

Shapes of rotating normal fluid ^3He versus superfluid ^4He droplets in molecular beams

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Abstract

Previous single-pulse extreme ultraviolet and X-ray coherent diffraction studies revealed that superfluid ^4He droplets obtained in a free jet expansion acquire sizable angular momentum, resulting in significant centrifugal distortion. Similar experiments with normal fluid ^3He droplets may help elucidate the origin of the large degree of rotational excitation and highlight similarities and differences of dynamics in normal and superfluid droplets. Here, we present the first comparison of the shapes of isolated ^3He and ^4He droplets following expansion of the corresponding fluids in vacuum at temperatures as low as ~ 2 K. Large ^3He and ^4He droplets with average radii of ~ 160 nm and ~ 350 nm, respectively, were produced. We find that the majority of the shapes of ^3He droplets in the beam correspond to rotating oblate spheroids, in agreement with previous observations for ^4He droplets. The aspect ratio of the droplets is related to the degree of their rotational excitation, which is discussed in terms of reduced angular momenta (Λ) and reduced angular velocities (Ω), the average values of which are found to be similar in both isotopes. This similarity suggests that comparable mechanisms induce rotation regardless of the isotope. We hypothesize that the observed distribution of droplet sizes and angular momenta originate from processes in the dense region close to the nozzle, where a significant velocity spread and frequent collisions between droplets induces excessive rotation followed by droplet fission.

1. Introduction

Bosonic superfluid helium-4 (^4He) droplets, produced in molecular beams, constitute a versatile medium for experiments in physics and chemistry. Notably, droplets consisting of a few thousand He atoms are frequently used as ultra-cold matrices for the spectroscopic interrogation of single molecules, radicals, ionic species, and diverse clusters [1-6]. Single molecules embedded in ^4He droplets can also provide a unique probe for superfluidity on atomic-length scales via renormalization of molecular rotational constants [7-9]. More recently, experiments have been extended to much larger ^4He droplets, containing up to $\sim 10^{11}$ atoms, and ranging in diameter from hundreds of nanometers up to a few micrometers [10]. Single droplets in this size range have been studied by ultrafast coherent scattering using femtosecond X-ray and XUV pulses from free electron lasers (FEL) and intense, laboratory-based high-order harmonic sources [11-17]. It was found that large ^4He droplets can have sizable angular momentum and can be subject to considerable centrifugal distortion [11,14-17]. Rotation of superfluid ^4He droplets is associated with the creation of quantum vortices, a physical manifestation of quantized angular momentum in the bosonic species [18-21]. Quantum vortices inside ^4He droplets have been visualized by doping them with a large number of xenon (Xe) atoms. The dopants are attracted to the vortices, inducing aggregation around the vortex cores and the formation of filament-shaped clusters [11-13,17].

Experiments involving droplets of the rare fermionic helium-3 isotope (^3He) have also been performed [7,22-30]. While ^3He may exist as a superfluid under temperatures $T \approx 1$ mK [31,32], it is a normal fluid at typical molecular beam temperatures of ~ 0.15 K [29]. Recent density functional calculations show that the rotating ^3He droplets should follow corresponding classical shapes [33]. It is important to expand X-ray imaging experiments to rotating ^3He droplets to enable a direct comparison of droplet shapes and rotational properties of the two quantum fluids.

In this article, we report on the characterization of ^3He droplets produced with nozzle temperatures as low as ~ 2 K. Using ultrafast X-ray scattering at an XFEL, the properties of individual, free ^3He and ^4He droplets are analyzed and their size, shape and angular momenta are compared. A wide range of ^3He and ^4He droplet sizes are obtained with average radii of 162 nm and 355 nm, respectively. An overwhelming majority of the droplets have pseudo-spheroidal shapes, characterized by the aspect ratio of the major and minor axes. From the aspect ratio, the reduced angular momenta and angular velocities are obtained, using the corresponding stability

diagram for classical viscous droplets [14,34,35]. The aspect ratios of droplets from both isotopes are found to have average values of 1.074 for ^3He and 1.088 for ^4He . Accordingly, the reduced angular momentum and reduced angular velocity in ^3He and ^4He droplets are similar. Comparison of the results obtained with ^4He and ^3He at different expansion conditions may help to gain a better understanding of the mechanism underlying the production of rotating droplets in free nozzle beam expansion sources.

2. Experimental

He droplets are produced by expanding pressurized He through a cryogenic nozzle with a 5 μm orifice into vacuum, the details of which are described elsewhere [1,4,5,10]. In vacuum, the temperature of the droplets further decreases via evaporative cooling down to 0.15 K and 0.38 K for ^3He [29] and ^4He [7], respectively. Phase diagrams for ^3He and ^4He containing some typical expansion isentropes are presented in Section S1 of the Supplementary Material (SM) [36] (see also references [37-39] therein). Considering the lower critical point of ^3He ($T_C = 3.3$ K, $P_C = 1.1$ atm) compared to that of ^4He ($T_C = 5.2$ K, $P_C = 2.3$ atm), lower nozzle temperatures are required to obtain ^3He droplets of the same sizes as those consisting of ^4He . For example, for a nozzle stagnation pressure of $P_0 = 20$ bar, previous experiments demonstrate that ^4He droplets with an average number of atoms $\langle N_4 \rangle = 10^7$ are produced at a nozzle temperature of $T_0 = 7$ K, [10] while $T_0 = 5$ K is required to obtain ^3He droplets with the same average number of atoms $\langle N_3 \rangle = 10^7$ [25-27,40]. The temperature difference of 2 K in T_0 correlates well with the corresponding difference in critical temperatures of the two isotopes. Large ^4He droplets can be produced with modern closed-cycle refrigerators that can reach temperatures down to ~ 3.5 K. However, to reach the lower temperatures required to produce large ^3He droplets, we instead employed a liquid helium flow cryostat, the LT3 from Advanced Research Systems, with a cooling power of up to 1 W at 1.8 K. Droplets of ^3He and ^4He are produced at constant $P_0 = 20$ bar and varying T_0 , ranging from 2 to 4.5 K. The temperature was measured using a calibrated silicon diode (Lakeshore DT-670-CU) attached to the copper block close to the nozzle.

Due to the considerable cost of ^3He gas, a recycling system is employed during the experiments as described in Section S2 of the SM [36] (see also references [41,42] therein). Filling the system requires about 10 L·bar of room temperature ^3He . For comparison, at standard operating conditions ($T_0 = 3$ K, $P_0 = 20$ bar), the flow rate of the He gas is ~ 3 cm³·bar/s and the filling amount of gas

would only be sufficient for about 1 hour of operation. During the experiments, ^3He gas is continuously collected from the exhausts of the backing scroll pumps, purified in a liquid nitrogen cooled zeolite trap, pressurized by a metal membrane compressor and resupplied to the nozzle with minimal losses. Any contaminants are constantly removed from the ^3He sample by the recycling system. The droplet source was stable over several days, indicating the purity of the ^3He remained high throughout the experiment. The ^3He gas used is 99.9% pure with the remaining 0.1% impurity being mostly ^4He . The residual ^4He will be mostly dissolved in the ^3He droplets, taking into account that its solubility is $\sim 0.1\%$ at 0.15K [32]. Any possible pockets of ^4He rich phase in ^3He droplets are too small to give rise to any measurable effects in the diffraction patterns. Based on the rest gas pressure of less than 10^{-7} mbar and a beam path length from the nozzle to the interaction point of about 70 cm, the droplets will capture, on average, fewer than 500 rest gas particles (mostly water molecules), again too small a number to be detected in the diffraction experiments.

The experiments are performed using the LAMP end station at the Atomic, Molecular and Optical (AMO) instrument of the Linac Coherent Light Source (LCLS) XFEL [43,44]. The focused XFEL beam ($\sim 2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ full-width-at-half-maximum, FWHM) intersects the He droplet beam $\sim 70\text{ cm}$ downstream from the nozzle. The XFEL is operated at 120 Hz, a photon energy of 1.5 keV ($\lambda = 0.826\text{ nm}$), a pulse energy of $\sim 1.5\text{ mJ}$ and a pulse duration of $\sim 100\text{ fs}$ (FWHM). The small pulse length and large number of photons per pulse ($\sim 10^{12}$) enables the instantaneous capture of the shapes of individual droplets. Diffraction images are recorded with a pn-charge-coupled device (pnCCD) detector containing 1024×1024 pixels, each $75 \times 75\text{ }\mu\text{m}^2$ in size, which is centered along the XFEL beam axis $\sim 735\text{ mm}$ downstream from the interaction point. The detector consists of two separate panels (1024×512 pixels each), located closely above and below the X-ray beam. Both panels also have a central, rectangular section cut-out to accommodate the primary X-ray beam. The diffraction patterns are recorded at small scattering angles and, thus, predominantly contain information on the column density of the droplets in the direction perpendicular to the detector plane.

3. Results

Figure 1 shows several diffraction patterns from pure ^3He droplets. The images are characterized by sets of concentric contours. Images in Figures 1(a) and (b) exhibit a series of circular and elliptical contours, respectively, with different spacing between their respective rings.

Figure 1(c), however, shows an elongated diffraction contour with pronounced streaks radiating away from the center. These diffraction patterns are characteristic of spherical (Figure 1(a)), and spheroidal (oblate) or capsule (prolate) (Figure 1(b) and(c)) droplet shapes, as previously observed in ^4He droplets [11,14,16,17]. Spheroidal and prolate shapes result from centrifugal deformation of droplets with considerable angular momentum.

The droplet shapes are characterized by the distances between the center and the surface in three mutually perpendicular directions: $a \geq b \geq c$. For an oblate axisymmetric droplet, $a = b > c$, with c along the rotation axis, whereas $a > b > c$ in the case of triaxial prolate shapes with c along the rotation axis [11,14]. The observed diffraction patterns do not provide direct access to the actual values of a , b and c , due to the droplets' unknown orientations with respect to the X-ray beam. Instead, the images are characterized by the two half-axes of the projection of a droplet onto the detector plane, which will be referred to as A and C ($A > C$), corresponding to a projection aspect ratio, $AR = A / C$. For an axisymmetric oblate droplet having an unknown orientation with respect to the X-ray beam, the value of A corresponds to the a -axis, whereas the value of C only constitutes an upper bound for the c -axis. In the case of a triaxial droplet, the value of A gives a lower bound for the a -axis, whereas the value of C gives a lower bound for the b -axis and an upper bound for the c -axis. In this section, we will discuss the experimental results in terms of the apparent A , C and AR values, from which the average actual sizes of the axisymmetric droplets are obtained. The values of A and C are obtained from the diffraction patterns as described elsewhere (SM in Reference [14]).

The values of the half axes A and C , as well as their AR s, are noted for each panel in Figure 1. The calculated A and C values from Figure 1(a) are very similar (within $\sim 3\%$), indicative of a spherical droplet shape or a spheroid with its symmetry axis aligned perpendicular to the detector plane. The diffraction pattern shown in Figure 1(b) originates from a droplet with larger values of A and C . Here, the two half-axes differ by $\sim 34\%$ ($AR = 1.34$), which is indicative of a spheroidal or ellipsoidal droplet. The streaked diffraction image in Figure 1(c) corresponds to a strongly deformed, capsule-shaped droplet with $AR = 1.95$. The capsule shape is indicated by the small curvature of the streak, as discussed earlier [14,16]. All images in Figure 1 exhibit blank horizontal stripes along their middle sections. These result from the gap between the upper and the lower panels of the pnCCD detector. Vertical stripes on the lower panel are caused by imperfect data readout for strong diffraction images.

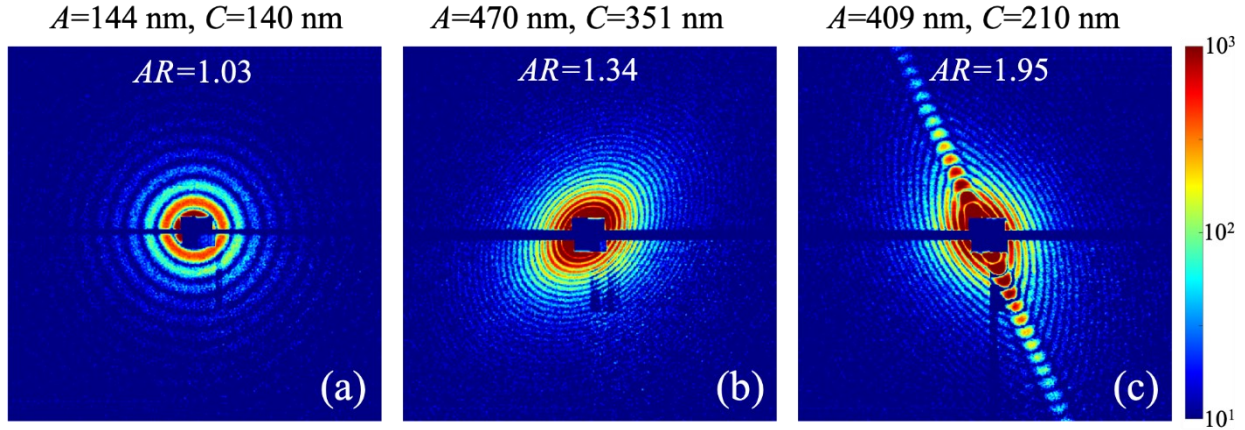


Figure 1. Diffraction patterns of pure ^3He droplets shown on a logarithmic color scale as indicated on the right. Images represent the central 660×660 detector pixels. Corresponding droplet projection half-axes (A , C) and their aspect ratio (AR) are displayed at the top of each image.

During the measurements, approximately 900 intense diffraction images from pure ^3He droplets are obtained, each providing a unique set of A and C values. Similar measurements are performed for ^4He droplets, providing ~ 300 patterns as an independent reference for comparison. The measurements for a given isotopic fluid do not exhibit any systematic variation with nozzle temperature, thus, the results obtained at different temperatures are combined to improve statistics. Table S1 in the SM [36] lists the nozzle temperatures and corresponding numbers of recorded diffraction images for all experimental runs. Figure 2(a) displays the measured distribution of the droplet's major half axis, A , for ^3He and ^4He droplets, as represented by blue and red bars, respectively. The average value of A of ^4He droplets is approximately a factor of two larger than that of ^3He droplets. The values for the ^3He droplets vary between $A = 52 \text{ nm}$ and $A = 796 \text{ nm}$, whereas ^4He droplets exhibit a larger spread, ranging from $A = 55 \text{ nm}$ to $A = 1250 \text{ nm}$. Figure 2(b) shows the AR distribution for ^3He and ^4He droplets. The largest AR s are 1.99 for ^3He and 1.72 for ^4He . Figures 2(a) and (b) show that both the values of A and $(AR-1)$ follow exponential distributions. Panel (c) in Figure 2 shows the average aspect ratio for each of the bins in panel (a) for droplets with $AR < 1.4$, which correspond to oblate pseudo-spheroidal shapes as discussed in the following. The results of single measurements with $AR > 1.4$ in panel (c) are shown by stars. It is seen that in ^3He droplets, the average aspect ratio increases linearly from ~ 1.03 in small droplets with $A < 100 \text{ nm}$ to ~ 1.15 in larger droplets with $A \sim 600 \text{ nm}$. Corresponding points for

^4He droplets also follow linear dependence with a somewhat smaller slope and have $\langle AR \rangle \sim 1.12$ at $A > 600$ nm. The AR distribution in each bin from Figure 2(a) is found to be close to exponential. In contrast to the temperature-independent droplet sizes reported here, previous measurements on ^4He droplets found continuous increases in sizes with decreasing temperature [10]. At $T_0 < 4$ K and $P_0 = 20$ bar, ^4He expansion leads to the formation of a jet that breaks up into micron-sized droplets due to Rayleigh instability [10,45,46]. This mechanism gives rise to an extremely collimated beam of droplets, the occurrence of which was not observed during this work with either ^3He or ^4He . We conclude that, most likely, the flow through the nozzle in this work was affected by imperfections such as microscopic damage or partial obstruction by some solid impurities. Previous experiments with ^4He droplets in our group demonstrated that, under such conditions, decreasing the nozzle temperature below a certain value does not result in any increase in average droplet size [47], which is in agreement with the observations in this work.

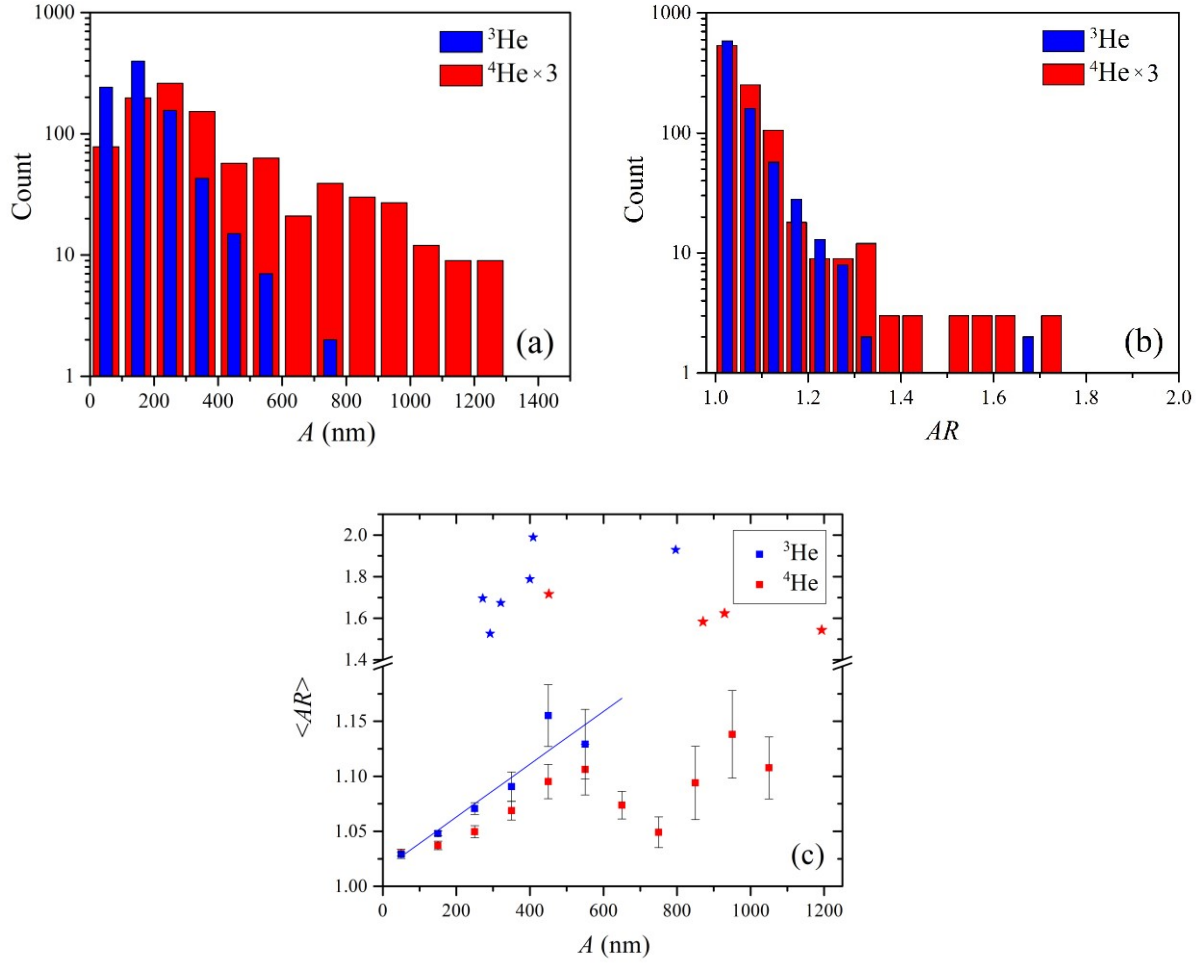


Figure 2. Droplet size (a) and aspect ratio (b) distributions for ^3He (blue) and ^4He (red) isotopes presented in logarithmic scales. The counts for ^4He were multiplied by a factor of 3 for the ease of comparison, as the total number of diffraction images obtained for ^3He and ^4He were ~ 900 and ~ 300 , respectively (see Table S1 in SM). Squares in panel (c) show average AR as obtained for each bin in panel (a) for the points with $AR < 1.4$. The results of single measurements with $AR > 1.4$ in panel (c) are shown by stars. The blue line in panel (c) represents a linear fit of the data points (blue squares) for ^3He droplets.

4. Discussion

4.1. Droplet size distribution

From Figure 2(a), we notice that the observed droplet size distributions peak at some small value of A , decrease sharply towards smaller A , and decrease more gradually towards larger A . The measured distribution reflects the actual distribution in the beam multiplied by the detection efficiency for a droplet of apparent half-axis A in the diffraction experiment. In the SM [36], it is shown that for a spherical droplet, the detection efficiency scales as $\ln \frac{R^4}{R_0^4}$ for $R \geq R_0$ and it is zero for $R < R_0$, where R is the radius of the droplet and $R_0 \approx 50$ nm is the radius of the smallest detectable droplet. Accordingly, for $R \gg R_0$ the detection probability is a slowly changing logarithmic function of R . However, as R approaches R_0 , the detection efficiency goes to zero, which explains the decrease of the counts at small A in Figure 2(a). In view of the approximate nature of the derivation, no corrections regarding the detection efficiency were applied in this work.

Droplet size distributions are usually discussed in terms of the number of atoms per droplet, owing to the detection technique, which is often based on mass spectroscopy [48]. For an oblate droplet the number of He atoms is given by $N = \frac{4\pi n a^2 c}{3}$, where n is the number density of liquid ^3He or ^4He at low temperature, with values of $1.62 \times 10^{28} \text{ m}^{-3}$ [32] and $2.18 \times 10^{28} \text{ m}^{-3}$ [49], respectively. Here, we approximate the true values of a and c for each droplet by the measured projection values of $A = a$ and $C \leq c$. Since, as discussed in the following section, the average aspect ratio of the droplets is close to unity, this approximation will overestimate the droplet number sizes by a few percent, which is comparable to the statistical error. Accordingly, average number sizes for droplets with aspect ratios of less than 1.4 are $\langle N_3 \rangle = (5.6 \pm 0.1) \times 10^8$ and $\langle N_4 \rangle = (1.1 \pm 0.1) \times 10^{10}$. Figure 3 shows the number size distribution for ^3He droplets on a natural logarithmic scale. For comparison, the red line indicates an exponential distribution $P(N_3) = \frac{S}{\langle N_3 \rangle} \exp\left(-\frac{N_3}{\langle N_3 \rangle}\right)$, with S being the total number of detected droplets. This approximation is in good agreement with the experimental data for sizes $N_3 \leq 3 \times 10^9$. An exponentially declining size distribution was also found in a recent study of ^4He droplets obtained from a pulsed nozzle at the FERMI FEL [16]. In comparison, the size distribution of smaller ^3He droplets with $N_3 \leq 10^7$ obtained at $P_0 = 20$ bar and $T_0 \geq 5$ K was found to be close to log-normal [40].

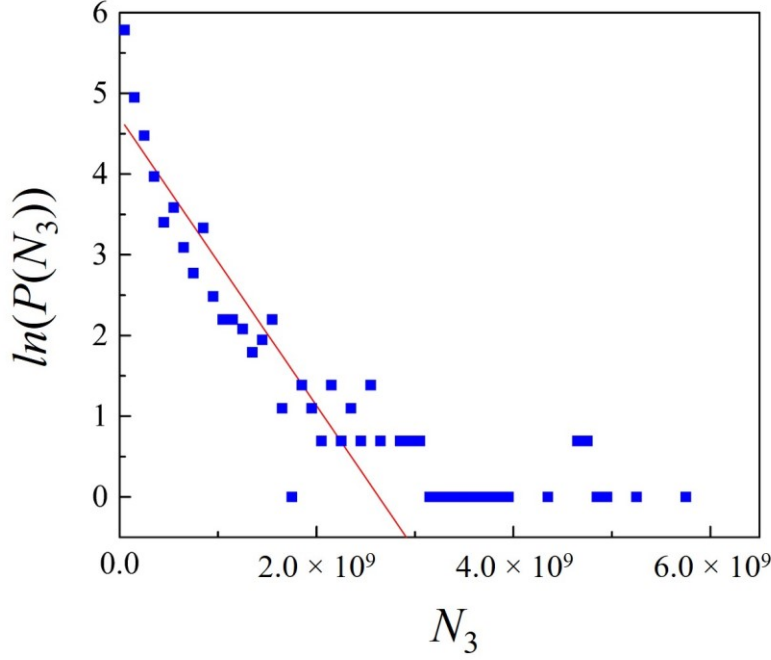


Figure 3. Measured size distribution of ^3He droplets (blue squares). The red line represents $\ln(P) = 4.7 - N_3/\langle N_3 \rangle$ (blue squares) with $\langle N_3 \rangle = 5.6 \times 10^8$, see the text for details. The figure does not show 9 droplets in the range $N_3 = 7 \times 10^9 - 2 \times 10^{10}$, which are off scale.

4.2. Droplet aspect ratios

The aspect ratios provide access to the angular momentum and angular velocity of the droplets. One can obtain the average actual aspect ratio $\langle ar \rangle$ from the average apparent aspect ratio $\langle AR \rangle$ assuming a random droplet orientation as described in the following.

In classical droplets, the largest aspect ratio of stable, axially symmetric droplets is $ar = 1.47$ [34,35]. About 99% of the measurements in Figure 2 have $AR < 1.4$, in agreement with previous measurements in ^4He droplets [11,14-16]. Here, we assume that an overwhelming majority of droplets with $AR < 1.4$ have oblate, axially symmetric shapes. We also assume that the data set contains less than ~ 10 events from prolate He droplets that are oriented in such a way that their projections yield $AR < 1.4$ and cannot be distinguished from oblate droplets. This estimate is

based on the number of events producing $AR > 1.4$, which are entirely ascribed to prolate droplets. For more details, see Fig. 11 and the corresponding text in Ref. [14]. For shapes with $AR < 1.4$, the average values for the observed major half axis A and aspect ratio AR are $\langle A_3 \rangle = 160 \pm 3$ nm, $\langle AR_3 \rangle = 1.049 \pm 0.003$, $\langle A_4 \rangle = 348 \pm 14$ nm, $\langle AR_4 \rangle = 1.059 \pm 0.005$, where the subscripts 3 and 4 refer to ^3He and ^4He , respectively.

To translate the measured $\langle AR \rangle$ into the actual $\langle ar \rangle$, we assume a spheroid with a well-defined ar and calculate its projection on the detector plane when its symmetry axis c forms an angle α with the normal to the plane. The aspect ratios of the diffraction pattern (AR) and of the spheroid off which the X-rays diffract (ar) are related by: $AR = \sqrt{\cos^2(\alpha) + ar^2 \sin^2(\alpha)}$ (see Eq. (S2.8) in the SM to [11]). The average AR of an ensemble of randomly aligned droplets is then calculated as $\langle AR \rangle = \int_0^{\pi/2} AR(\alpha) \cdot \sin(\alpha) \cdot d\alpha$, where $\sin(\alpha)$ represents the probability of finding a spheroid at angle α . Integration and second-order expansion near $\langle AR \rangle = 1$ yields $\langle AR \rangle - 1 = \frac{2}{3}(ar - 1) + \frac{1}{15}(ar - 1)^2$. The expression is approximately linear within less than 5% error in the range of $1 \leq ar \leq 1.4$. Due to the linear relationship between $\langle AR \rangle$ and ar , the same formula also applies when considering not just an orientation-averaged ensemble with one specific ar , but also averages over all orientations, thus $\langle ar \rangle - 1 \approx \frac{3}{2}(\langle AR \rangle - 1)$. From this relationship, the average true aspect ratios for ^3He and ^4He droplets are derived as $\langle ar \rangle_3 = 1.074 \pm 0.005$ and $\langle ar \rangle_4 = 1.088 \pm 0.008$, respectively.

4.3. Average angular momenta and angular velocities of ^3He and ^4He droplets

As previously described for ^4He droplets [11,14-17], we ascribe the shape deformation in ^3He droplets to centrifugal distortion. It has been reported that the shapes of rotating ^4He droplets closely follow the equilibrium shapes of classical droplets having the same values of angular momentum [14,16,17,20,21]. This pattern is also expected to be the case of ^3He droplets, which at the temperature of these experiments (~ 0.15 K) [29] should behave classically due to the high viscosity of about 200 μP and small mean free path (a few nm) of elementary excitations at this temperature [32]. In recent density functional calculations, the shapes of rotating ^3He droplets were found to be very close to those predicted for classical droplets [33]. The blue curves in Figure 4

show the stability diagram of the classical droplets in terms of the reduced angular momentum (Λ) and reduced angular velocity (Ω), which are given by [34,35],

$$\Lambda = \frac{L}{\sqrt{8\sigma\rho R^7}} \quad (1)$$

$$\Omega = \sqrt{\frac{\rho R^3}{8\sigma}} \cdot \omega \quad (2).$$

Here, L and ω are the angular momentum and angular velocity, respectively, σ is the surface tension of the liquid, ρ is the liquid mass density, and R is the droplet radius in a quiescent state. For liquid ^4He and ^3He at low temperature, the surface tensions are $\sigma_4 = 3.54 \times 10^{-4}$ N/m [49] and $\sigma_3 = 1.55 \times 10^{-4}$ N/m [50], respectively, while their densities are $\rho_4 = 145$ kg/m³ [49] and $\rho_3 = 82$ kg/m³ [32]. With increasing Λ , the droplet's equilibrium shape transitions from spherical to oblate axially symmetric, which is shown by the solid blue curve. At $\Omega \approx 0.56$, $\Lambda \approx 1.2$, $ar \approx 1.47$, the stability curve bifurcates into two branches; an unstable upper branch (dashed blue curve) representing axially symmetric droplets and a stable lower branch (dotted blue curve) representing prolate triaxial droplets. The stable prolate branch represents triaxial ellipsoidal and capsule shaped droplets with $1.2 < \Lambda < 1.6$, and dumbbell-shaped droplets at $\Lambda > 1.6$ [14,16,34,35]. For $\Lambda > 2$, droplets become unstable and break up. Also shown in Figure 4 is the ar of droplets along the axisymmetric branch as a function of Λ , which is represented by the red curve [14]. Using an exponential distribution of the ar values: $P(ar - 1) = \frac{1}{\langle ar - 1 \rangle} \exp\left(-\frac{ar-1}{\langle ar-1 \rangle}\right)$, and the functions of $\Lambda(ar)$ and $\Omega(ar)$ in Figure 4, integration over ar gives the average Λ and Ω for ^3He and ^4He droplets to be $\langle \Lambda_3 \rangle = 0.47$, $\langle \Omega_3 \rangle = 0.27$ and $\langle \Lambda_4 \rangle = 0.51$, $\langle \Omega_4 \rangle = 0.29$. Those values are indicated in Figure 4 as green circles and black crosses, respectively. Very similar values were obtained for ^3He by integrating a double exponential distribution of the form:

$P(ar - 1, A) = \frac{1}{\langle ar(A) - 1 \rangle} \exp\left(-\frac{ar-1}{\langle ar(A) - 1 \rangle}\right) \frac{1}{\langle A \rangle} \exp\left(-\frac{A}{\langle A \rangle}\right)$ where the values of $ar(A)$ were obtained from the blue line in Figure 2(c) multiplied by 1.5. Although the values of $\langle AR \rangle$ vs A in Figure 2(c) lay somewhat lower for ^4He than for ^3He , the corresponding average values for ^4He are larger due to larger prevalence of large ^4He droplets. From the values of $\langle \Lambda_{3,4} \rangle$ and $\langle \Omega_{3,4} \rangle$ and using equations (1, 2), the angular momentum (L) is obtained as $L_3 = 1.5 \times 10^9 \hbar$ and $L_4 = 6.9 \times 10^{10} \hbar$ for the average-sized ^3He and ^4He droplets, respectively. Next, L per atom of the droplet is

obtained as $5.7 \hbar$ and $19.3 \hbar$ for ^3He and ^4He droplets, respectively. Lastly, ω was calculated as $1.6 \times 10^7 \text{ rad/s}$ and $5.9 \times 10^6 \text{ rad/s}$ for ^3He and ^4He , respectively. Although the ^4He droplets and ^3He droplets have similar $\langle \Lambda \rangle$, ^4He droplets have about a factor of three larger L per atom. Mathematically, this effect stems from the different factors of $\sqrt{\sigma \rho R^7}$ in Equation (1) in ^3He and ^4He droplets.

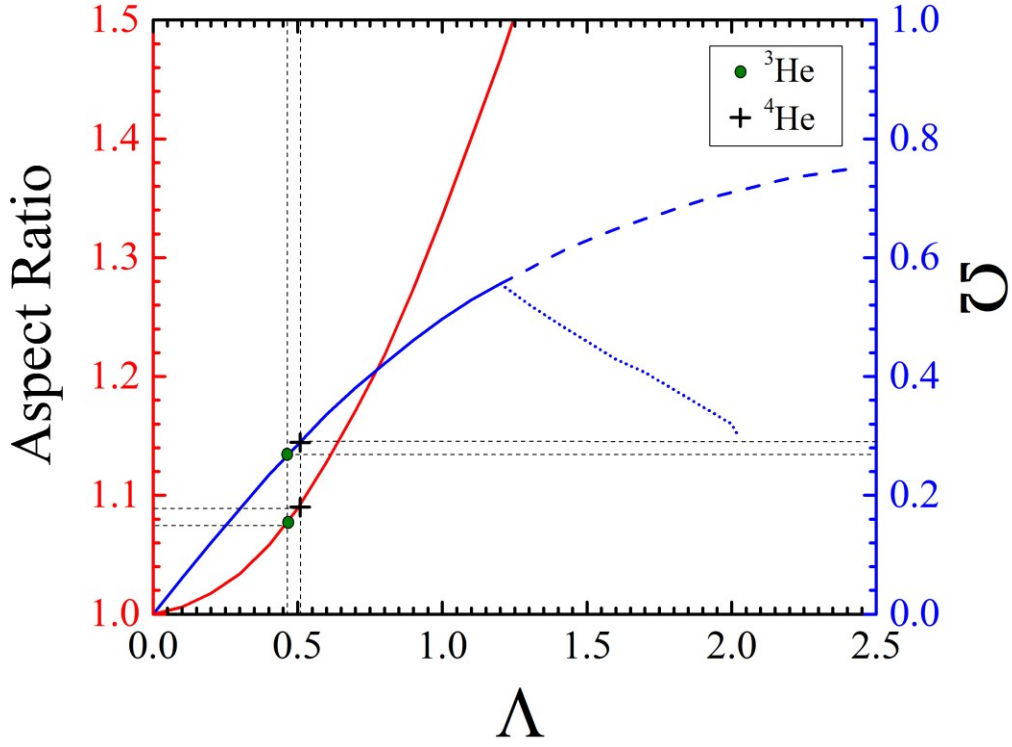


Figure 4. Red curve: Calculated aspect ratio as a function of reduced angular momentum (Λ) for axially symmetric oblate droplet shapes. Blue curve: stability diagram of rotating droplets in terms of reduced angular velocity (Ω) and reduced angular momentum (Λ). The upper branch (dashed blue) corresponds to unstable axially symmetric shapes. The lower branch (dotted blue) is associated with prolate triaxial droplet shapes resembling capsules and dumbbells. The green circle and black cross on the red curve represent the average $\langle ar \rangle$ for ${}^3\text{He}$ and ${}^4\text{He}$ droplets, respectively, obtained in this work (with $AR < 1.4$). Similar markers on the blue curve indicate the (Ω, Λ) values corresponding to ${}^3\text{He}$ and ${}^4\text{He}$ droplets.

4.4. Formation of rotating droplets in the fluid jet expansion

It is remarkable that despite their very different physical properties, ^3He and ^4He droplets have very similar values of Ω and Λ on average. Previous XFEL experiments with ^4He droplets yielded average aspect ratios, $\langle AR \rangle$, in the range of 1.06 – 1.08 at $P_0 = 20$ bar and $T_0 = 4 - 7$ K, which spans average droplet sizes from 200 nm to 1000 nm in diameter (see Figure 4.11 in Reference [47]). Thus, it is noteworthy that very similar average aspect ratios, and therefore Ω and Λ , were obtained at different T_0 . Comparable $\langle AR \rangle$ were obtained in experiments involving different nozzle plates, including measurements with partially obstructed and intact nozzles [47]. Hence, it seems that the acquired $\langle AR \rangle$ is largely independent of particular nozzles used in the experiments. Similar results for non-superfluid ^3He and superfluid ^4He droplets indicate that the state of the droplets has a small effect on the resulting average reduced angular momentum.

In previous works [14,51], we conjectured that during the passage of fluid helium through the nozzle, the fluid interacts with the nozzle channel walls and acquires vorticity, which is eventually transferred to the droplets [10]. Accordingly, the estimated average angular velocity of ^4He and ^3He droplets is 3.4×10^7 rad/s and 4.5×10^7 rad/s, respectively. Such high angular velocities can only be sustained by rather small droplets.

It is challenging to explain the similarities in reduced angular velocity and angular momentum in ^3He and ^4He droplets based on the stability diagram in Figure 4 and the estimated vorticities. Moreover, the half axis and shape distributions in Figure 2, as observed at high vacuum far downstream (~ 70 cm) from the nozzle, originate from processes in the high-density region inside or close to the nozzle, where collisions between droplets with the dense He gas must play an important role. For example, for a droplet with a radius of 300 nm, rotating at 10^7 rad/s, the peripheral velocity will be ~ 3 m/s, assuming rigid body rotation. In the regime of extensive jet atomization as in this work, a large spread of droplet velocities up to $\Delta v/v \sim 5\%$ has previously been observed [52]. Thus, with a characteristic droplet velocity on the order of 200 m/s, the droplets may have significant relative collision velocities of ~ 10 m/s, which are sufficient to produce rapidly spinning products. Further downstream, presumably a few mm away from the nozzle, the number density of the gas and droplets decrease, the collision rates decrease, and the angular momenta of individual droplets remain constant further downstream.

Although we are currently unable to provide a quantitative model of the processes close to the nozzle, it is instructive to consider the evolution of a droplet driven at some angular velocity as opposed to free droplets with a constant angular momentum. The corresponding driving force may originate from the aforementioned collisions. The prolate branch on the stability curve of driven droplets is unstable at constant ω [34]. Driven droplets will climb along the axially symmetric branch until they reach the bifurcation point at $\Omega = 0.56$ (Figure 4) at which point they will enter the unstable prolate branch. Here, further elongation of the droplets occurs, culminating in their fission. The stable configurations beyond the fission point correspond to two spherical droplets, each having one half the volume of the parent droplet [34]. On the other hand, scission of dumbbell-shaped droplets will result in strongly deformed fragments. Related theoretical studies of nuclear fission indicate that such fragments contain sizable angular momentum [53,54]. Similar to the parent droplets, daughter droplets will acquire angular momentum via collisions. The fission cycle continues until sufficiently small, stable droplets are formed or the droplets are far away from the nozzle, where the driving force diminishes. Because the occurrence of such a cycle is largely independent of the He isotope, the process should yield very similar values of $\langle AR \rangle$, $\langle \Lambda \rangle$ and $\langle \Omega \rangle$, independent of the droplet size and composition. This model is also consistent with the trend apparent in Fig. 2(c) that larger droplets exhibit larger values of $\langle AR \rangle$.

5. Conclusions

In this work, bosonic ^4He and, for the first time, fermionic ^3He droplets are studied by single-pulse X-ray coherent diffractive imaging. Statistics of the droplets' sizes, aspect ratios, reduced angular momenta and reduced angular velocities are compared for superfluid ^4He droplets and normal fluid ^3He droplets. Since the experiments only give access to projections of droplets onto the detector plane, estimates are made to determine the true average axes and aspect ratios. It is found that, although the superfluid droplets have a much higher average angular momentum, the two kinds of droplets have very similar average aspect ratios and, thus, similar average reduced angular momenta and reduced angular velocities. This observation may result from the formation of the droplets through turbulent nozzle flow and the atomization regime in the immediate vicinity of the nozzle. We conjecture that the droplets' rotation is driven by a combination of the liquid flow velocity gradient inside the nozzle and collisions close to it, leading to elongation and,

ultimately, fragmentation into daughter droplets, which may undergo repeated collision-elongation-fragmentation cycles.

Future studies will shed more light on the origin of angular momentum in droplets produced via fluid fragmentation. A large number of studies discuss the fragmentation of classical liquids upon jet expansion [55,56]. However, to the best of our knowledge, the amount of angular momentum contained in the resulting droplets remains unknown. It is therefore interesting to see that the jet atomization of classical liquids produces highly rotating droplets similar to quantum He droplets.

The availability of the large ^3He droplets suitable for single-pulse diffraction experiments also opens additional research directions. Vortex-induced cluster aggregation has so far been unique to superfluid ^4He . It is of high interest to expand diffraction experiments to non-superfluid ^3He and study the aggregation patterns in rotating fermionic droplets. Dopant aggregation mechanisms and the morphology of the phase separation in rotating mixed $^3\text{He}/^4\text{He}$ droplets presents another frontier [57].

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