after delamination. Both the deflection and radius are continuously measured in the AFM over a period of 24 h to 10 days. As gas slowly leaks out of the well, the deflection decreases, but the radius stays pinned at the delaminated radius (Figure 5a). Once the deflection reaches a critical height, we see a gradual decrease in both the radius and the height of the blister.

In Figure 5b, we plot  $\delta$  vs  $a$  for  $\text{MoS}_2$  on gold and graphite samples undergoing both delamination and relamination. This difference in paths between delamination and relamination is attributed to adhesion hysteresis<sup>61</sup> similar to what we





**Figure 5.** (a) AFM cross-section of the device during inflation and deflation. (b)  $\delta$  and  $a$  during the inflation and deflation. Gold and graphite substrates are shown (see the [Supporting Information](#) for more data). Arrows show various regimes: (1) inflation, (2) separation, (3) deflation at a pinned radius, (4) relamination, and (5) deflation at the well's radius. Dashed lines are the linear fits for the calculation of the work of adhesion. (c) Comparison of the work of adhesion among graphite, Au, Ti, Ge, Cr, and Si substrates. Data points are mean values, and error bars represent the standard deviation.

previously observed in MoS<sub>2</sub> on SiO<sub>x</sub><sup>30,62,63</sup> (see the [Supporting Information](#) for the other tested substrates).

Using a modified version of eq 3, we determine  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}}$ .<sup>30</sup> The onset of the relamination occurs at the critical deflection,  $\delta_c$ . The relamination process then takes place along a line where the slope is given by  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}}$ . The expression for the relamination energy can then be written as

$$\Gamma_{\text{adh}} = \frac{5}{4} CKE_{2D} \left( \frac{\delta_c}{a_d} \right)^4 \quad (4)$$

where  $\delta_c$  is the critical deflection and  $a_d$  the radius at this deflection. Comparing [Figures 3](#) and [5c](#), the energy that separates the membrane from the surface is considerably higher than the energy the membrane recovers upon relamination ( $\Gamma_{\text{sep}} > \Gamma_{\text{adh}}$ ). We find that  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}}$  ranged from  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}} = 0.057 \pm 0.008 \text{ J/m}^2$  for graphite devices to  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}} = 0.01 \pm 0.002 \text{ J/m}^2$  for germanium devices ([Figure 5c](#)). (see the [Supporting Information](#) for complete data sets). This adhesion hysteresis was similar to what was previously observed in MoS<sub>2</sub> on SiO<sub>x</sub>.<sup>30</sup>

The exact mechanism for the hysteresis is not fully comprehended, but one possible reason is that the membrane–substrate interface formed during the relamination is not equivalent to that which is broken during delamination. However, during pressurizing of the microcavities to  $p_0$  the external pressure applied may alter the membrane–substrate interface by pushing the membrane onto the substrate and thereby increase the adhesive interactions prior to delamination measurements.<sup>64–70</sup>

In conclusion, we measured the work of separation of MoS<sub>2</sub> to graphite, Ge, Cr, Ti, and Au substrates using a blister test. We found  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  ranging from  $0.08 \pm 0.03 \text{ J/m}^2$  for Cr to  $0.39 \pm 0.1 \text{ J/m}^2$  for graphite substrates and a  $\Gamma_{\text{adh}}$  value considerably lower than the  $\Gamma_{\text{sep}}$  value. Our results suggest that both surface roughness and chemical interactions may play a role in the surface adhesion of 2D materials, but more research is needed to conclusively determine the exact contribution each makes. A measurement of both the work of separation and adhesion for a range of substrates as provided here is critical to guiding the future design of electrical and mechanical devices based on 2D materials due to the prominent role that these adhesive surfaces play in their fabrication and functionality.<sup>18,71,72</sup>

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

Supporting Information covers the and videos of . The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.nanolett.2c04886>.

CVD growth and characterization, metal, Ge, and graphite fabrication procedures, MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer method to substrates, graphite surface treatment, photoluminescence verification for clamping conditions, data sets of graphite Young's modulus calculation, relamination data sets for metal, Ge, and graphite substrates, and surface roughness examination ([PDF](#))

MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer to SiO<sub>x</sub> substrate ([MP4](#))

MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer to Cr substrate ([MP4](#))

MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer to Ti substrate ([MP4](#))

MoS<sub>2</sub> transfer to Al substrate ([MP4](#))

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### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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