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Indium-Silicon Co-Doping of High-Aluminum-Content AlGaIn for Solar Blind Photodetectors

V. Adivarahan

Grigory Simin

University of South Carolina - Columbia, simin@engr.sc.edu

G. Tamulaitis

R. Srinivasan

J. Yang

See next page for additional authors

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Author(s)

V. Adivarahan, Grigory Simin, G. Tamulaitis, R. Srinivasan, J. Yang, M. Asif Khan, M. S. Shur, and R. Gaska

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Indium–silicon co-doping of high-aluminum-content AlGa_N for solar blind photodetectors

V. Adivarahan,^{a)} G. Simin,^{b)} G. Tamulaitis, R. Srinivasan, J. Yang, and M. Asif Khan
Department of Electrical Engineering, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29028

M. S. Shur and R. Gaska

Sensor Electronic Technology, Incorporated, 21 Cavalier Way, Latham, New York 12110

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We report on an indium–silicon co-doping approach for high-Al-content AlGa_N layers. Using this approach, very smooth crack-free *n*-type AlGa_N films as thick as 0.5 μm with Al mole fraction up to 40% were grown over sapphire substrates. The maximum electron concentration in the layers, as determined by Hall measurements, was as high as $8 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and the Hall mobility was up to 40 cm²/Vs. We used this doping technique to demonstrate solar-blind transparent Schottky barrier photodetectors with the cut-off wavelength of 278 nm. © 2001 American Institute of Physics. [DOI: 10.1063/1.1402159]

Due to their direct band gap Al_xGa_{1-x}N layers with $x \geq 0.4$ exhibit a sharp transmission cutoff at $\lambda < 280 \text{ nm}$, thereby offering unique opportunities for the development of intrinsic solar-blind photodetectors for space communications, missile detection, and flame and heat sensing. In past, several groups¹⁻³ have reported on AlGa_N based photoconductive and photovoltaic detectors. The reported photoconductive devices had a large gain but their response times were in excess of several minutes, making them unsuitable for such applications. Since these devices can not operate at zero bias they also have an extra noise coming from the dark current. Recently, AlGa_N *p-i-n* photodiodes were reported.^{4,5-7} The *p-i-n* device geometry for solar-blind AlGa_N detectors has several shortcomings. First, *p*-type doping of AlGa_N layers with a high-Al content remains a difficult problem.⁵ The resistance of ohmic contacts to *p*-type AlGa_N layers is quite high. This resistance can be avoided by using *p* Ga_N and or both *p* Ga_N and *n* Ga_N as the contact layers^{4,6,7} with *i* Al_xGa_{1-x}N ($x > 0.4$) as the active layer. However, the contact Ga_N layers absorb a significant fraction of the optical beam thereby reducing the device responsivity and deteriorating UV/visible selectivity. Further, to avoid cracking, the *i* AlGa_N active layer thickness has to be restricted to the values well below 2000 Å.

A metal–semiconductor–metal (MSM) design⁸ does not require ohmic contacts. The MSM devices however, cannot operate at zero bias, which increases the noise. Since the space charge width and hence the width of the high-field region in the AlGa_N layer is usually much smaller than the electrode spacing at moderate bias values, the photoresponse of the MSM diode has a significant slow component. Lateral geometry transparent Schottky barrier photodetectors avoid most of these problems.⁹ However, this design requires a *n*-doped Al_{0.4}Ga_{0.6}N layer, and, to date, all such doping attempts using Si have resulted in insulating material.

We now report on an In–Si co-doping approach to ob-

tain *n* Al_{0.4}Ga_{0.6}N active layers with resistivity as low as 0.16 ohm cm. In addition to significantly increasing the doping efficiency, the introduction of a small concentration of In also allows for the direct deposition of a crack-free 0.5 μm thick Si-doped Al_{0.4}Ga_{0.6}N layer over a 200 Å thick AlN buffer layer on basal plane sapphire substrates. We also demonstrate the potential of using these In–Si co-doped layers for a lateral geometry, true solar-blind Schottky barrier detector (λ cutoff at 278 nm). The epilayer structures of this study were grown using low-pressure metalorganic chemical vapor deposition. The active AlGa_N layer and the 200 Å thick AlN buffer layer were deposited at a pressure of 76 Torr and growth temperatures of 950 °C and 600 °C, respectively. Triethylgallium, trimethylaluminum, trimethylindium (TMI), and ammonia were used as the precursors, with hydrogen as the carrier gas. The active AlGa_N layer was co-doped using disilane (Si₂H₄) and TMI. The secondary ion mass spectrometry analysis shows that this co-doping procedure introduces a trace amount (about 0.5%) of In in the active layer.

Standard Van Der Pauw measurements showed the sheet resistivity of the In–Si co-doped AlGa_N layers of 0.08...0.3 ohm cm depending on the TMI flux. From Hall measurements, the carrier concentration and electron mobility of these layers were found to be $n \approx 2$ to $8 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and $\mu_n \approx 40 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$. Similar values of electron concentration was also extracted from capacitance–voltage (*C-V*) measurements. AlGa_N layers deposited without the TMI flux were highly insulating and thus unusable for Schottky detector fabrication. These layers were completely depleted at zero bias as shown by the *C-V* measurements.

The increased *n*-type doping due to the addition of In can result from the introduction of a shallow impurity level. Indium incorporation might also reduce the defect formation as indicated by the improved structural quality and morphology of the grown films.¹⁰ Further, indium might counteract the incorporation of defects responsible for the self-compensation of high-Al mole fraction AlGa_N layers, such as DX centers and cation vacancies.¹¹ More detailed studies

^{a)}Also with Sensor Electronic Tech. Inc.

^{b)}Electronic mail: simin@engr.sc.edu

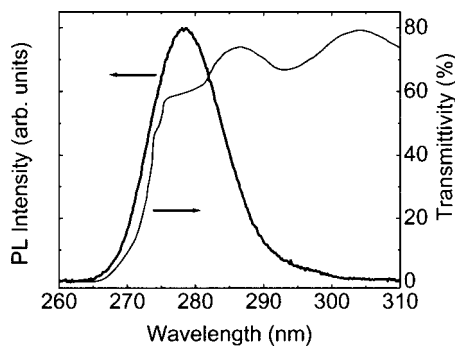


FIG. 1. Spectra of optical transmission and PL of the In co-doped AlGaIn epilayer with approximately 40% of Al are shown.

are underway to determine the exact mechanism, and the results will be reported elsewhere.

In Fig. 1, we include the room temperature optical transmission and photoluminescence spectra of In co-doped AlGaIn layer. The photoluminescence (PL) spectrum was measured by using a TRIAX-550 spectrometer with a liquid-nitrogen-cooled charge coupled device and a 230 nm pump from a frequency doubled dye laser. The dye laser was pumped using 600 ps long pulses from a nitrogen laser. As can be seen from Fig. 1, both the optical transmission cutoff and the peak PL occur at 278.5 nm. From the optical characteristics, we extracted the Al mole fraction in the AlGaIn to be approximately 40%. The PL linewidth full width at half maximum is 12 nm. This narrow PL linewidth and a coincidence of the optical transmission cutoff with the PL peak position indicate a good structural quality of the $\text{Al}_{0.4}\text{Ga}_{0.6}\text{In}$ layers, which can serve as the active layers for transparent Schottky barrier photodetectors.

We then fabricated lateral geometry transparent Schottky barrier detectors using the In-Si co-doped n AlGaIn layers. The layer with electron concentration $n \approx 4 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ was chosen for this experiment as it provides both low ohmic contact resistance, low Schottky barrier leakage current and large enough zero bias depletion in the space charge region. The design was similar to our prior work.¹⁰ First, ohmic contacts consisting of Ti(200 Å)/Al(600 Å)/Ti(200 Å)/Au(1000 Å) were deposited using electron beam (e-beam) evaporation. We also deposited a transmission line model (TLM) patterns. The as-deposited ohmic contacts were non-linear. The linearity was significantly improved by an 850 °C anneal for 1 min in flowing N_2 . Using TLM measurements, the sheet resistivity of the n^+ AlGaIn layer was found to be 0.16 ohm cm, in good agreement with the van der Pauw data. In Fig. 2(a), we show the current–voltage (I – V) characteristics measured between two $50 \mu\text{m} \times 150 \mu\text{m}$ TLM pads separated by a 2 μm gap. Note, the I – V characteristics are linear due to the low sheet resistivity of the AlGaIn layer. The TLM measurements yielded the specific contact resistivity to be $2.5 \times 10^{-3} \text{ ohm cm}^2$. Connotation of novelty is not permitted.

Transparent Schottky barriers were then formed using e-beam deposited 50 Å thick $300 \mu\text{m} \times 300 \mu\text{m}$ Pd Schottky contacts and a Ti (200 Å)/Au (3000 Å) probe pads. The probe pads were deposited only on a small portion of the Schottky contact. In Fig. 2(b), we show the dark I – V characteristics for the transparent Schottky barriers fabricated as

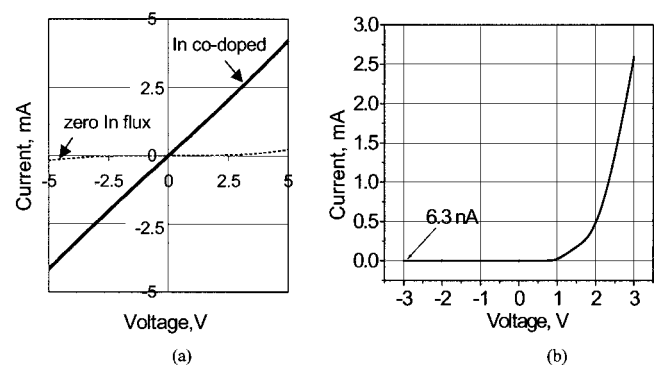


FIG. 2. I – V characteristics of the ohmic contacts to In co-doped AlGaIn (a) and of the AlGaIn Schottky photodiode (b) are shown. Dashed line in the left-hand side shows the I – V curve for the AlGaIn layer with zero flow of TMI (no In co-doping).

just described. As seen, the turn-on voltage and the forward differential resistance were approximately 1.2 V and 500 ohm, and the reverse leakage current at a bias of -3 V was as low as 6 nA. In order to extract the barrier height for these Schottky barriers, we also measured the temperature dependence of the forward current at small forward voltages. These measurements yielded an effective barrier height of 0.64 V [see Fig. 3(a)]. We also measured the ideality factor for our transparent Schottky barriers to be $n=2.34$ [see Fig. 3(b)]. We explain this relatively low Schottky barrier height by the effect of barrier lowering due to high impurity concentration in our In-co-doped AlGaIn layers.

The Schottky barrier spectral photoresponse was then measured using a light from a xenon lamp and a monochromator as pump beam, which was focused to illuminate the active surface of the device. A UV-enhanced calibrated Si detector was used to measure the input pump beam power. The spectral photoresponsivity signal for the $300 \mu\text{m} \times 300 \mu\text{m}$ transparent Schottky detector on $n \text{ Al}_{0.4}\text{Ga}_{0.6}\text{In}$ is shown in Fig. 4. As seen, the device has a peak photoresponsivity of about 0.033 A/W at 275 nm, and the photoresponse falls by more than three orders of magnitude within 30 nm. C – V measurements indicate a zero-bias depletion width of 0.05 μm with a carrier concentration of $4 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. This depletion region thickness is not large enough to ensure the full light absorption in the space charge region of the Schottky barrier and thus reduces the maximum achievable value of the photoresponsivity. More than two times higher

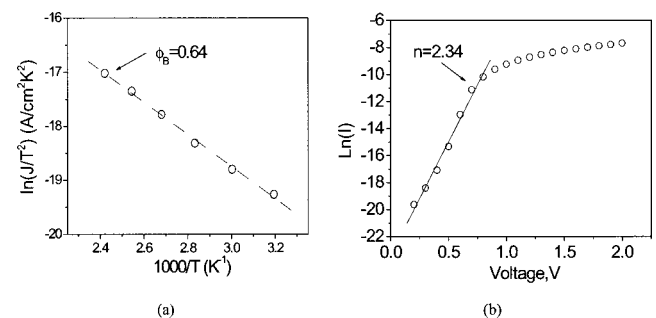


FIG. 3. (a) Dependence of the current density, J/T^2 on temperature, $1000/T$ and (b) forward current dependence on forward bias for AlGaIn photodiode are shown.

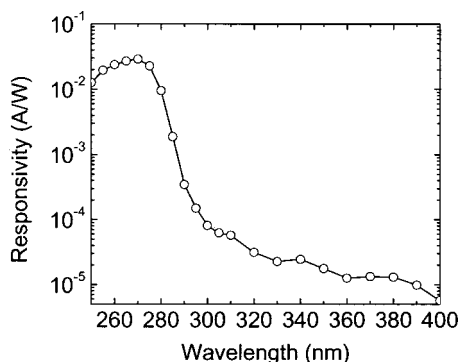


FIG. 4. Photoresponsivity spectrum of the AlGaIn photodiode is shown.

peak responsivity was measured on the device with optimized epilayer design. The detailed report on these results will be published elsewhere.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that ternary AlGaIn layers with Al mole fraction as high as 40% can be *n* doped up to $8 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ using an In–Si co-doping approach. This enables the fabrication of transparent Pd–Schottky barriers and Ti/Al/Ti/Au ohmic contacts with specific contact resistivity of $2.5 \times 10^{-3} \text{ ohm cm}^2$. These transparent Schottky barriers serve as excellent solar-blind UV photodetectors with a zero-bias peak responsivity of 0.033 A/W at a wavelength of 275 nm and more than three orders of magnitude of UV/visible rejection ratio.

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