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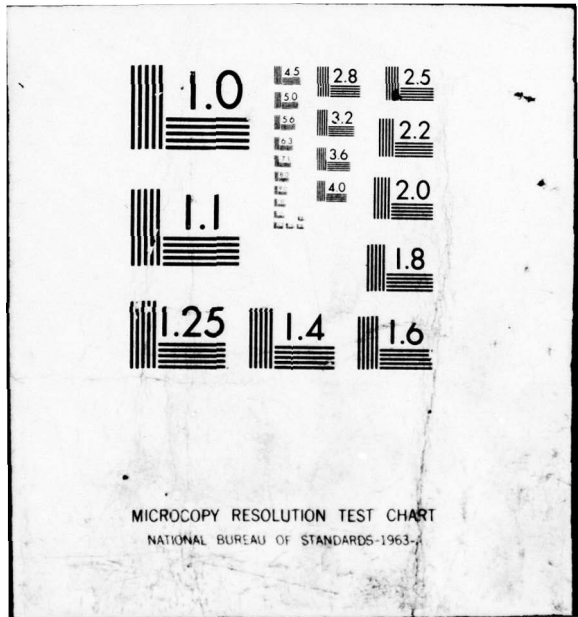
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ACOUSTIC SURFACE WAVE SCATTERING:
THE DETECTION OF SURFACE CRACKS IN CERAMICS

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ABSTRACT

An acoustic surface wave technique for detecting surface cracks in ceramics has been devised. The technique has been demonstrated to detect cracks at least as small as $60\ \mu\text{m}$ in depth, with the detectability limit for individual cracks being imposed by the size distribution of the adjacent background cracks. The attenuation of the surface wave has also been attributed (at least in structural ceramics) to the surface cracks, and preliminary correlations between attenuation and the large extremes of the crack size distribution have been reported.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

Surface cracks are an omnipresent source of fracture in structural ceramics.(1-3) The cracks are generated during finishing operations (such as grinding and machining); and usually consist of arrays of semi-elliptical cracks, with an essentially random inclination to the surface, but a preferred alignment parallel to the direction of motion of the abrading particles.(4) The characterization of these cracks is an essential constituent in an effective failure prediction procedure. The characterization techniques that have been conventionally applied to surface cracks are dye penetrants and fracture statistics.(5) The dye penetrant techniques are restricted to relatively large cracks, because of inherent resolution limitations, and are only viable in structural ceramic systems as preliminary inspection procedures. Statistical methods exhibit superior prospects.(1,5) But the statistical approach is not, by itself, capable of identifying components subject to anomalously severe surface damage, on an individual basis. Alternative, or additional, surface crack characterization techniques must, therefore, be sought. An acoustic surface wave technique, that has the basic prerequisites for satisfying the failure prediction requirements, is described in the present paper.

Two aspects of surface wave scattering have potential for surface flaw characterization: the scattering from individual flaws at the large extreme of the distribution, and the cumulative scattering from the entire



surface flaw population (related to the attenuation⁽⁶⁾). The prospects for each approach are examined herein by studying both the scattering from deliberately introduced individual cracks, and the attenuation due to various arrays of cracks generated by abrasion treatments. For comparative purposes, the crack arrays are separately characterized, on a statistical basis, using an indentation technique.⁽⁷⁾



2.0 SPECIMEN CHARACTERIZATION

The material selected for this study was a commercial, hot-pressed silicon nitride (NC 132). Plate specimens (3 x 3 x 0.5 cm) were machined from an as-pressed billet and one surface optically polished. Specific surface grinding treatments were then applied to each sample using 30 μm and 70 μm diamond abrasive pastes and a standard diamond wheel. Then, three surface cracks were introduced using the Knoop indentation technique.⁽⁸⁾ The sizes of the cracks were characterized using optical or scanning electron microscopy (Fig. 1); the results are presented in Fig. 2. Subsequently, the plastic zones were removed by grinding* (the grinding condition corresponding to that applied prior to indentation). Thereafter, the cracks were not detectable, using either optical or electron microscopy, because the thin layer of surface plasticity that accompanies grinding tends to obscure the residual crack opening. It is assumed that all cracks are semicircular in shape, in accordance with observations of Petrovic and co-workers.⁽⁸⁾

The surface roughness of each sample was also measured using a Datatrak instrument. The results are summarized in Fig. 3. The expected increase in the amplitude of the surface irregularities with the grinding severity is apparent. It is also evident that uncharacteristically deep troughs exist in the sample subjected to a 30 μm grind (the consequence of a poorly sequenced grinding procedure)--the significance of this feature will emerge later.

*The plastic zone in Si_3N_4 is relatively shallow and its removal does not effect a significant change in the dimensions of the surface cracks.



3.0 SURFACE WAVE ACOUSTIC CHARACTERIZATION

3.1 Technique

A schematic of the transducer configuration developed for launching acoustic surface waves on ceramics⁽⁹⁾ is presented in Fig. 4. A surface wave is firstly excited on a piezoelectric (LiNbO₃) delay line by an interdigital transducer. A fluid couplant is placed between the delay line (outside the transducer region) and the nonpiezoelectric substrate on which an acoustic surface wave is to be excited. The surface wave becomes a leaky wave in the presence of the fluid and excites a bulk wave at an angle:

$$\theta_1 = \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{v_f}{v_{SL}}\right) \quad (1)$$

where v_f is the longitudinal wave velocity in the fluid, and v_{SL} is the surface wave velocity on the LiNbO₃. This longitudinal wave is, in turn, arranged to be incident on the nonpiezoelectric material at the critical angle that permits surface wave excitation:

$$\theta_2 = \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{v_f}{v_{SC}}\right) \quad (2)$$

where v_{SC} is the surface wave velocity on the nonpiezoelectric medium. The angle θ between the two solids is, therefore:



$$\theta = \theta_1 - \theta_2 = \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{v_f}{v_{SL}}\right) - \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{v_f}{v_{SC}}\right) \quad (3)$$

The distance between the LiNbO_3 line and the nonpiezoelectric delay line is made as small as possible in order to minimize the propagation loss in the fluid couplant. For the case of a surface wave on the Y-Z cut LiNbO_3 delay line, coupled to a Si_3N_4 ceramic, the calculated maximum efficiency (of 54%) occurs for an overlay distance l (Fig. 4) of .5 mm, at a center frequency of 100 MHz. This constitutes a loss of about 2.7 dB conversion of the surface wave from one material to the other. In our experiments, glycerol was used as the fluid couplant because it does not evaporate quickly and because it forms a good meniscus. The inclination θ for this couplant is 13° .

3.2 Insertion and Propagation Loss

The reduction in amplitude of the signal reflected at the edge of the sample can be used to obtain estimates of the insertion and propagation (attenuation) losses. The two sources of loss are distinguished by performing experiments on a given sample with the transducer at different distances from the sample edge, and then presuming that the insertion loss is constant and that the propagation loss is linearly proportional to the propagation distance. The latter assumption is justified on the basis that beam spreading at the wavelengths (30-60 μm), distances (1-2 cm), and beam widths (1 mm) involved is negligably small, and that a sufficient area is sampled by the beam to ensure a consistent attenuation.



The loss experiments have thus far only been completed on the polished $9\ \mu\text{m}$ and $30\ \mu\text{m}$ diamond ground samples. The insertion loss was found to be relatively frequency independent (in the range 80-130 MHz); but increased as the surface condition degenerated, from ~ 4 dB on the polished sample to ~ 9 dB on the $30\ \mu\text{m}$ ground sample. The propagation loss results are plotted in Fig. 5 for the polished sample. The attenuation level is low and varies approximately as λ^{-4} , where λ is the wavelength. The results obtained on the $30\ \mu\text{m}$ ground sample are similar in character, except at the highest frequency (130 MHz) where no return signal could be detected. Finally, it was noted that finely polishing the surface of the ground samples to remove the surface roughness, without disrupting the underlying crack structure, had little effect: and certainly did not restore the attenuation and propagation losses to the values obtained for the fully polished sample.

3.3 Defect Detection

Cracks were introduced into each sample using indentation loads of 10, 20, and 40 N corresponding (Fig. 2) to crack radii of 60, 80, and $120\ \mu\text{m}$, respectively. The crack planes in each case were normal to the long axis of the sample; this coincides, in turn, with the incident direction of the acoustic surface wave. For the polished sample, the background scattering was minimal and all cracks could be clearly distinguished, as illustrated in Fig. 6a for the $60\ \mu\text{m}$ crack.

For the sample with the $30\ \mu\text{m}$ finish, the background level increased markedly (Fig. 6b), and although distinct signals were obtained for the $80\ \mu\text{m}$



(Fig. 6b) and 120 μm cracks, the 60 μm crack could not be discerned. Additional signals that could not be related to the deliberately introduced cracks were also apparent (Fig. 6b). It is recalled that this sample contained unusually deep surface troughs (Fig. 3), which may signify the presence of relatively large underlying cracks introduced during a prior stage of the surface preparation sequence. The additional signals are thus plausibly explained by the presence of large cracks other than those introduced by indentation.

The even larger background level on the sample with the 70 μm finish prevented the detection of both the 60 and 80 μm cracks, although a clear signal was obtained from the 120 μm crack (Fig. 6c). Finally, on the rough ground sample, none of the deliberately introduced cracks could be isolated. However, distinct signals were apparent in other areas of the sample.



4.0 STATISTICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF SURFACE CRACKS

The size distribution of surface cracks can be characterized experimentally in terms of their effective strength S : the applied stress required to initiate crack extension. In general, the strength and crack size are related by:(10)

$$S^2 = \frac{EG_c}{Y_a^2} F(\theta) \quad (4)$$

where E is Young's modulus, G_c is the critical strain energy release rate, Y is a crack shape parameter ($Y^2 = 4(1-\nu^2)$ for penny cracks), θ is the inclination of the crack plane to the stress axis, and F is a function. The distribution of strengths $g(S)dS$, the number of flaws per unit area of surface with a strength between S and $S + dS$ is related to the probability Φ of fracture occurring at a stress level S in an areal element A . In general,(1,7)

$$\Phi = 1 - \left[\exp - \int_A dA \int_0^S g(S)dS \right] \quad (5)$$

The distribution of flaw sizes, $g(a)da$, is in turn related to $g(S)dS$: the precise relation depending upon the strength test configuration employed.



Surface crack size distributions are conveniently obtained using sphere indentation tests. In this test, the strength level, S_{TC} , and the crack size are related by (eq. A3):

$$S_{TC}^2 = \frac{EG_c}{4(1-\nu^2)a}$$

the strength distribution is related to the cumulative distribution of the peak tensile stress at crack formation $\Phi(S_m)$ by: (7)

$$g(S_{TC}) = \frac{S_m}{\pi R^2} \frac{\Phi''(1-\Phi) + (\Phi')^2}{(1-\Phi)^2} = \frac{S_m \epsilon''}{\pi R^2} \quad (6)$$

and (Appendix I):

$$G(a) \sim 2 G(S_{TC}) = \int_0^{S_{TC}} g(S_{TC}) dS_{TC} \quad (7)$$

Indentation fracture data have, therefore, been obtained on the rough ground sample using a spherical steel indenter (Fig. 7) (cf ref. 11) and analyzed according to the above scheme. The approximate flaw size distributions derived from the data are plotted in Fig. 8. The flaw sizes were computed by assuming a polycrystalline value for G_c (80 Jm^{-2}); (12)



this overestimates the flaw size in the small size regime ($\leq 5 \mu\text{m}$ radius) when a smaller (although ill-defined) G_c would be more pertinent.⁽¹⁰⁾ Also plotted in Fig. 8 are the flaw size distribution derived from uniaxial flexure data, obtained on the same material with a similar surface condition. It is evident that $G(a)$ for a wide range of a can be approximated by:

$$G(a) \approx G_0 \left(\frac{a_0}{a} \right)^p \quad (8)$$

where a_0 is taken to be $1 \mu\text{m}$ and p and G_0 are constants equal to 3.3 and 10^9 m^{-2} , respectively.



5.0 INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Loss Characteristics

The attenuation of surface waves in ceramics can derive from several scattering sources: surface cracks, surface roughness, and microstructural constituents (such as grains, pores, and second phases). The low level of the microstructural attenuation in hot-pressed silicon nitride⁽⁶⁾ and the minor effect of the surface roughness (Section 3.2) indicate that the attenuation in the present studies derives primarily from the surface cracks.

The attenuation due to surface cracks can be related, in the usual way,⁽⁶⁾ to the crack size distribution and the scattering cross section $\Omega(a)$ (derived in Appendix II). Hence, for the long wave length limit, eqs. (8) and (A14) can be combined⁽⁶⁾ to yield:

$$\alpha = \frac{\kappa}{\lambda^5} \int_{a_{\min}}^{a_{\max}} g(a) a^6 da \quad (9)$$

where a_{\max} and a_{\min} are, respectively, upper and lower flaw size bounds for the area A of surface sampled by the acoustic beam. Differentiating eq. (8) to obtain $g(a)da$ and substituting into eq. (10) gives (for $p < 6$):



$$\alpha(\lambda, a) = \frac{p G_0 \kappa a_0^p}{\lambda^5} \int_0^{\infty} a^{5-p} da = \frac{p G_0 \kappa a_0^p}{(6-p) \lambda^5} a_{\max}^{6-p} \quad (10)$$

The substantial dependence on the upper bound is important, because it indicates that the propagation loss may correlate with the fracture strength when individual flaws cannot be distinguished (c.f. bulk attenuation in coarse grained or porous ceramics⁽⁶⁾).

The limited attenuation data obtained in the present study exhibit a weaker frequency dependence (λ^{-4}) than predicted by the long wavelength theory; probably indicating departures from the long wavelength regime, as commonly encountered in studies of microstructure attenuation.⁽⁶⁾ Further studies will examine the frequency and crack size distribution dependence of the attenuation in detail, to obtain direct comparisons with eq. (11) (including theoretical extensions to shorter wavelengths, if possible).

It is also instructive to explore the crack size dependence of the attenuation predicted by eq. (11). The total crack density, $G(a)_{a \rightarrow a_0}$, is not expected to change appreciably as the surface finish is varied; rather, the distribution is expected to displace to larger flaw sizes as the severity of the grinding process increases. Hence, in terms of the flaw size distribution parameters, G_0 and a_0 would be essentially unchanged, while p would decrease (and a_{\max} would increase) as the grinding severity increases. By analogy with impact fracture studies on ceramics,^(13,14) the



depth of the surface cracks for a constant grinding velocity should be approximately proportional to $r^{4/3}$, where r is the radius of the grinding particle. This proportionality allows p in eq. (11) to be correlated with the grinding particle size and the distribution parameters a_0 and G_0 . For cracks considerably larger than a_0 , p is found to be relatively insensitive to small changes in r , and the following approximate proportionality should apply:

$$\alpha \sim r^{(8-4p/3)} / \lambda^5 \quad (a_{\max} \gg a_0) \quad (11)$$

The predicted dependence will be compared with loss data for samples subjected to several surface treatments.

5.2 Crack Characterization

The detectability of a crack is determined by the power scattered by the crack (eq. 9), relative to the insertion and propagation losses and the input power.⁽⁵⁾ The theory is not yet sufficiently developed to predict detectability, but the present observations (Section 3.7) yield an upper bound for the detectable crack sizes: ranging from $<60 \mu\text{m}$ for polished surfaces to $<120 \mu\text{m}$ for surfaces subjected to a $70 \mu\text{m}$ diamond grinding treatment. Improved detection should be realized by optimizing both the frequency and the overlay distance, through quantitative studies of their effects on the attenuation and insertion losses, respectively, vis-a-vis the scattered power.

APPENDIX IANALYSIS OF INDENTATION FRACTURE DATA

When an elastic sphere is pressed onto a semi-infinite elastic body with a force P , the surface stresses outside the contact zone, a , are given by:(7)

$$\sigma_{rr} = \frac{P(1-2\nu)}{2\pi r^2} \quad (A1)$$

$$\sigma_{\theta\theta} = -\frac{P}{2\pi r^2}(1-2\nu) \quad (r \gg R)$$

where r is the distance from the center of contact. For this stress field, it has been demonstrated(7) that the strength distribution for pre-existing surface flaws can be derived directly from the cumulative distribution of the peak tension $S_m(=P(1-2\nu)/2\pi R^2)$ at the crack activation condition (eq. 6).

However, when such tests are performed on high strength ceramics, plastic deformation of the sphere frequently precedes crack activation.(11) The onset of deformation in the sphere changes the contact area and the pressure distribution. For indenter materials which exhibit substantial work hardening, we will assume that the pressure distribution remains approximately parabolic, as in the elastic problem. The spatial dependence of the stress given by eq. (A1) would then still pertain. But now the contact area could



not, of course, be determined directly from the load (as in the elastic case); instead, independent evaluation would be required.(11)

The propagation condition for penny-cracks subjected to multi-axial stress is:(15)

$$\frac{E G_c}{4(1-\nu^2)a} = \sigma_n^2 + \frac{4\tau_m^2}{(2-\nu)^2} \quad (A2)$$

where σ_n is the stress normal to the crack plane and τ_m is the maximum in-plane shear stress. For indentation, the surface stress state is equi-tension/compression (eq. A1); hence, if attention is restricted to cracks nearly normal to the surface, the crack propagation condition becomes:

$$\frac{E G_c}{4(1-\nu^2)a} = S_{TC}^2 \left[\cos^2 2\alpha + \frac{4}{(2-\nu)^2} \sin^2 2\alpha \right] \approx S_{TC}^2 \quad (A3)$$

where S_{TC} is the applied stress level of fracture and α is the inclination of the flaw normal to the principal tensile stress axis. This condition is only expected to pertain, however, when the normal stress is tensile and the crack faces can displace without friction, i.e., for $\alpha \leq \pi/4$. At larger α , the normal stress is compressive and the shear stress (especially in polycrystalline ceramics) is unlikely to lead to substantial intensification of the crack tip because of frictional resistance. Hence, only cracks in the



range, $-\pi/4 < \alpha < \pi/4$, are considered to be prone to extension. Since all flaws within this range experience the same crack extension force, the simple result for a random flaw orientation is that $G(a)$, the number of flaws per unit area larger than a is $\sim 2G(S_{TC})$, the number of flaws per unit area with a indentation strength less than S_{TC} . This result is modified when flaws inclined to the surface are also included, but this complexity need not be considered for present purposes.



APPENDIX II

SCATTERING CROSS SECTIONS OF SURFACE CRACKS

We will consider the situation that occurs when the crack depth $a \ll \lambda$. In this case, the main component of scattering of the surface waves is into other surface waves; the scattering into bulk waves is negligible because of the relatively weak coupling to the surface. We employ a general scattering matrix formula first derived by Kino⁽¹⁶⁾ for the relative wave amplitude s_{21} scattered from one transducer (transducer 1) to another (transducer 2) by a void:

$$s_{21} = \frac{i\omega}{4} \int_S (u_i)_1 (\sigma_{ij}^i)_2 \eta_j dS \quad (A4)$$

where $(u_i)_1$ is the surface displacement at the flaw due to unit power emitted by transducer 1, $(\sigma_{ij}^i)_2$ is the incident wave stress in the neighborhood of the flaw without the flaw being present due to unit power from transducer 2, η_j is the crack normal to the flaw surface, and S is the flaw surface area.

We suppose that the transmitting transducer (transducer 1) emits a straight crested wave (the surface wave equivalent of a plane wave) propagating at an angle θ_1 to the normal to the flaw surface. We are interested in determining the total power scattered by the flaw. This is most conveniently found by assuming that transducer 2 is of width W_2 and the flaw



is in its far field. We shall assume that this transducer has its axis at an angle θ_2 to the flaw normal. This normal is taken to be parallel to the sample surface. Elastostatic assumptions can now be used to calculate the displacements of the flaw faces. For a penny shaped crack of radius a it may be shown that the displacement normal to the surface u_0 , is:(17)

$$u_{0n} = \pm \frac{(T)_1 (1-\nu) (a^2 - r^2)^{1/2} \cos \theta_1}{\pi \mu} \quad (A5)$$

where r is the distance from the center of the crack, μ the shear modulus, and $(T)_1$ is the longitudinal component of the stress field due to transducer 1, at the transducer. For transducer 2, Auld(12) has shown that, for a wave emitted along the z axis, the stress in the far field is:

$$\frac{(\sigma_{zz}^i)_2}{(T)_2} = \frac{W_2}{(\lambda R)^{1/2}} \quad (A6)$$

where R is the distance of the transducer from the flaw, and $(T)_2$ is the longitudinal component of the stress field at the transducer.

It then follows after inserting eqs. (A5) and (A6) in eq. (A4) that:

$$s_{21} = \frac{i\omega(1-\nu)a^3}{6\mu} (T)_1 (T)_2 \cos \theta_1 \cos \theta_2 \frac{W_2}{(\lambda R)^{1/2}} \quad (A7)$$



where

$$A = \frac{\mu^2}{v_R} \left[1 - \left(\frac{v_S}{v_1} \right)^2 \right] f_z^3 \omega^{1/2} \quad (A8)$$

$$f_z = \frac{4\eta \left[1 - (v_R/v_S)^2 \right]^{3/2}}{3\eta - 2\eta (v_R/v_S)^2 - 1} \left(\frac{v_S}{v_R} \right)^2$$

$$\eta^2 = \frac{1 - (v_R/v_1)^2}{1 - (v_R/v_S)^2}$$

v_1 is the longitudinal wave velocity in the medium, v_S is the shear wave velocity, and v_R is the Rayleigh wave velocity.

For convenience, we now set $P_R = 1$ for the wave emitted from transducer 1, assuming that the transducer has unit width, and take $W_2 P_R = 1$ for transducer 2. Then:

$$(T)_1 = A \quad (A9)$$

$$(T)_2 = A/W_2^{1/2} \quad (A10)$$

Combining eqs. (A7), (A8), and (A9):

$$s_{21} = \frac{i\omega(1-\nu)a^3}{6\mu} \left(\frac{1}{\lambda R} \right)^{1/2} A^2 \cos\theta_1 \cos\theta_2 \quad (A11)$$



We now suppose that the receiving transducer subtends an angle $d\theta_2$ at the flaw. Then it follows that:

$$W_2 = R d\theta_2 \quad (A12)$$

The total power reradiated by a unit incident intensity signal from the flaw can now be calculated: this is defined as the one-dimensional scattering cross section Ω :

$$\begin{aligned} \Omega &= \int_0^{2\pi} |s_{21}|^2 R d\theta_2 \\ &= \frac{\pi \omega^2 (1-\nu)^2 a^6 A^4 \cos^2 \theta_1}{36 \mu^2 \lambda} \end{aligned} \quad (A13)$$

The flaw orientation distribution can now be used to obtain the average cross section. For a random orientation, $\langle \cos^2 \theta_1 \rangle = 0.5$ and hence,

$$\Omega = \frac{2\kappa a^6}{\lambda^5} \quad (A14)$$

where κ is a parameter dependent on the Poisson's ratio of the material given by:



$$\kappa = \frac{\pi^5}{9} f_z^2 (1-\nu)^2 \left[1 - (v_S/v_1)^2 \right]^4 \quad (A15)$$

A similar frequency dependence pertains to scattering by surface irregularities. (18)

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

- Fig. 1 Micrographs of surface cracks introduced by indentation: (a) scanning electron micrograph, $P = 20$ N, (b) polarized light reflected micrograph, $P = 50$ N, (c) reflected light optical micrograph, $P = 110$ N.
- Fig. 2 The relation between indentation load and surface crack radius.
- Fig. 3 Surface profiles of the various surfaces used in the present study, obtained using a Datatrak instrument.
- Fig. 4 A schematic illustrating the transducer configuration used for launching high frequency surface waves.
- Fig. 5 Propagation loss data obtained for the polished sample.
- Fig. 6 Oscilloscope records of signals obtained from surface cracks.
- Fig. 7 The probability of fracture for indentation using steel spheres, plotted as a function of the peak tensile stress.
- Fig. 8 Cumulative flaw size distribution derived from indentation and flexure data.



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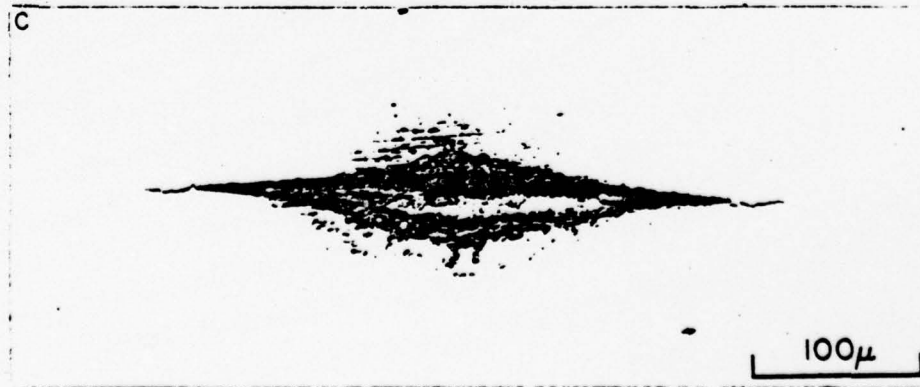
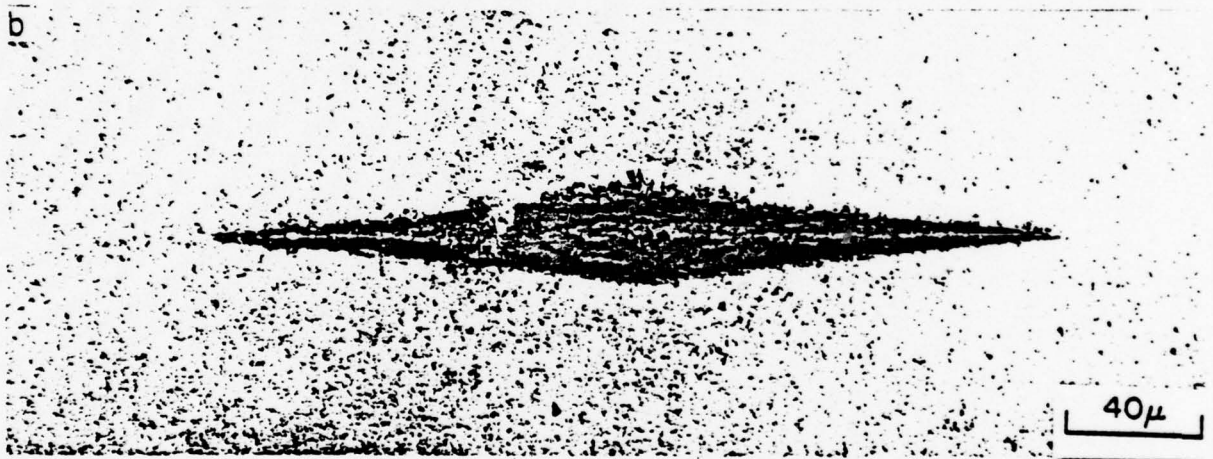
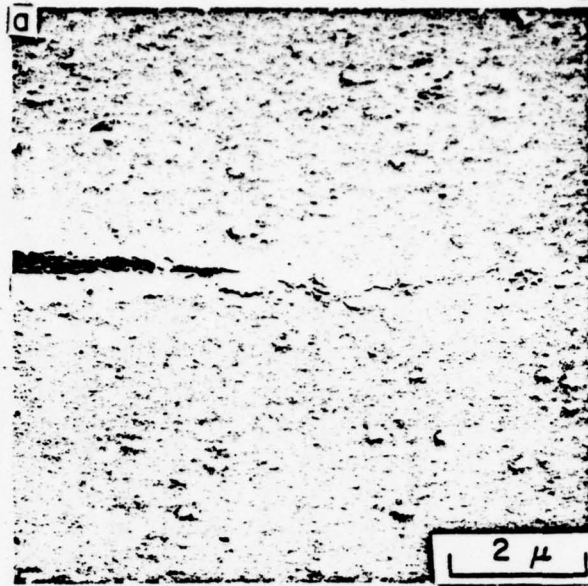


Figure 1



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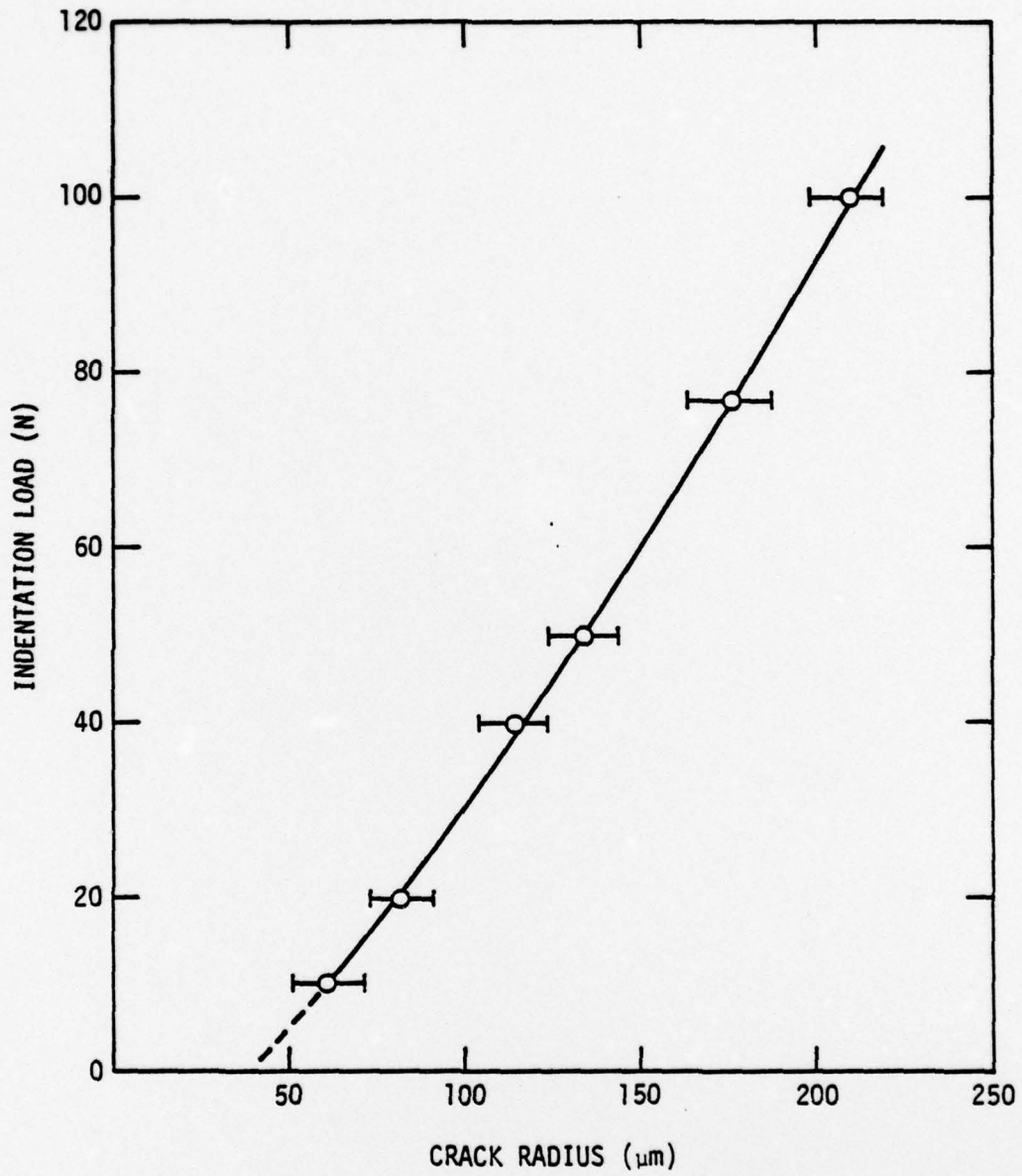


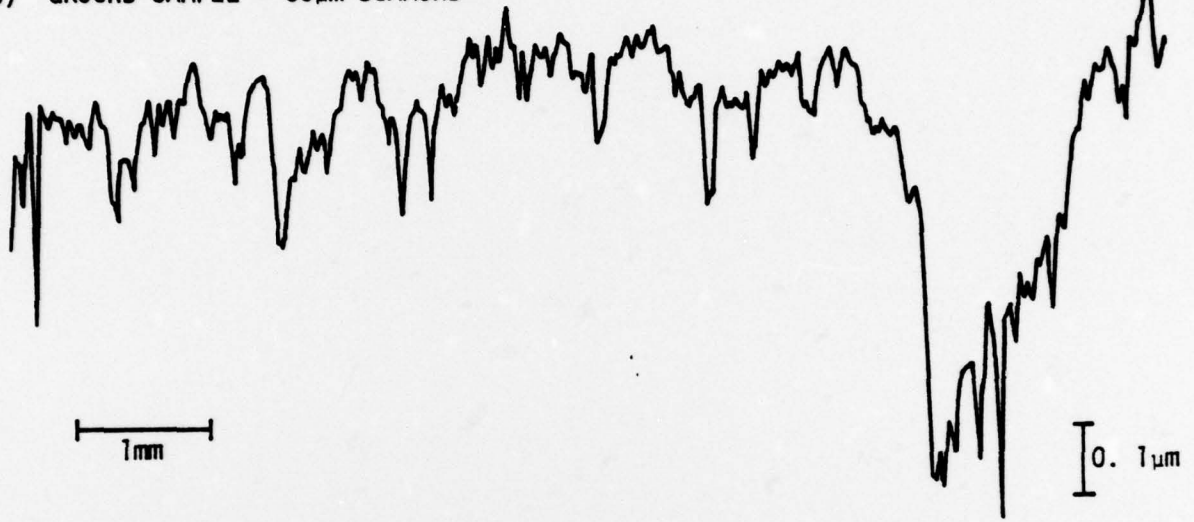
Figure 2



a) POLISHED SAMPLE



b) GROUND SAMPLE - 30µm DIAMOND



c) GROUND SAMPLE - 70µm DIAMOND



d) ROUGH GROUND SAMPLE

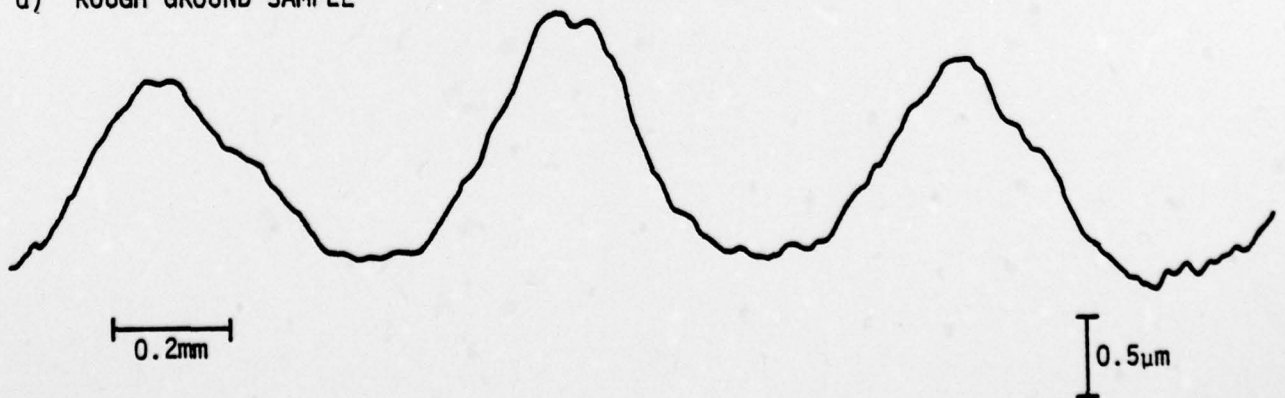


Figure 3



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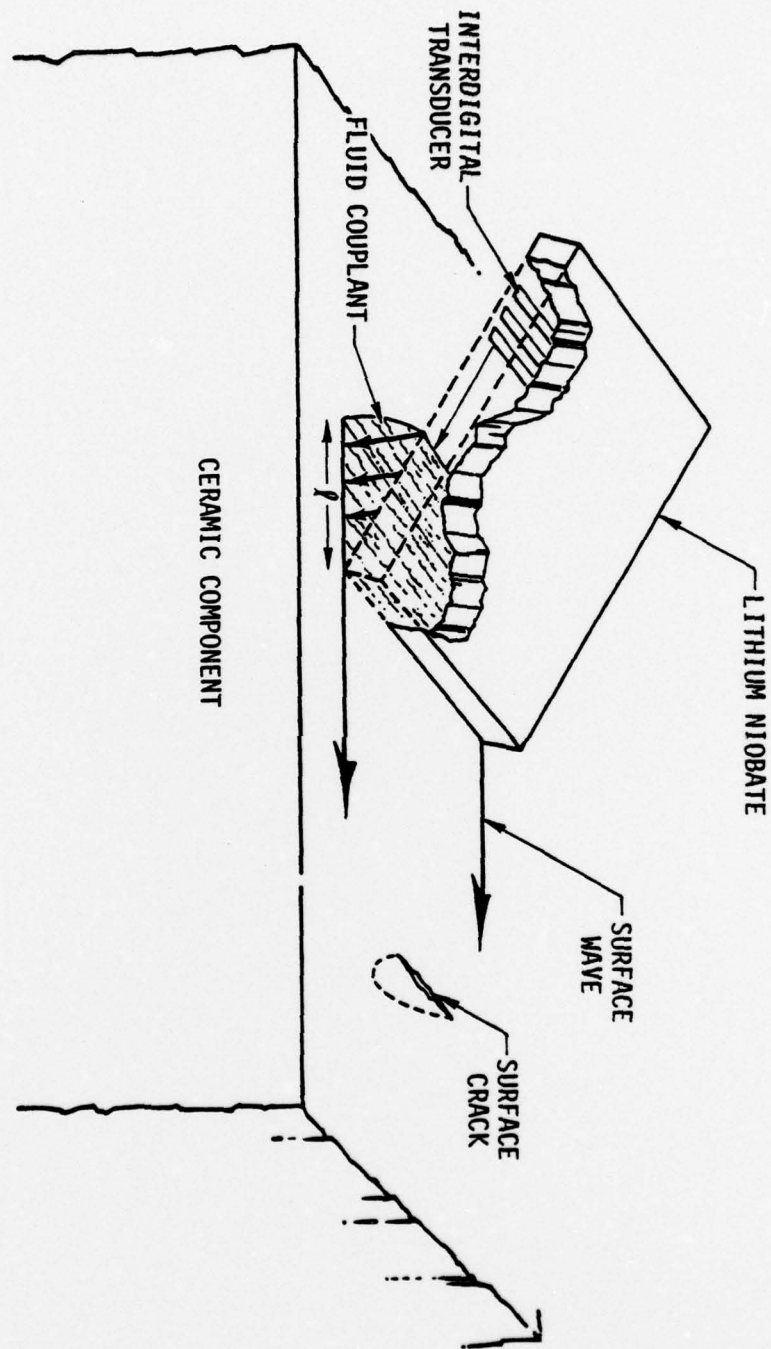


Figure 4



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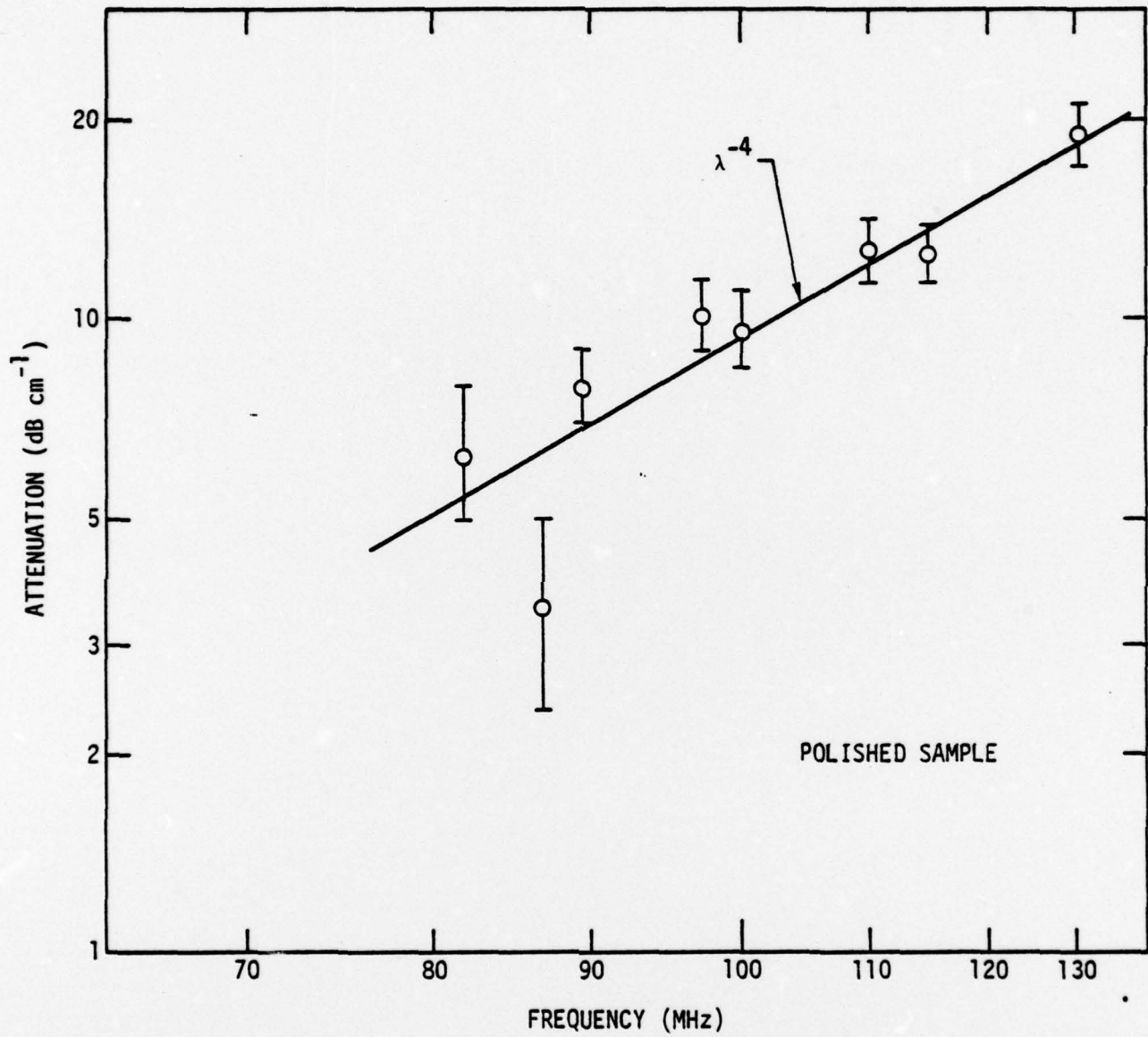


Figure 5



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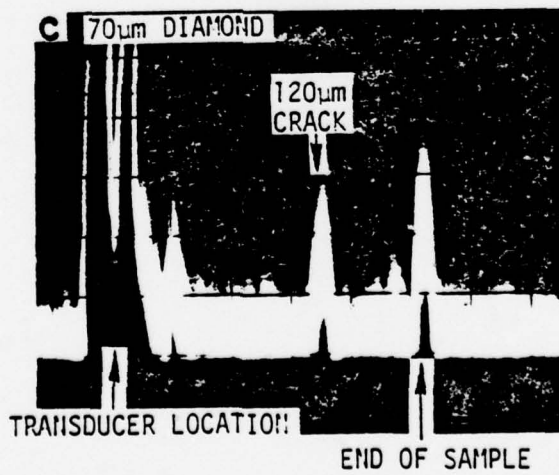
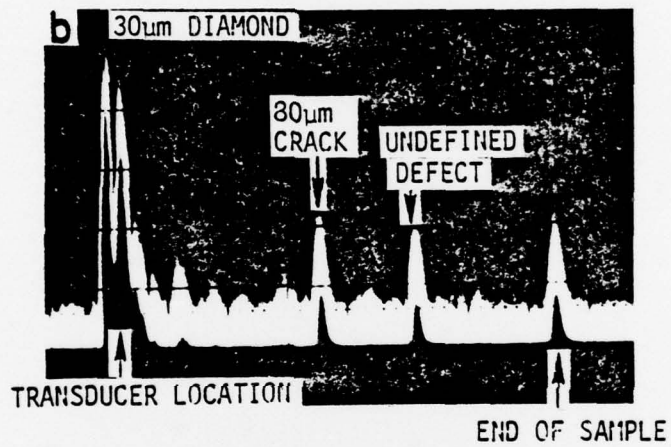
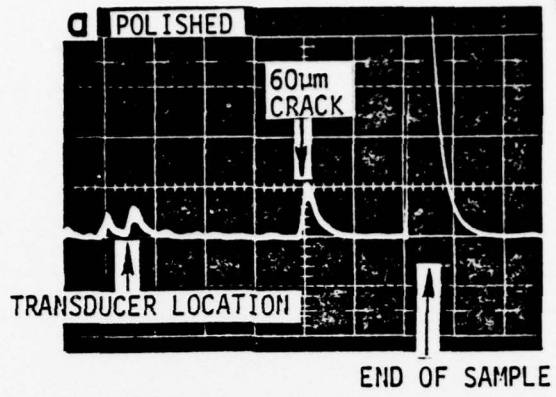


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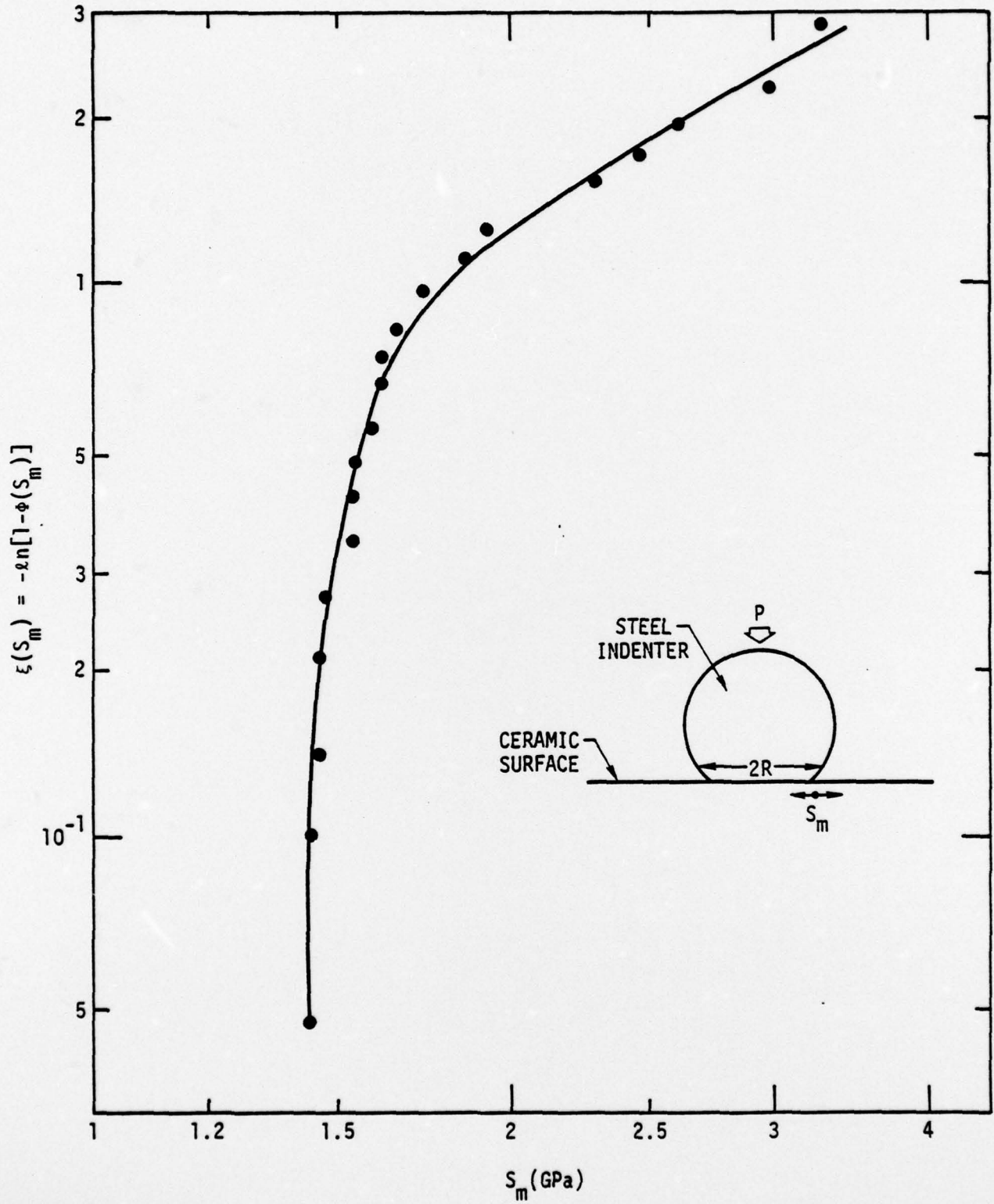


Figure 7

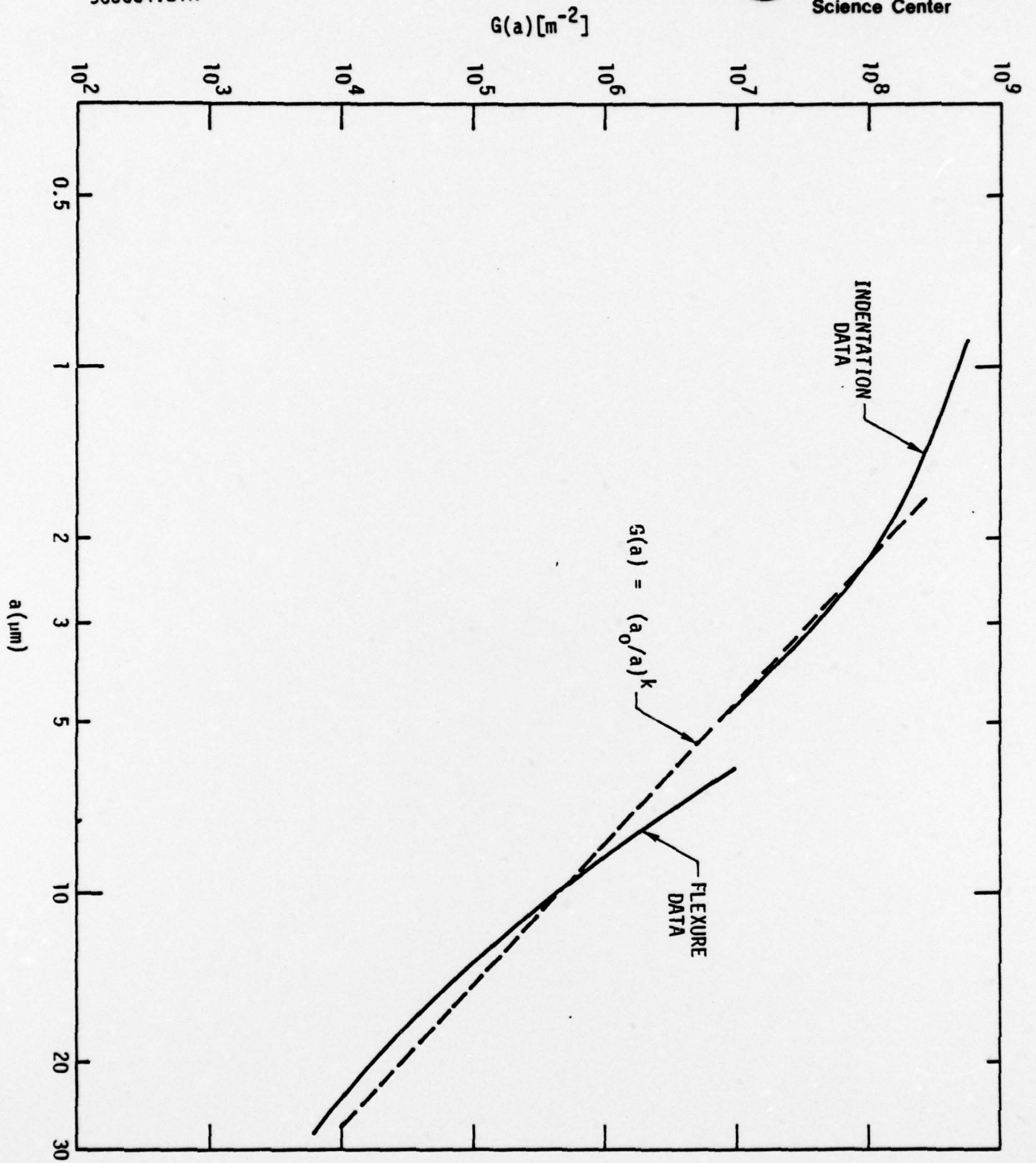


Figure 8

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