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Induced magnetic moment of Eu$^{3+}$ ions in GaN

V. Kachkanov$^1$, M. J. Wallace$^2$, G. van der Laan$^1$, S. S. Dhesi$^1$, S. A. Cavill$^1$, Y. Fujiwara$^3$ & K. P. O’Donnell$^2$

$^1$Diamond Light Source, Chilton, Didcot, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom, OX11 0DE, UK, $^2$Department of Physics, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom, G4 0NG, Scotland, UK, $^3$Division of Materials and Manufacturing Science, Graduate School of Engineering, Osaka University, 2-1 Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan.

Magnetic semiconductors with coupled magnetic and electronic properties are of high technological and fundamental importance. Rare-earth elements can be used to introduce magnetic moments associated with the uncompensated spin of 4f-electrons into the semiconductor hosts. The luminescence produced by rare-earth doped semiconductors also attracts considerable interest due to the possibility of electrical excitation of characteristic sharp emission lines from intra 4f-shell transitions. Recently, electroluminescence of Eu-doped GaN in current-injection mode was demonstrated in p-n junction diode structures grown by organometallic vapour phase epitaxy. Unlike most other trivalent rare-earth ions, Eu$^{3+}$ ions possess no magnetic moment in the ground state. Here we report the detection of an induced magnetic moment of Eu$^{3+}$ ions in GaN which is associated with the $^7F_2$ final state of $^3D_0 \rightarrow ^7F_2$ optical transitions emitting at 622 nm. The prospect of controlling magnetic moments electrically or optically will lead to the development of novel magneto-optic devices.

GaN and related (In,Al,Ga)N alloys have become technologically important materials over the past fifteen years due to their unique physical properties, which include a wide direct bandgap, remarkable mechanical strength and high melting temperature. Commercial use of nitrides spans a broad field from optoelectronics to microwave technology. Besides being super-efficient light emitters on their own account, nitride semiconductors also prove to be promising hosts for visible- and infrared-emitting trivalent rare-earth (RE$^{3+}$) ions$^1$. The luminescence of RE$^{3+}$ ions is an attractive source of emission which is relatively independent of the ambient temperature and host material$^1$. The use of semiconductors as hosts for RE ions has attracted much interest recently for the potential integration of RE emission with existing semiconductor devices. The discovery by Favennec et al.$^4$ that wide bandgap hosts reduce the temperature quenching of RE luminescence led to a widespread interest in doping of III-nitride semiconductors with RE$^{3+}$ ions. More recently, attempts to exploit another property of the 4f-shell, namely the uncompensated spin of electrons, in order to produce dilute magnetic semiconductor, have been reported$^5$.

Doping GaN with Eu is particularly attractive for the realization of red light-emitting devices$^6$ due to problems related to the growth of InGaN with the moderately high InN fractions, required to produce intrinsic red emission from this alloy$^7$. The first Eu-doped GaN electroluminescent devices, operating at a bias of $\sim$50 V, were reported by Heikenfeld et al.$^8$. Recently, the first current-injection light emitting diode (LED), operating at voltages as low as 3 V, was realised by one of the present authors$^9$. Stimulated emission from Eu-doped GaN has also been reported$^{10}$.

Interestingly, the observation of a ferromagnetic phase in Eu-doped GaN epilayers was first reported nearly a decade ago$^{11}$. The presence of the ferromagnetism was attributed to the coexistence of magnetic Eu$^{3+}$ species along with EuGaN since Eu$^{3+}$ is non-magnetic. Hite et al.$^{12}$ reconfirmed the existence of a ferromagnetic response from Eu-doped GaN. However, no second phase formation was observed in the samples$^{13}$ and it was pointed out that no Eu phases are ferromagnetic at room temperature; the secondary phases considered include EuGa, EuGa$_{2}$, Eu$_2$Ga$_{2}$, Eu$_2$Ga$_{3}$, Eu$_2$Ga$_{4}$, Eu$_2$Ga$_{5}$, metallic Eu, EuN, EuO, Eu$_2$O$_3$ and Eu$_2$O$_5$. On the other hand, two of the present authors recently reported the Zeeman splitting of emission lines at $\sim$622 nm assigned to the $^3D_0 \rightarrow ^7F_2$ transition of Eu$^{3+}$ centres in GaN with the magnetic field applied along the c-axis$^{14}$. The observed Zeeman splittings, with g-factors $\sim$2, were suggested to be associated with the magnetic moment of the final $^7F_2$ state of the $^3D_0 \rightarrow ^7F_2$ transition, since the $^7F_2$ ground state and $^3D_0$ excited state of Eu$^{3+}$ ions do not have any associated magnetic moments.

In this work we report the detection of the induced magnetic moment associated with the $^7F_2$ state of Eu$^{3+}$ ions which is involved in optical emission. We used X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD), which is the difference between the X-ray absorption spectra (XAS) for left- and right-circularly polarized X-rays. XMCD
probes the magnetic moments of the states involved in the element-specific X-ray absorption process utilizing the helicity of the circularly polarized photons parallel and antiparallel to the sample magnetization direction\(^3\). To measure the induced magnetic moment of Eu\(^{3+}\) ions, the bright red Eu-related luminescence (with photon energy \(\sim 2\) eV) emitted following X-ray excitation, referred to as X-ray excited optical luminescence (XEOL), was monitored with the X-ray energy scanned across the Eu\(^{3+}\) absorption edges \((3d_{5/2,5/2}^0\rightarrow 4f^1\) transitions). Conventional XMCD measurements were also taken, by detecting secondary X-ray fluorescence (XRF) and the drain current caused by Auger and secondary electrons, commonly referred to as total electron yield (TEY) detection.

**Results**

**Sample structure and cathodoluminescence spectroscopy.** The sample studied was GaN doped with Eu in-situ during growth by organometallic vapor phase epitaxy (OMVPE)\(^4\). The thickness of the doped layer was 400 nm. The concentration of Eu, estimated by Rutherford backscattering spectrometry (RBS), was 0.11 at\% corresponding to \(9.6\times10^{19}\) cm\(^{-3}\). Fig. 1 shows the cathodoluminescence (CL) spectrum of the sample at room temperature. Several emission lines are observed, identified as \(^5D_{1}\rightarrow^7F_{1}\), \(^5D_{3}\rightarrow^7F_{3}\), \(^5D_{0}\rightarrow^7F_{2}\) and \(^5D_{0}\rightarrow^7F_{3}\) intra-4f shell transitions at \(\sim 543\) nm, 600 nm, 622 nm and 663 nm, respectively, according to the Dieke diagram\(^5\). Energy states for RE\(^{3+}\) ions are labelled following the Russell-Saunders scheme\(^6\) as \(^{2S+1}L_{J}\), in which \(S\) is the total spin angular momentum, \(L\) is the total orbital angular momentum and \(J = L+S\) is the total angular momentum. The total momenta \(S\) and \(L\) are vectorial sums of individual electron spins and orbital moments, respectively. For energy levels with \(J = 0\), the orbital moment compensates the spin moment, so that Eu\(^{3+}\) has no magnetic moment in the \(^7F_0\) ground state. The ‘hypersensitive’ emission line at 622 nm is for the brightest transition. Note that GaN band edge emission in the 350–400 nm spectral region is not observed: it is very much weaker than Eu\(^{3+}\) emission which dominates the entire CL spectrum of GaN:Eu.

**X-ray magnetic circular dichroism.** Fig. 2 shows the XMCD and corresponding XAS recorded by TEY and XEOL. Due to the extremely low Eu concentration the XAS are dominated by the \(L_{2,3}\) absorption from Ga atoms. The XMCD feature corresponding to the \(M_s\) absorption peak due to the \(3d_{5/2}\rightarrow 4f^1\) transition appears at 1128.3 eV and 1129.8 eV in TEY and XEOL, respectively. When the magnetic field is reversed the XMCD features in both TEY and XEOL have opposite signs for the same energy positions as expected, thereby confirming the reliability of the observation. Note that the difference in energy of the XMCD peaks for TEY and XEOL is 1.5 eV. The \(M_s\) absorption peak corresponding to the \(3d_{5/2}\rightarrow 4f^1\) transition is present in TEY at \(\sim 1157\) eV and not resolved in XEOL. No XMCD features were observed using secondary XRF detection.

The experimentally observed difference in the XMCD peak positions for TEY and XEOL can be explained by taking into account the depth sensitivity and underlying physics of each detection method. TEY is a surface sensitive, where the signal probes the sample surface with an attenuation length of \(\sim 5\) nm. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, with an even smaller probing depth, indicates that Eu\(^{3+}\) undergoes a valence-state transition into Eu\(^{2+}\) near the surface of GaN\(^7\). The presence of a 10 nm thick GaN cap in the sample should therefore reduce the bulk TEY signal by 86%; it is also possible that Eu ions diffuse through the GaN cap. In any case, the XMCD measured by TEY clearly indicates the presence of Eu\(^{3+}\) ions at the surface of GaN.

On the other hand, visible photons emitted by Eu\(^{3+}\) are collected from the entire depth of the epilayer. Since the visible luminescence of the sample is dominated by the emission line at 622 nm due to \(3D_0\rightarrow^7F_{2}\) intra-4f shell transitions with a magnetic final state, the XMCD spectrum measured by XEOL detection uniquely probes the induced magnetic moment of the excited \(^7F_2\) state of Eu\(^{3+}\) ions in the bulk of the epilayer. The description of the processes underlying the X-ray absorption of XMCD is as follows:

1) X-rays generate Eu\(^{3+}\) XEOL by direct excitation following the absorption of an X-ray photon by an atomic level and indirectly through the generation of electron-hole pairs.
2) The \(^7F_2\) final state of the \(3D_0\rightarrow^7F_{2}\) transition is populated for \(\sim 150\) µs after the excitation\(^8\), long enough for the next (probing) X-ray photon to arrive.
3) The X-ray energy is scanned across the Eu \(M_{4,5}\) edges and any resulting change in the Eu\(^{3+}\) luminescence is monitored.
Note that in our experiment the X-ray beam is used both as a pump and as a probe. Interestingly, XEOL detection of X-ray absorption spectra was used successfully by Sham et al.\textsuperscript{21} to explore the origin of luminescence in porous silicon.

The absence of an XMCD signal in XRF can be explained by the fact that the X-ray photon flux incident on the sample (\( \sim 10^{12} \) photons per second) may not be sufficient to populate the \( \text{^7F}_2 \) states to an adequate detection level, or by the fact that not all Eu\textsuperscript{3+} ions are involved in the process of light emission\textsuperscript{17} whereas all Eu\textsuperscript{3+} ions are expected to emit secondary X-ray fluorescence photons. This is to say that the emission of the visible photons following X-ray absorption is intrinsically a more complex process than the emission of X-ray fluorescence photons. Due to the absence of information about the relaxation from higher to lower states of the \( \text{^7F}_J \) manifold, however, it is difficult to judge what the primary cause may be.

**Atomic multiplet calculations.** Theoretical XAS and XMCD spectra for the \( M_{4,5} \) absorption of trivalent and divalent Eu ions were calculated using atomic multiplet theory\textsuperscript{22}. Spectra for Eu\textsuperscript{3+} \( ^6S_2 \) as well as Eu\textsuperscript{2+} \( ^7F_0 \) and \( ^7F_2 \) are shown in Fig. 3. In the calculation the XMCD peak for \( ^7F_2 \) is shifted by 2.2 eV towards higher energy compared to that for the Eu\textsuperscript{3+} \( ^6S_2 \) state. This energy shift is reproduced very well in the experimentally observed positions of the XEOL and TEY peaks.

**X-ray absorption near edge structure.** In order to check for the presence of Eu\textsuperscript{2+} in the bulk of the epilayer, the X-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) of the Eu \( L_3 \) absorption edge at 6977 eV\textsuperscript{23} was measured using \( L_{2,3} \) secondary X-ray fluorescence detection at 5845.7 eV. XANES is a sensitive tool for the determination of the valence states of a particular element in a sample by analyzing the shape and position of the resonance peak, or so called white line\textsuperscript{24–27}. In the case of Eu\textsuperscript{3+} and Eu\textsuperscript{2+} the resonance is due to 2p\textsuperscript{3/2}R\textsuperscript{5}d electronic transitions. The Eu\textsuperscript{3+} and Eu\textsuperscript{2+} valence states can be easily distinguished by the energy position of their white lines. If both Eu\textsuperscript{3+} and Eu\textsuperscript{2+} are present, XANES typically displays two peaks with the stronger one belonging to the dominant oxidation state. The white line for Eu\textsuperscript{2+} species is 7–8 eV lower in energy than that of the Eu\textsuperscript{3+} species\textsuperscript{24–27}. The shift in the white line energy position is primarily due to a lower binding energy of the core electrons in Eu\textsuperscript{2+} through shielding of the nucleus by the additional 4f electron. Generally, the tabulated value of Eu \( L_3 \) X-ray absorption edge energy position of 6977 eV\textsuperscript{22} separates the white lines for Eu\textsuperscript{3+} and Eu\textsuperscript{2+} valence states\textsuperscript{24–27}. Fig. 4 shows the analysis of the XANES spectrum for the sample studied. The white line is located at 6980.3 eV with no other peak resolved below 6977 eV. This is a clear indication that no Eu\textsuperscript{2+} is present in the bulk of the epilayer within the sensitivity of XANES measurements. Note that our sample is very dilute with a peak concentration of \( \sim 9.6 \times 10^{19} \) cm\textsuperscript{-3} corresponding to an average distance between the Eu\textsuperscript{3+} ions of \( \sim 2 \) nm.

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**Figure 2 | X-ray absorption and X-ray magnetic circular dichroism.** XAS and XMCD spectra measured by detecting the total electron yield and X-ray excited optical luminescence at \( T = 1.5 \) K. The vertical dashed lines with arrows indicate the shift of the XMCD peak in TEY and XEOL. The XAS is dominated by the Ga \( L_{2,3} \) absorption edges. Spectra are offset vertically for clarity.
late whether the magnetic moments of the optically or electrically in an LED structure. It is interesting to speculate on the features of Eu.

Discussion

We report here for the first time the detection of an induced magnetic moment of Eu" ions in the F3 state, which is associated with the 7D0→F3 intra-4f shell optical emission line at 622 nm. The unique features of Eu" ions are the non-magnetic F0 ground state and magnetic F1,2,3 states, as displayed in Fig. 1, which can be populated optically or electrically in an LED structure. It is interesting to speculate whether the magnetic moments of the F1 manifold can play a role in the reported room temperature ferromagnetism of Eu-doped GaN. For instance, the F1 state is ~70 meV above the F0 ground state, so that at room temperature, according to Boltzmann statistics, ~7% of the Eu" ions will be in the F1 state. The sample studied showed ferromagnetic response measured by Superconducting Quantum Interference Device (SQUID) magnetometry, however, the interpretation of this observation and its relation to the optically induced magnetic moment is a matter of future investigations. Another unique property of Eu" is its non-magnetic D0 excited state. Apart from inducing a magnetic moment by forcing the Eu" ion to emit a photon, one can switch off the induced magnetic moment by shining light with an energy specific to the transitions from the F1 manifold to the D0 state to which GaN is transparent. This opens up a very interesting prospective for electrical or optical manipulations22 with the excited-state magnetic moments of Eu" in GaN, which is not feasible with Gd for example since the magnetic moment of Gd cannot be easily switched off. The well-established processing technology for nitride semiconductors should certainly facilitate potential applications of Eu-doped GaN in novel magnetooptoelectronic devices.

Methods

Organometallic vapor phase epitaxy. The growth procedure is described in Ref. 16. Eu-doped GaN layers were grown on a sapphire substrate by OMVPE in Taiyo Nippon Sanso SR-2000 system. Trimethylgallium (TMGa) and ammonia (NH3) were used as precursors. Tris(dipivaloylmethanato)europium referred to as Eu(DPM) was used as a Eu source. The Eu(DPM) source temperature was set at ~135 °C, while keeping the dopant line temperature at ~145 °C to prevent vapor condensation during transport. The growth process consisted of the following steps. First, a 20 nm thick GaN buffer layer was deposited on (0001) sapphire substrate. Then a 4 µm thick undoped GaN layer was grown followed by the deposition of 400 nm thick Eu-doped GaN layer. The pressure in the reactor was 10 kPa. The TMGa and NH3 flow rate were fixed at 25.3 μmol/min and 8.1 mmol/min respectively. The III/V ratio flow rate was 320. The growth temperature for the sample was 1000 °C. Finally, a 10 nm thick GaN cap layer was grown.

Cathodoluminescence spectroscopy. Experiments were carried out using a modified Cameca SX100 electron probe micro-analyser (EPMA). A built-in optical microscope, coaxial and confocal with the electron beam, allows optical monitoring of the sample during measurements. Oriel 0.125 m spectrophotometer with chargeable gratings and a cooled silicon 1024×256 CCD array were inserted in the light path of the optical microscope in order to acquire room temperature CL spectra. A 400 lines/mm diffraction grating was used in the spectrophotometer. The overall spectral resolution of the system was 0.5 nm.

X-ray magnetic dichroism measurements. XMCD spectra were measured on beamline I06 at Diamond Light Source, UK. Circularly polarized X-rays were produced by an APPLE II undulator operating in third harmonic. Polarization rate was close to 80%. The beamline operated at its highest possible X-ray photon flux of 1012 photons/sec into a spot size of 200 µm (horizontal) by 20 µm (vertical). XMCD spectra were recorded at 1.5 K in a 6 T superconducting magnet using total electron yield and X-ray fluorescence yield detection. X-ray excited optical luminescence was
Atomic multiplet theory. The wave functions of the initial- and final-state configurations for the excitation $4f^{n} \rightarrow 3d^{m}f^{n-1}$ were calculated in intermediate coupling using Cowan’s atomic Hartree-Fock (HF) code with relativistic correction. The HF values of the Slater parameters were reduced to 80% to account for screening effects, as was previously found to be the optimal value for the rare-earths $M_{4,5}$ X-ray absorption spectra. Since such an 80% scaling has become standard for rare earths, there are essentially no free parameters in the calculation.

Author contributions

Additional information
Competing financial interests: The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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