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A.G. Cullis P.A. Midgley
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Microscopy of Semiconducting Materials 2007

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Preface

This volume contains invited and contributed papers presented at the conference on ‘Microscopy of Semiconducting Materials’ held at the University of Cambridge on 2-5 April 2007. The event was organised under the auspices of the Electron Microscopy and Analysis Group of the Institute of Physics, the Royal Microscopical Society and the Materials Research Society. This international conference was the fifteenth in the series that focuses on the most recent world-wide advances in semiconductor studies carried out by all forms of microscopy and it attracted delegates from more than 20 countries.

With the relentless evolution of advanced electronic devices into ever smaller nanoscale structures, the problem relating to the means by which device features can be visualised on this scale becomes more acute. This applies not only to the imaging of the general form of layers that may be present but also to the determination of composition and doping variations that are employed. In view of this scenario, the vital importance of transmission and scanning electron microscopy, together with X-ray and scanning probe approaches can immediately be seen. The conference featured developments in high resolution microscopy and nanoanalysis, including the exploitation of recently introduced aberration-corrected electron microscopes. All associated imaging and analytical techniques were demonstrated in studies including those of self-organised and quantum domain structures. Many analytical techniques based upon scanning probe microscopies were also much in evidence, together with more general applications of X-ray diffraction methods. The materials subjected to investigation covered the complete range of elemental and compound semiconductors, often in epitaxial form, with some emphasis on both device-processed materials and finished devices at the state-of-the-art. This Proceedings volume presents work described in all study areas.

Every manuscript submitted for publication in this Proceedings volume has been reviewed by at least two referees and modified accordingly. The editors are very grateful to the following colleagues for their rapid and meticulous reviewing work:

A Andreev, J Arbiol, I Arslan, J S Barnard, H Bender, N Browning, T J Bullough, A Cavallini, M Dahne, C Dieker, M Fay, M Galtrey, M Gass, V Grillo, A Harrison, C J Humphreys, Z Liliental-Weber, H Kirmse, M MacKenzie, J Mardinly, G Moldovan, R T Murray, R Oliver, B Pecz, F Priolo, A Rocher, A Rosenauer, F M Ross, J-L Rouviere, O Schmidt, M Schowalter, B Sieber, J Sloan, E Spiecker, V Stolojan, P Sutter, K Tillmann, C Trager-Cowan, T Walther, E Yakimov, N Zakharov.

It is a pleasure to thank Claire Garland and Jodie Cartwright of the Institute of Physics for their expert assistance in organising the present conference. Also, we are very grateful to Erica Bithell, Jo Sharp and Edmund Ward of Cambridge University for editorial assistance in preparing papers for printing in this Proceedings volume.

A G Cullis
P A Midgley
December 2007

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Part I

Wide Band-Gap Nitrides

The Puzzle of Exciton Localisation in GaN-Based Structures: TEM, AFM and 3D APFIM Hold the Key

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Summary: The InGaN/GaN quantum well system emits intense light even though the dislocation density is high. This is a puzzle since dislocations should quench the light emission. Photoluminescence (PL) experiments show that the excitons in the InGaN quantum well are localised on a nanometre scale, thus separating the carriers from most of the dislocations. Many papers report transmission electron microscopy (TEM) results showing that this localisation is caused by gross indium clustering in the InGaN quantum wells, but our TEM reveals no gross indium clustering. Three-dimensional atom probe field ion microscopy confirms that InGaN is a random alloy. Mechanisms are given for localisation on a nm scale. Confinement on a broader length scale (50 – 100 nm) can also occur in some InGaN quantum wells.

1 Introduction

A remarkable feature of InGaN/GaN quantum well LEDs is that they emit intense light, even though the dislocation density is typically 10^9cm^{-2} . In all other light-emitting semiconductors the light emission is quenched if the dislocation density exceeds about 10^3cm^{-2} . Yet InGaN quantum wells emit strong blue and green light (depending on the In concentration) when the dislocation density is one million times higher than that in other light-emitting semiconductors, even though it is known that dislocations in InGaN are non-radiative recombination centres.

The widely-believed solution to the above problem, up to a few years ago, was that InGaN was an unstable alloy and the indium in the InGaN quantum wells formed In-rich clusters. Since the band-gap of InN is less than that of GaN, the bandgap of these In-rich clusters is reduced, and hence the electrons and holes are spatially localised in these clusters. At room temperature (and below) in InGaN, an electron and hole form a bound exciton, hence the In-rich clusters localise the excitons. The clusters were believed to be small, on a nanometre scale. Statistically, most threading dislocations would not pass through these nanometre-scale In-rich clusters, even for a dislocation density of 10^9cm^{-2} at which the average dislocation spacing is about 300 nm. Hence it was almost universally believed that the In-rich clusters localised the excitons away from most of the dislocations so that they did not quench the light emission. Thus it was believed that the intense light emission observed from InGaN quantum wells with a high dislocation density was due to In-rich clusters.

In this paper we first present evidence to support this argument. We then show that In-rich clusters are produced in InGaN in the electron microscope due to electron beam damage. However, careful low-dose electron microscopy reveals no gross In clustering, but it cannot rule out small In fluctuations. We then report that three-dimensional atom probe analysis of InGaN quantum wells yields that InGaN is a random alloy, with no In fluctuations other than would be expected of any random alloy. This is consistent with our electron microscopy results. Finally, we return to the question of why InGaN emits intense light despite having a high dislocation density.

2 The Evidence for Exciton Localisation in InGaN

There is clear evidence that, at low temperature, the dominant emission from InGaN/GaN quantum-well structures involves the recombination of strongly localised excitons (see, for example [1, 2]). Graham et al [2] studied the low temperature ($T = 6$ K) optical properties of a series of $\text{In}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}/\text{GaN}$ single-quantum-well structures where the indium fraction x varied from sample to sample over the range 0.05 – 0.25. The structures were grown by Metal Organic Vapour Phase Epitaxy (MOVPE), and the InGaN quantum well was 2.5 nm thick. By comparing the strengths of the phonon-accompanied recombination with those obtained from a theoretical model, the spatial extent of the carrier wavefunctions in the plane of the quantum well was estimated. This localisation length was found to range from 1 nm for the InGaN quantum well containing 25% indium, to 3 nm for the 5% indium alloy. Thus the exciton localisation length in the plane of the quantum well is typically about 2 nm. The key question is what causes this localisation.

3 The Evidence from Electron Microscopy for Indium-Rich Clusters

Bright-field transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images of InGaN/GaN quantum well structures were reported to show dark dot-like features with a size of about 3 nm in the InGaN quantum wells [3, 4]. Since an indium atom is much larger than a gallium atom, fluctuations in InGaN compositions will cause variations in lattice strain and hence strain contrast in TEM images. The dot-like features were therefore attributed to strain contrast. Energy-dispersive X-ray analysis in the TEM suggested a correlation between the dark spots and higher indium content [4]. This was confirmed by Cho et al [5] who used energy-filtered transmission electron microscopy (EFTEM) to analyse the regions of strain contrast observed in InGaN quantum wells. EFTEM images clearly revealed these strained regions to be indium-rich clusters with a size of 2-3 nm.

A popular method for studying these indium-rich clusters has been lattice parameter mapping. In this technique, high-resolution TEM lattice images are taken of InGaN/GaN quantum well structures. The indium-rich clusters give rise to localised strain, and by measuring the local lattice fringe spacings a two-dimensional lattice parameter map can be plotted, which shows the size of the indium-rich clusters to be typically a few nm. Strains of the order of 10% are found in these clusters. By using Vegard's law, the lattice parameter map can be converted to a composition map. For InGaN quantum wells grown with 10-20% indium, the indium-rich clusters are typically found to contain at least 80% indium [6, 7], although the projection problem in TEM makes it difficult to quantify the indium content. We will call such clusters "gross indium-rich clusters". It was reported that such gross indium-rich clusters may, in fact, be pure InN [7], and pure InN regions with a 1-3 nm size were reported in InGaN quantum wells grown by both MOVPE and MBE, as measured using high resolution TEM lattice parameter mapping of samples with mean composition of 16% In in the InGaN quantum wells [8].

The argument for gross indium clustering in InGaN quantum wells appears to be strong. We know from optical measurements that the excitons in InGaN are localised on a 1-3 nm scale. Thermodynamic calculations show that InGaN is unstable and should decompose into In-rich and In-poor regions [9]. TEM shows gross In-rich clusters in InGaN quantum wells on a nanometre scale, similar to the scale on which the excitons are localised.

Because of the apparently strong and convincing arguments given above, many hundreds of papers have been published stating that InGaN quantum wells contain gross In-rich clusters, and that these clusters are responsible for the exciton localisation. The Cambridge GaN research group has observed such clusters in the TEM many times, and indeed they are among the authors of a paper demonstrating that those clusters are indium-rich [5]. However, this work necessarily used high electron doses for the EFTEM images which revealed the In-rich clusters. We will now demonstrate that in the wide range of InGaN materials we have examined, such gross indium-rich clusters do not exist, and they are produced by electron beam damage in the TEM.

4 The Effect of Electron Beam Damage on InGaN in the TEM

We have found that InGaN quantum wells damage extremely rapidly in the electron beam of a TEM at the beam currents normally used for imaging. The damage causes indium-rich clusters to form. Figure 1 shows (0002) lattice fringe images of an $\text{In}_{0.22}\text{Ga}_{0.78}\text{N}$ quantum well using high-resolution TEM (HRTEM). The lattice fringe images were obtained with the specimen tilted about 6-7 deg away from a $\langle 11\bar{2}0 \rangle$ axis towards the adjacent $\langle 10\bar{1}0 \rangle$ pole. At this orientation a systematic row of reflections are excited with (0002) and $(000\bar{2})$ under equal excitation. The images in Fig. 1 were recorded using 400 keV incident electrons in a JEOL 4000EX. Figure 1a was recorded within 20 seconds of first exposing this part of the quantum well to the electron beam. Figure 1b is the same area after a few minutes of exposure. We have analysed these images to produce lattice parameter maps [10, 11] using a process similar to the DALI technique [7]. After only a few minutes exposure to the electron beam we found nanometre-size indium clusters formed which caused local strains of up to 10%, corresponding to an indium fraction x of 60%. These cluster sizes, strains and compositions are typical of those found by others using TEM (for example [6, 7]). However, we have found no evidence at all of gross indium clustering if low electron beam currents are used. At low electron dose, the lattice fringe image of the quantum well and the lattice parameter map are both reasonably uniform (Fig. 1a, 1c), [10, 11]. We have studied the effect of 200, 300, and 400 keV incident electrons. For the 200 keV electrons we used a FEI Tecnai F20-G2. We reduced the electron beam current substantially below the maximum available, so that the current density incident on the sample was 35Acm^{-2} . Electron beam damage of the InGaN QWs was already strong after less than 30 seconds of exposure to 200 keV electrons at this current density.

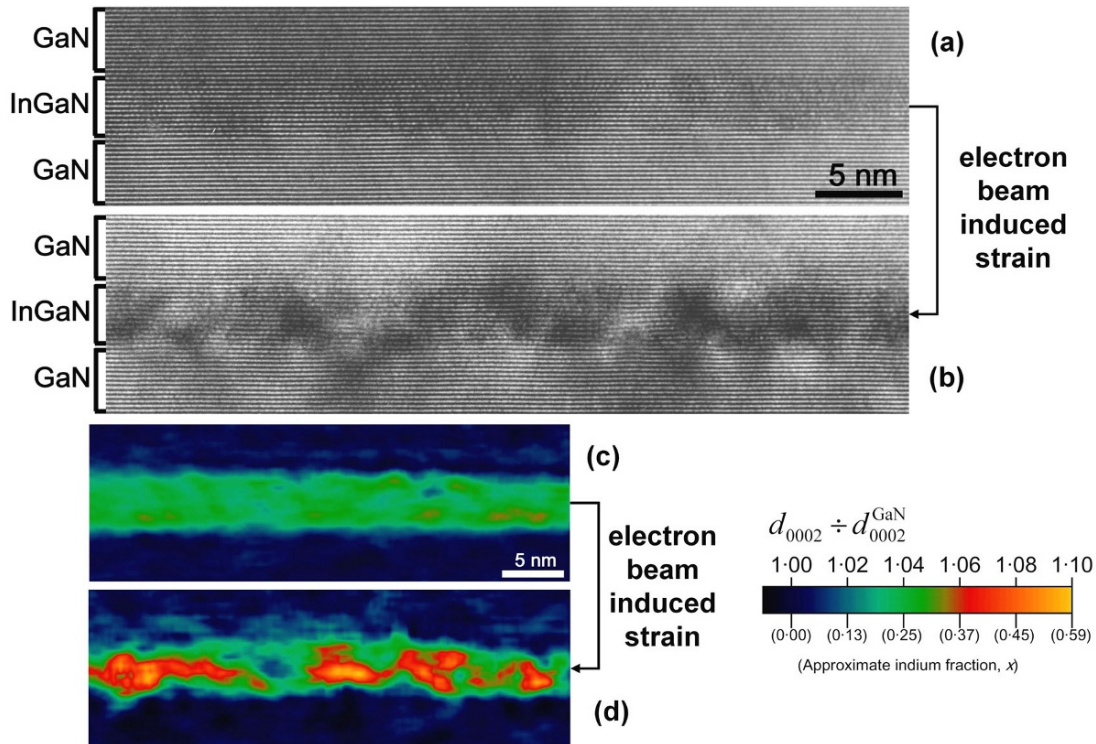


Fig. 1. A pair of HRTEM lattice fringe images demonstrating the electron-beam induced damage to an $\text{In}_{0.22}\text{Ga}_{0.78}\text{N}$ quantum well. The (0002) lattice fringe images were obtained using a JEOL 4000 EX operating at 400kV. (a) shows the image after minimal exposure to the beam, and (b) the same region after only a few minutes of exposure. (c) is a lattice parameter map of (a), and (d) is a lattice parameter map of (b).

Since publishing the Smeeton et al [10, 11] papers it has been suggested to us that our results may apply only to InGaN grown on MOVPE equipment at Cambridge, or may be related to our TEM specimen preparation procedures, rather than being a general effect. We have therefore purchased a very bright blue commercial LED and examined the InGaN quantum wells it contains by TEM. Again, we found no evidence of gross indium clustering at low electron beam currents and short exposure times in the TEM. However, as the electron dose increased, indium-rich clusters formed, just as in the Cambridge grown samples [12]. O'Neill et al [13] also reported that In-rich clusters formed as a result of electron beam damage in their specimens. We also prepared TEM specimens using only mechanical polishing instead of using a combination of mechanical polishing followed by ion beam thinning. We observed no differences in the behaviour of both specimens in the TEM, suggesting that the susceptibility of InGaN to electron beam damage is intrinsic to the InGaN/GaN system and not a consequence of our ion milling procedures [12]. We have also studied MBE grown InGaN/GaN structures. In *all* the samples we have studied, we observe no gross indium clustering in the TEM at low beam currents and short exposure times. Indium-rich clusters *only* appear at higher electron doses.

5 Does TEM Give Any Evidence for Genuine In Clustering?

Slight fluctuations in the TEM image contrast of InGaN quantum wells can be observed in low-dose images. It should be noted that if InGaN is a random alloy, the composition will not be uniform and some statistical fluctuations will be observed. Hence, the small fluctuations that are observed in TEM image contrast could be due to random alloy fluctuations or to genuine low-level In-clustering. In addition, the initial stages of damage may already have occurred in low-dose images, since significant radiation damage can occur in orienting the specimen in the electron microscope before recording the image. Hence even the lowest dose images should not be treated as a faithful representation of the original specimen.

In the light of the Smeeton et al [10, 11] papers, which suggested that the gross indium-rich clusters in InGaN quantum wells reported by many researchers might be due to electron beam damage, the Gerthsen group revised their earlier conclusions [7]. They observed that the indium concentration in the clusters increased with increasing irradiation time in the electron microscope. However, because they found In-rich clusters already in their first HRTEM images taken after only 20s of exposure to the electron beam they concluded that In-rich clusters genuinely existed in their InGaN quantum wells, but that the In concentration was significantly lower than they had previously stated [14].

The Kisielowski group has recently made detailed studies of indium clustering in InGaN, following their earlier work [6]. They claim that InGaN quantum wells can be imaged in HRTEM with negligible electron beam damage and that indium-rich clusters genuinely exist [15]. They have found that no measurable alteration of the initial element distribution occurs for electron irradiation times of up to 2 minutes and current densities of 20-40 Acm⁻² [16]. They report that green In_xGa_{1-x}N quantum wells (with average indium fraction *x* about 0.2) have genuine indium-rich clusters, 1-3 nm wide with In content up to 0.40 [17]. This disagrees with our findings reported above (see Fig. 1).

A key question is whether the electron micrographs carefully recorded and reported in the above papers [14-17] are, in fact, damage free. Electron-beam damage of inorganic materials in an electron microscope can be a complex process and the damage mechanism for strained thin layers of InGaN is not yet known. In some inorganic materials, there appears to be a threshold electron beam current density for damage to occur, below which there appears to be little or no damage [18, 19]. If InGaN behaves in this way then Gerthsen and Kisielowski may be correct that damage-free electron micrographs of this material can be recorded. However, for other inorganic materials there appears to be no lower threshold electron beam current density for damage, which can also occur for incident electron energies as low as 40 keV [20]. If InGaN behaves in this way then damage-free microscopy is impossible. Until more is

known about the mechanism(s) by which strained thin layers of InGaN damage, we cannot be sure that it is possible to record high resolution electron micrographs in which the damage is negligible.

6 3-D Atom Probe Studies of Indium Clustering

Our low-dose TEM studies have revealed that gross indium clustering does not exist in the many InGaN quantum wells we have studied. However, we cannot rule out lower level indium clustering for the reasons given above, namely the fact that such genuine clustering, if it exists, may be masked by the noise in low-dose images, and genuine clusters cannot be distinguished from indium-rich clusters already created by the electron beam in even low-dose images. In addition, since the electron-beam damage mechanism in strained layers of InGaN is not yet known, we do not know if it is possible to record damage-free electron micrographs of this material. In order to assess whether low-level indium clustering genuinely exists we therefore need a different technique from electron microscopy. The method should not involve exposure to high-energy electrons, and it should preferably provide direct information, at the atomic level, of the distribution of indium in InGaN quantum wells. In addition, the technique should preferably avoid the projection problem in TEM.

It is well known that the three-dimensional atom probe (3DAP) can provide nanometre-scale information about composition variations in a variety of materials [21]. We have recently applied this technique to InGaN quantum wells. Needle-shaped 3DAP specimens were prepared in a FEI Dualbeam Quanta FIB/SEM. All SEM imaging was performed at 5 kV and exposure times and currents were minimised in order to limit the risk of damage to the InGaN quantum wells. The 3DAP images were obtained using an Oxford nanoScience instrument fitted with a prototype laser module.

Figure 2 shows reconstructions of the InGaN/GaN structure with the indium and gallium atoms displayed. Four indium-containing quantum wells are clearly visible, and we have analysed in detail the indium distribution in the bottom three of these since the top well may have been damaged by sample preparation. We have compared the indium distribution with the expected distribution from a random alloy. No significant deviations were found from that expected in a random alloy for all three of the quantum wells (for further details see [22, 23]). We therefore conclude that there is no evidence of indium clustering in this sample.

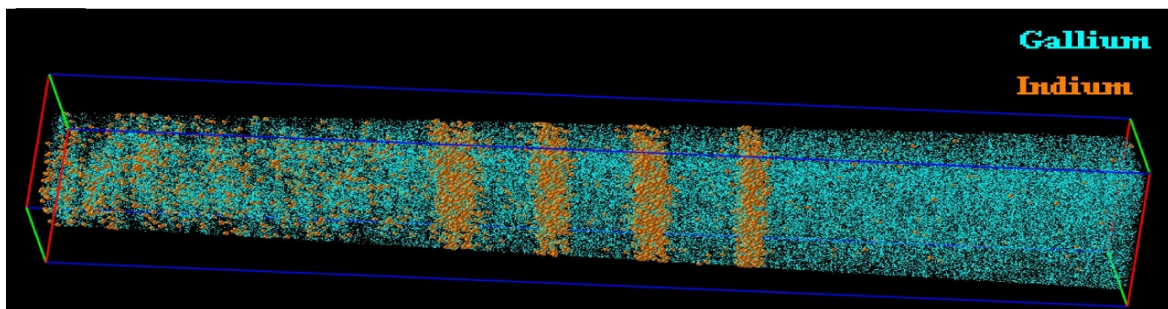


Fig. 2. Three-dimensional Atom Probe Field Ion Microscope (3DAP) image of InGaN/GaN multi-quantum wells. Each dot represents a single atom: light blue is gallium and orange is indium. Statistical analysis shows that the indium distribution is as expected in a random alloy.

Two independent direct imaging techniques, TEM and 3DAP, have therefore found no evidence for indium clustering in InGaN quantum wells. The 3DAP results indicate that the distribution of indium in the InGaN sample studied is that of a random alloy. Local compositional fluctuations statistically exist of course in a random alloy, but there is no atomic clustering.

7 Localisation Mechanisms

The evidence for exciton localisation on a nanometre scale in InGaN quantum wells is strong (see Section 2). This is consistent with InGaN quantum well structures emitting intense light with high quantum efficiency, despite having a high dislocation density. In this section we discuss possible mechanisms for the carrier localisation, having ruled out gross indium clustering.

7.1 Quantum Well Thickness Fluctuations

At low temperature, excitons are known to be localised in GaAs/AlGaAs quantum wells by well-width fluctuations. The localisation energy is typically only a few meV, and so localisation by this mechanism only occurs at low temperature in GaAs/AlGaAs [24]. However, the localising effects of well-width fluctuations are much greater in the InGaN/GaN quantum-well system, both because the InGaN is more highly strained and because the piezoelectric effect is much stronger than in GaAs/AlGaAs.

High-resolution electron micrographs show that in the InGaN/GaN quantum well system, the lower quantum well interface appears to be atomically abrupt, whereas the upper interface is atomically rough [2]. The in-plane extent of these well-width fluctuations is small, typically a few nm. The thickness variation is typically one monolayer ($= 0.259$ nm). Calculations show that for an InGaN/GaN quantum well system with an indium fraction of 0.25, and well widths of 3.3 nm and 3.3 nm + 1 monolayer, the quantum well bandgap for the $n = 1$ electron and hole confined states decreases by 58 meV. Since kT at room temperature is 25 meV, a monolayer change in quantum well thickness, consistent with electron micrographs, is sufficient to localise the carriers [2].

7.2 Indium-Localised Hole Wave Functions

Bellaiche et al [25] have suggested from theoretical calculations of cubic InGaN that even for a perfectly homogeneous InGaN material the carriers could be localised. The calculations predict localisation of the hole wavefunctions around indium in InGaN along randomly formed In-N-In chains. Hole localisation leads to exciton localisation because of the small effective Bohr radius of excitons in GaN ($= 3.4$ nm). Chichibu et al [26] have recently explained their positron annihilation results in InGaN in terms of such In-N-In chains. Unfortunately there is no theoretical calculation of the carrier localisation energy due to In-N-In chains in a random hexagonal InGaN alloy.

8 Thermodynamics of Strained InGaN

The thermodynamic calculations reported earlier [9] which predicted the decomposition of InGaN were for bulk material. However Karpov [27] has calculated the phase diagram for an InGaN layer epitaxially matched to a GaN layer, which puts the InGaN into biaxial compression. The effect of the strain is to stabilise the InGaN, and no decomposition is predicted for normal growth conditions.

Electron microscopy of the InGaN quantum wells we have studied in this paper reveals no misfit dislocations. We are aware that the measured critical thickness for the introduction of misfit dislocations depends on the resolution of the experimental technique used to detect the dislocations [28] and that electron microscopy, because of the limited volume of specimen sampled, may over-estimate the critical thickness. However, electron microscopy indicates that, at least locally, our InGaN quantum wells are fully strained, and this is confirmed by our X-ray diffraction measurements.

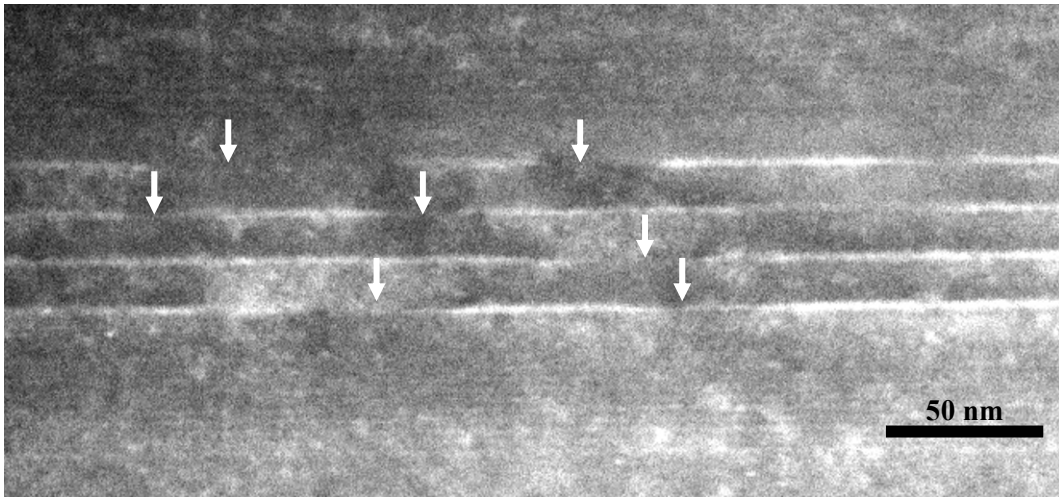


Fig 3: A cross-sectional STEM-HAADF image of a commercial green-emitting LED showing gross thickness variations (some of which are arrowed) in all four InGaN quantum wells.

Hence we would not expect indium-rich clusters to form in strained InGaN quantum wells, and this is precisely what our TEM and 3DAP results reveal.

9 Confinement in InGaN Quantum Wells with Gross Fluctuations in Width

We have shown above that dislocations do not quench the light emission from InGaN quantum wells because the excitons are localised on a nanometre scale. The localisation is due to quantum well thickness fluctuations on an atomic scale, the interface steps being a few nm in lateral extent, and may also be due to localisation of the hole wavefunction at randomly formed In-N-In chains in the homogeneous InGaN alloy. We will now consider an additional confinement mechanism, on a different length scale, in InGaN quantum wells with gross length scale fluctuations.

It has been known for some time that under certain conditions epilayers of various materials

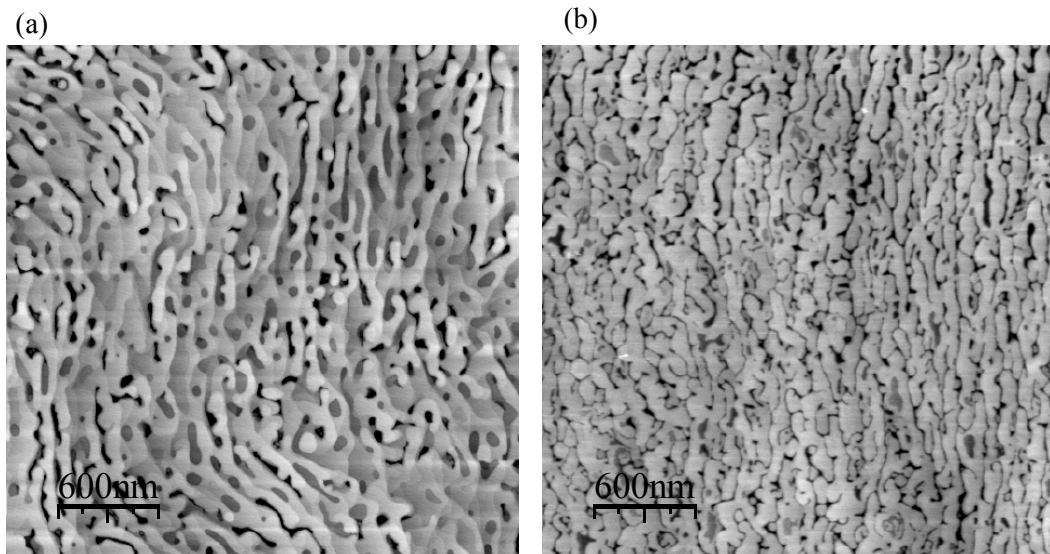


Fig. 4: AFM images of InGaN epilayers with gross thickness fluctuations showing the InGaN network structure of interlinking strips. (a) shows the network structure after the InGaN has been subjected to a temperature ramp, and (b) after it has been subjected to an anneal at the growth temperature.

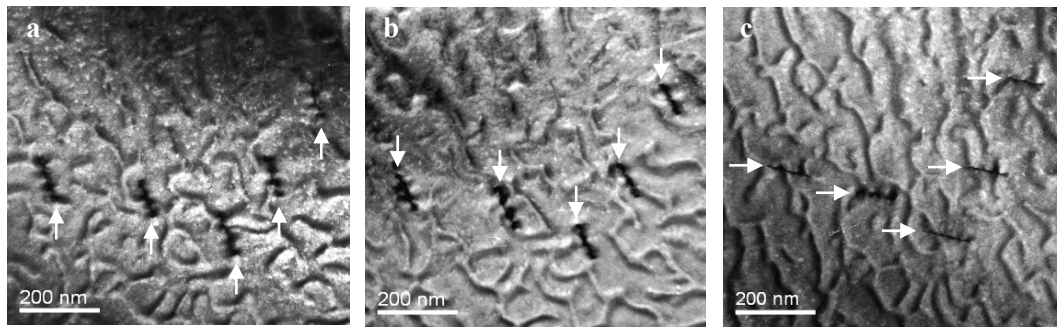


Fig. 5: Bright field plan-view TEM images of an annealed InGaN epilayer taken down different $\{1213\}$ zone axes (Fig. 5 a, b and c). All threading dislocations (edge, mixed and screw) are revealed in this orientation. From the different projections it can be determined that $90\pm 8\%$ of the threading dislocations terminate between the interlinking InGaN strips.

can exhibit gross fluctuations in thickness [29, 30]. Figure 3 shows a cross-sectional transmission electron micrograph of a bright commercial LED, showing gross thickness fluctuations in all four InGaN quantum wells. We have also grown InGaN quantum wells with similar gross thickness fluctuations [31, 32]. These fluctuations occur if the barrier material is grown at a higher temperature than the quantum well layer (two-temperature growth) or if the quantum well is annealed at its (lower) growth temperature prior to growth of the barrier at the same temperature.

The two-dimensional nature of the thickness fluctuations in the plane of the quantum wells is not very apparent in the electron micrograph of Fig. 3. Atomic force microscopy (AFM) has therefore been performed on an InGaN epilayer subject to a temperature ramp (Fig 4a) or an anneal (Fig 4b). In each case the layer-thickness fluctuations can be seen to take the form of interlinking strips of InGaN. EDX analysis in the TEM shows that indium is depleted at the edges of the strips, and between the strips there is no indium at all, only GaN. We have recorded bright field images of an annealed InGaN epilayer down three different $\{1213\}$ zone axes (Fig 5 a, b and c) since all threading dislocations are visible using this zone axis orientation [33]. The electron microscopy reveals that 90% of the threading dislocations terminate in the GaN regions between the InGaN strips [31] (Fig. 5). This physical separation of 90% of the dislocations from the light emitting InGaN strips prevents exciton recombination at these dislocations and hence may enhance light emission. Since the InGaN strips are typically about 50-100 nm across, this separation of the dislocations from the light-emitting InGaN strips is on a totally different length scale from the few nanometre-scale localisation of the excitons described earlier in this paper.

The quantum wells that exhibit this network structure emit very bright light, in some cases brighter than equivalent quantum wells of more uniform thickness. Hence the network structure provides an additional mechanism for confining the light emission away from the dislocations.

10 Conclusions

Low-dose TEM shows no evidence of gross indium clusters in InGaN quantum wells that emit bright light. 3DAP shows that InGaN is a homogeneous random alloy, consistent with TEM results and with thermodynamic calculations that take strain into account. Hence indium-rich clusters in InGaN are not necessary for bright light emission. Optical studies of InGaN show that the excitons are localised on a nanometre scale, which prevents them diffusing to dislocations which would quench the light emission. Excitons can be localised by atomic scale well-width fluctuations and by In atoms in In-N-In chains forming statistically in a homogeneous InGaN alloy. Calculated localisation energies at In atoms in In-N-In chains in hexagonal InGaN are not yet available. However, the localisation energy provided by a monolayer well-width fluctuation of an InGaN quantum well is about 60 meV, sufficient to localise excitons at room temperature. We therefore have a consistent story that in the InGaN/GaN quantum-well system, the InGaN is a

random alloy. Localisation of the excitons may be due to monolayer thickness variations of the quantum wells, which TEM suggests occur on a few nm in-plane length scale, consistent with the PL evidence of the in-plane localisation length of the excitons of a few nm. The 60 meV localisation energy strongly localises the excitons at room temperature. Additionally, excitons may be localised around randomly formed In-N-In chains in InGa_N, but the localisation energy for this in hexagonal InGa_N is not yet known.

Confinement on a different length scale, about 50-100 nm, has recently been observed in InGa_N quantum wells that have gross well-width fluctuations, produced by annealing or two-temperature growth. Such quantum wells consist of network structures in which the dislocations are separated from the InGa_N light-emitting regions. These structures emit very bright light, consistent with them containing an additional confinement mechanism. Hence in these network structures there may be exciton confinement on both a few nm and a 50 nm scale.

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Elastic Strain Distribution in GaN/AlN Quantum Dot Structures: Theory and Experiment

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Summary: We present a theory of strain distribution in GaN/AlN quantum dot (QD) structures and compare the results of calculations with experimentally measured strain maps from HRTEM images using geometrical phase analysis. We find that the AlN spacers situated between the wetting layers are almost fully relaxed. On the contrary, the AlN spacers located between the vertically correlated GaN QDs are found to be in a tensile strain state. This result demonstrates that the biaxial strain approximation is not valid for the case of a three-dimensional system like a QD.

1 Introduction

Nitride quantum dots (QDs) are of great interest because of their potential applications in optoelectronic devices, from the ultraviolet to the infrared energy range [1]. The piezoelectric polarization, whose magnitude is comparable to the spontaneous polarization, induces a significant blue-shift of the luminescence spectra of GaN/AlN QDs. Therefore, knowledge of the strain distribution in QDs is essential to understand their electronic structure and tune their emission wavelength for the desired application.

The aim of this paper is to study the strain tensor spatial variation in GaN/AlN quantum dots both theoretically and experimentally. We demonstrate a good qualitative and quantitative agreement between simulated and measured strain maps. Surprisingly, we found that thin foil effects can be neglected for strain calculations in our samples.

2 Theory

The calculation of the spatial strain distribution in a QD structure requires the solution of a 3D problem in elasticity theory. In this paper we employ a method we previously developed to calculate the strain tensor in a semiconductor structure containing QDs of arbitrary shape [2,3]. This method is based on a Green's function approach and allows nearly analytical solution of the problem. In particular, a simple analytical formula can be derived for the Fourier transform of the strain tensor in a hexagonal QD structure [2] in case when the elastic constants of the QD and matrix materials are assumed to be the same. Simple iterative procedure can be used to take account of the differences in elastic constants [2]. However, it should be noted that the differences in reported values of elastic constants in GaN and AlN are greater than the average values of the constants for each of the material [2,4]. Therefore taking account of the difference of the elastic constants would not improve the model in our case and also does not change the results noticeably.

To calculate the spatial strain tensor ε_{ij} we summed up the Fourier series:

$$\varepsilon_{ij}(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{(2\pi)^3}{d_1 d_2 d_3} \sum_{\mathbf{n}} \tilde{\varepsilon}_{ij}^s(\xi_{\mathbf{n}}) \exp(i \xi_{\mathbf{n}} \mathbf{r}) \quad (1)$$

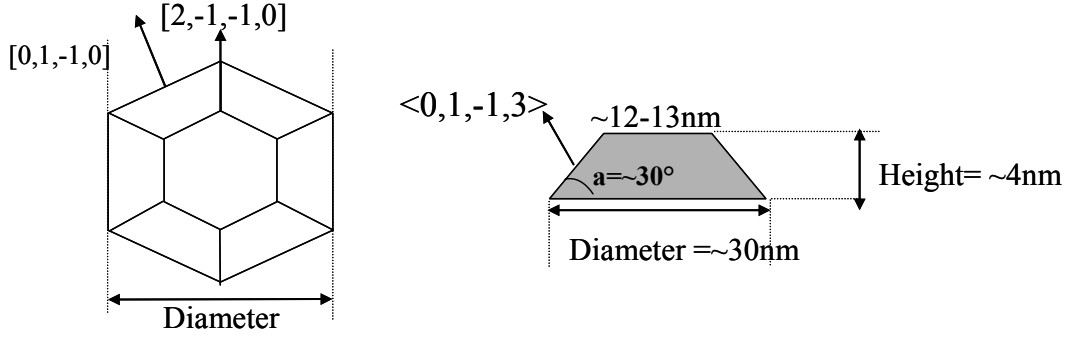


Fig. 1. Schematic top and side views of the GaN QDs studied in this paper showing dot shape and geometrical parameters.

where d_1, d_2, d_3 – are the periods of the QD array in x, y, z directions respectively, $\tilde{\varepsilon}_{ij}^s(\xi_n)$ is the Fourier transform of the strain tensor for a single QD [2]. The summation is taken over all possible values of the components of the vector $\xi_i = 2\pi n_i / d_i$, with the cut-off of $n_{1\max} = n_{2\max} = n_{3\max} = 150$ Fourier components for each direction. The periods of the QD array are taken from experiment and are equal to 54.6 nm in the lateral (x - y) direction and 10 nm in the vertical (z axis) direction. The results of the calculations are presented in Fig. 2.

3 Experiment and Results

The wurtzite GaN/AlN QD superlattice sample, that is studied in this paper, was grown by plasma-assisted molecular beam epitaxy (PAMBE) in a MECA2000 molecular beam epitaxy chamber equipped with standard effusion cells for Al and Ga. Active nitrogen was produced in a radio-

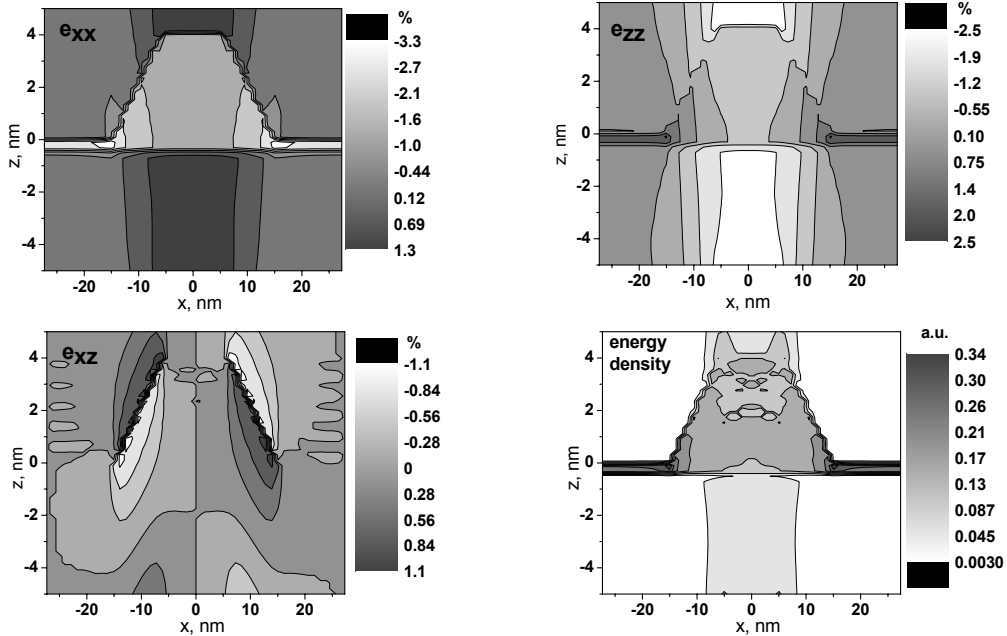


Fig. 2. Calculated spatial variation of the material strain tensor components ε_{xx} , ε_{zz} , ε_{xz} (measured in percent) and the elastic energy per unit volume (in a.u.) for the GaN QD structure with the parameters shown in Fig. 1.

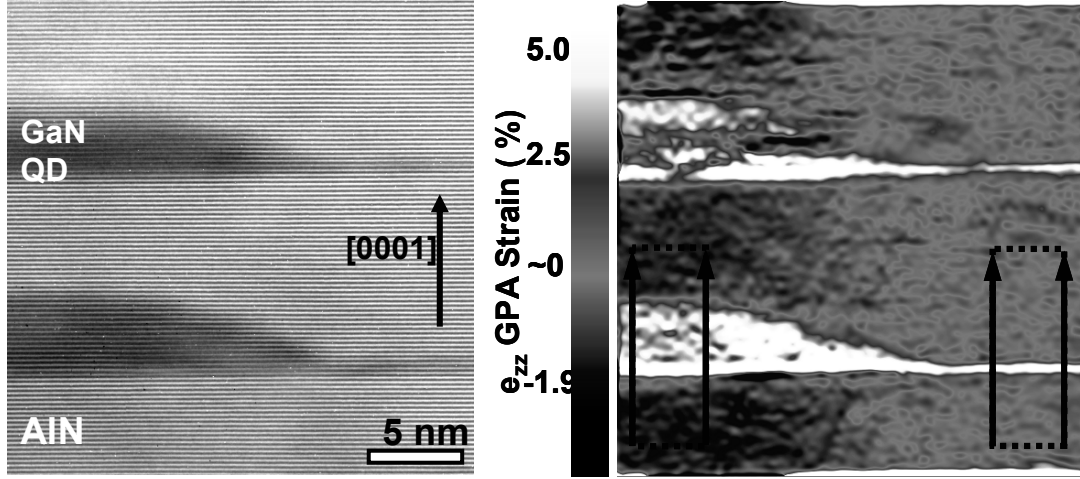


Fig. 3. Off-axis HRTEM image of two vertically aligned GaN QDs embedded inside an AlN matrix and corresponding experimental e_{zz} GPA strain map.

frequency plasma cell by dissociation of N_2 . The superlattice consists of 80 GaN QD layers embedded in an AlN matrix. The growth of GaN on AlN was performed under N-rich conditions, by depositing an amount of about 6 monolayers (ML) of GaN on ~ 10 nm of AlN matrix. Under these conditions, the growth starts layer-by-layer, leading to the formation of a 2 MLs GaN wetting layer (WL), followed rapidly by the formation of 3D islands by elastic relaxation (Stranski-Krastanow growth mode) [5]. A JEOL4000EX electron microscope was used for the HRTEM observations. TEM cross-section samples were prepared using the standard techniques of mechanical polishing and Ar⁺ ion milling. All HRTEM images were directly recorded by an on-line charge-coupled device (CCD) camera of (2048 x 2048) pixels. In order to measure and map the strain fields that are present in the sample, high-resolution images were analyzed by using the geometrical phase analysis method (GPA) [6]. This method has proven to be a powerful tool for extracting quantitative strain information from HRTEM images [6,7].

Before presenting the experimental and theoretical strain results, it is important to recall the definitions of strain used by the various methods. Strain results are expressed using two different strain tensors: the GPA strain and material strain; the latter is defined by Eq.(1). The GPA measures strain with respect to a reference area in the HRTEM image following the expressions:

$$e_{zz}^{GPA}(r) = \frac{c(r) - c^{ref}}{c^{ref}}, \quad e_{xx}^{GPA}(r) = \frac{a(r) - a^{ref}}{a^{ref}} \quad (2)$$

where $c(r)$ and $a(r)$ are the lattice parameters at the pixel r of the HRTEM image, and c^{ref} and a^{ref} are the values averaged on the reference region of the image. This definition of strain, called here “GPA strain,” is also known as GPA Lagrange strain [7]. In this work, we have chosen the AlN matrix situated between two WLs as the reference region. The material strain ε_{ij} can be easily obtained from GPA strain [4]. We summarise the results for measured and calculated strain values in Table I. We find that the AlN spacers situated between wetting layers are almost fully relaxed. On the contrary, the AlN spacers located between the vertically correlated GaN QDs (Figs. 3 and 4) are found to be in a tensile strain state. The GaN QDs are almost completely strained on the barriers in the a -direction while they are under a slight tensile strain in the c -direction. This result demonstrates that the biaxial strain approximation is not valid for the case of a three-dimensional system like a QD. Finally, all these results demonstrate that the mechanism responsible for the vertical correlation of GaN/AlN QDs is neither the presence of threading dislocations nor Ga-Al interdiffusion, but the local strain induced in the AlN matrix by the presence of the buried GaN QD layers.

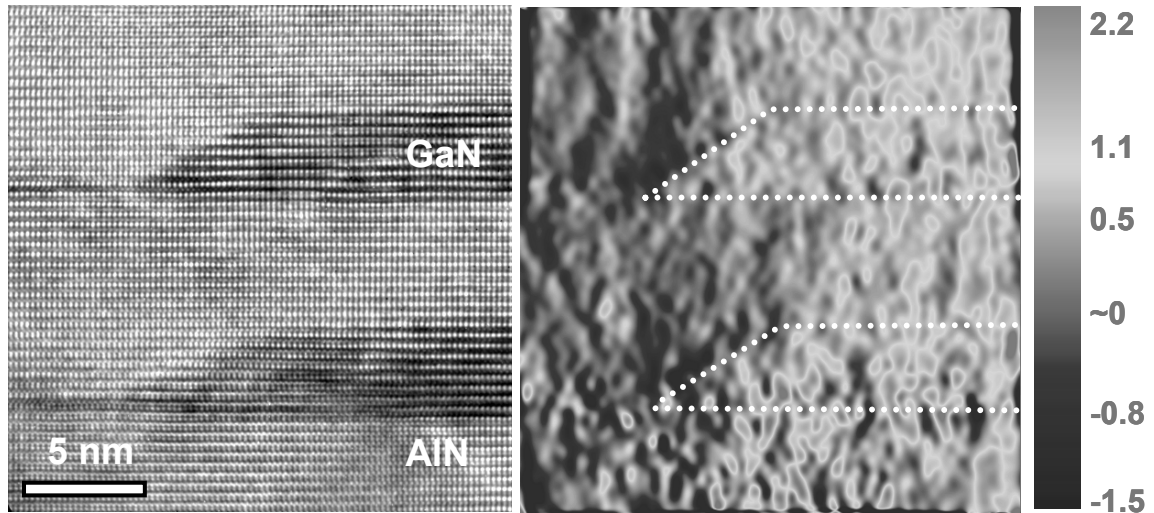


Fig. 4. High-resolution image of two GaN QDs of the superlattice taken along the $[2,-1,-1,0]$ direction and corresponding GPA strain map for the e_{xx} .

Table I. Experimental and calculated values of the GPA strain components in various region of the sample.

	e_{zz} , GPA strain, %		e_{xx} , GPA strain, %	
	exper. ($\pm 0.4\%$)	theory	exper. ($\pm 0.6\%$)	theory
AlN (WL)	≈ 0	≈ 0	(0)	(0)
AlN (between QDs)	-1.9	-1.92	0.9	1.00
GaN (WL)	5.1	5.54	(0)	-0.03
GaN (QDs)	2.7	3.31	0.9	1.18

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, using HRTEM measurements in combination with theoretical calculations, the strain distribution in a GaN/AlN QD SL has been investigated. The GaN WL roughly follows a biaxial deformation, which is not the case for the GaN in the QDs due to the compressive hydrostatic stress imposed by the AlN matrix. We have experimentally identified the mechanism responsible for the vertical correlation of GaN/AlN QDs, which is the local strain induced in the AlN matrix by the presence of dots.

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Concentration Evaluation in Nanometre-Sized $\text{In}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ Islands Using Transmission Electron Microscopy

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Summary: In this work the indium concentration of uncapped InGaN samples is measured by three different transmission electron microscopy approaches which are based on measurement of local lattice plane distances. In the case of three dimensional, nanometre-sized, uncapped InGaN islands, an increase of the indium concentration from the base of the islands toward their tip is observed. Additionally, an indication is presented that the local indium concentration in the islands is influenced by the vicinity of other islands.

1 Introduction

Semiconductor quantum structures with dimensions of only a few nanometres in one or more dimensions can be used in high quality optoelectronic devices. Especially quantum dots (QDs) in the active region of these devices can improve the optical properties and lead to a reduced and temperature independent threshold current density [1]. InGaN QDs are very promising for achievement of e.g. a QD laser emitting in the blue spectral range due to the direct band gap which can be adjusted between 3.508 eV (GaN [2]) and ~ 0.7 eV (InN [3–5]). Within this scope, the indium concentration x of $\text{In}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ is a crucial parameter influencing the wavelength of the emitted light. In this work, the indium concentration of free-standing, nanometre-sized InGaN islands is measured by different transmission electron microscopy (TEM) approaches.

2 Experimental

2.1 Sample Growth

All structures analysed for this work were grown by metal organic vapour phase epitaxy (MOVPE). The substrates consist of approximately 2 μm thick MOVPE grown GaN, deposited on (0001) sapphire. On top of the GaN, a 200 nm to 300 nm thick GaN buffer layer was grown at 1030°C. A subsequent growth interruption of approximately five minutes was used to adjust to the lower growth temperature of InGaN of only 600°C. The indium to group three flux ratio was 0.736 for sample C2 and 0.582 for the samples C3a and C3b. The InGaN deposition time t_{InGaN} was varied between 22 s (C2), 17 s (C3a) and 52 s (C3b). With these growth conditions, smooth two dimensional InGaN layers or free-standing InGaN islands with dimensions of a few nanometres were obtained, depending on the InGaN growth duration.

2.2 TEM Analyses

For derivation of the local indium concentration x in the $\text{In}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ structures three different methods were employed, which are based on measurement of lattice plane distances by TEM.

An easy to use and established method to derive the local concentration in $\text{In}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}/\text{GaN}$ heterostructures is the evaluation of 0002 fringe images using strain state analysis. Using Vegard's rule [6] and linear elasticity theory, x can be derived from measured fringe distances of high resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) images. Nevertheless, the measured hkl