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Citation for published version (APA):

DOI:
10.1063/1.113606

Document status and date:
Published: 01/01/1995

Document Version:
Publisher’s PDF, also known as Version of Record (includes final page, issue and volume numbers)

Please check the document version of this publication:
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X-ray reciprocal space mapping of GaAs/AlAs quantum wires and quantum dots

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(Received 5 July 1994; accepted for publication 7 December 1994)

Periodic arrays of 150 and 175 nm-wide GaAs–AlAs quantum wires and quantum dots were investigated, fabricated by electron beam lithography, and SiCl₄/O₂ reactive ion etching, by means of reciprocal space mapping using triple axis x-ray diffractometry. From the x-ray data the lateral periodicity of wires and dots, and the etch depth are extracted. The reciprocal space maps reveal that after the fabrication process the lattice constant along the growth direction slightly increases for the wires and even more so for the dots. © 1995 American Institute of Physics.

In the last few years, considerable progress has been made in the field of semiconductor quantum wires and quantum dots.¹⁻³ Quantum confinement effects have been observed in wires and dots with a size up to about 2000 Å.¹,² High resolution x-ray diffractometry provides a promising method for structural investigations of periodic arrays of semiconductor surface corrugations,⁴⁻⁷ quantum wires,⁸,⁹ and quantum boxes.⁹,¹⁰ It is nondestructive, averaging over a large area of the sample, and requires no sample pretreatment. Moreover, it is mainly sensitive to the crystalline part of the sample surface and 2θ (between incident and scattered x rays) provides the possibility of reciprocal space mapping.

In this letter we report on reciprocal space maps of the diffraction pattern of reactive ion etched 150 and 175 nm wide GaAs/AlAs periodic quantum wires and quantum dots. A Philips MRD diffractometer with an angular resolution of 12 arcsec was used. Its analyzer crystal, placed in between the sample and the detector (“triple axis diffractometry”—TAD),¹¹ reduces significantly the extension of the reciprocal space probe. The independent variation of the two diffraction angles ω (between incident x rays and sample surface) and 2θ (between incident and scattered x rays) provides the possibility of reciprocal space mapping.

The lateral macroperiodicity of the wire and dot arrays gives rise to additional intensity maxima (wire satellites Wᵢ and dot satellites Dᵢ) in the diffraction pattern. In principle, the full information about the geometrical shape (height, width, inclination of the sidewalls, period) as well as about the structural quality (strain and crystalline damage) can be obtained from a two-dimensional map of reciprocal space.⁷

The GaAs/AlAs wires and dots were realized by nanostucturing a 30 period AlAs–GaAs multiquantum well (MQW) grown on a 1 μm GaAs buffer. The nominally 8 nm thick GaAs wells are separated by nominally 12 nm AlAs barriers resulting in a total thickness of 600 nm. The MQW was capped by a 20 nm GaAs layer. Beneath the GaAs buffer 25 periods of a 5 ML/5 ML short period AlAs–GaAs SL with a total thickness of approximately 75 nm was grown on the GaAs substrate with a 80 nm GaAs buffer. The samples investigated were prepared by electron beam lithography (EBL) with a Leica Cambridge EBPG5-HR electron beam pattern generator and subsequent magnetically confined plasma reactive ion etching (MCP-RIE)¹² using SiCl₄ with a flow rate of 13.5 sccm and O₂ with 1.5 sccm (which is incorporated to ensure the verticality of the nanostructures) at an operating pressure of 0.5 mTorr. The microwave power was 54 W, the rf power 35 W and the resulting dc bias was −230 V. The etching depth was nominally between 600 and 700 nm. The period was nominally 300 and 350 nm and the width of the wires and dots was half the period length. SEM micrographs of the periodical wire and dot arrays revealed vertical, i.e., [110] oriented, sidewalls, and an etching depth of approximately 760 nm. This implies that the GaAs buffer was partly etched. During the etching process the 12 nm Ti/20 nm Au mask was partly attacked. The consequence was a damage of the uppermost part of the dots and wires.

Figure 1(a) shows a reciprocal space map around the (004) reciprocal lattice point (RELP) of an unstructured (as-grown) GaAs/AlAs-reference sample. “S” denotes the GaAs-substrate peak, SL₀ and SL₁ the zero and first-order MQW peak, respectively. “A” is a symbol for an artifact, the
The total etch depth extends through the entire MQW structure, larger than that of the actual GaAs/AlAs dot fringes. Thus, the wires were fixed in all three dimensions of space whereas the dots are (224) RELP was measured by double crystal diffractometry (DCD) using a diaphragm of 0.1 mm width in front of the detector. The dot period determined from the $D_i$ satellite spacing is 310 nm which coincides quite well with the nominal lateral periodicity of 300 nm.

An important feature is the observation of the shifts of both the zero order wire and dot peak with respect to the reference SL$_0$ peak along the [001] growth direction. These shifts toward the center (000) of reciprocal space can only result from a larger mean lattice constant $a^n_{MQW}$ in the wires and dots along [001] direction compared to that in the unpatterned GaAs/AlAs MQW reference sample. An anticipated elastic relaxation in strained MQW layers after fabrication, the distortion would be orthorhombic in the case of [110] oriented wires on a [001] substrate, would have the opposite effect. In a pseudomorphic layer structure grown on a GaAs ($a_{GaAs}=5.6537$ Å) substrate, the GaAs layers of the sample are not strained at all and the AlAs ($a_{AlAs}=5.6629$ Å) layers are subjected to a small biaxial compression because of the lattice mismatch of 0.162%. When wires or dots are fabricated by deep etching, this strain is expected to be redistributed among the layers of the etched part of the sample, leading to a reduction of the biaxial compressive strain in the AlAs layers and the occurrence of a biaxial tensile strain in the GaAs quantum wells. A reduction of $a^n_{MQW}$ within the dots would be the consequence of elastic relaxation. However, from Figs. 1 and 2 follows, that on the contrary, the nanostructured MQW is even more strained in the growth direction ($q_z$ direction). The shift of the zero order wire satellite with respect to the SL$_0$ peak of the unstructured MQW $\Delta_{D}$ [see Fig. 1(b)] is about 136 arcsec, the shift of the zero order dot satellite $D_0$ [see Fig. 2(b)] is even larger: $\Delta_{D}=230$ arcsec. This corresponds to an enlargement of the average MQW-lattice constant $a^n_{MQW}$ from 5.663 Å in the reference sample to 5.669 Å in the wires (the extra average strain in the growth direction $\Delta a/a$ equals $1.1 \times 10^{-3}$), and to 5.673 Å in the dots ($\Delta a/a=1.8 \times 10^{-3}$). The origin of this increase of $a^n_{MQW}$ does not follow from the x-ray analysis. However, in SEM investigations on similar dots with even thicker AlAs barriers (approximately 70 nm), which have been exposed to air for about 30 min after etching, a visible oxidation of the AlAs layers was observed. Therefore it is most probable that the oxidized AlAs layers on the sidewalls splay the quantum wires and dots mainly along theMQW growth direction. In any case, the dots are affected stronger than the wires because they can expand or contract in all three dimensions of space whereas the wires are fixed along the direction of the corrugations by the buffer. Furthermore, the exposed surface area is larger for the dots than for the wires. This idea is confirmed by the inset of Fig. 2(b), where the extra average strain in growth direction $\Delta a/a$ of all investigated wire and dot samples is plotted against the ratio of surface area and volume $S/V$ of the nanostructures (the line is a guide to the eye). The dots are of cylindrical shape (radius $r$, height $h$), so the surface area of their sidewalls is $2\pi rh$ and their volume is $\pi r^2h$ leading to $S/V=2/\pi r$. The wires are approximated by rectangular blocks (width $w$, length $l$, height $h$), which have a sidewall surface area of $S=lh+wh+lh$ since $w$~150–175 nm is much smaller than
the length $l \approx 100 \mu m$. Consequently $S/V$ equals $1/w$ for the wires. From the inset, it can be seen that the extra average strain $\Delta a/a$ is proportional to $S/V$ in the first approximation. In a previous photoreflectance work of deep etched GaAs/AlGaAs quantum dots, evidence was seen of an increasing strain in the quantum wells along the growth axis with decreasing dot size,\textsuperscript{3} consistent with the present observation of an enlarged $a_{MQW}^\text{MQW}$.

In conclusion, x-ray reciprocal space mapping is particularly useful for the characterization of periodical one- and zero-dimensional systems. The period and the etching depth can be deduced. Furthermore it could be clearly demonstrated that with this method small changes of the strain status in multilayer samples caused by the nanofabrication process itself can be detected. Moreover, information on the crystalline quality of the fabricated lateral structures was obtained.

Note added in proof. Recently, Vaclav Holy has shown that the in-plane lattice constant of periodic arrays of quantum wires or dots is not necessarily determined by the position of the diffraction satellites in asymmetric reciprocal space maps [like (224)].

Work supported by BMfWuF (Project No. GZ 601.540/ 1-26/92), by GME (Project No. P VI/94) and by the UK EPSRC (Grant No. ER/J90718). One of us (C.M.S.T.) is a Royal Society of Edinburgh Research Fellow.


