

# Magnitude and size scaling of intervalley coupling in semiconductor alloys and superlattices

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Coupling between different  $G$ ,  $X$ , and  $L$  band-structure valleys is responsible for  $\pi$ -level anticrossing in superlattices as a function of period, pressure, and electric field and for  $\pi$ -band “optical bowing” of band gaps in random alloys. We investigate the symmetry, magnitude, and size scaling of intervalley coupling in semiconductor superlattices and alloys by direct supercell calculations, performed with screened pseudopotentials and a plane-wave basis, considering up to  $10^6$  atoms/supercell. Projecting the calculated electronic wave functions  $c_i$  of alloys or superlattices onto the bulk states of the constituent zinc-blende materials shows that  $c_i$  contain a “majority representation” from one or more zinc-blende states  $g$ . The intervalley coupling  $E(i,j)$  between the alloy states  $c_i$  and  $c_j$  then includes a term  $2F(g,g) V(g,g)$  due to the “majority representations”  $g$  and  $g$  of  $c_i$  and

*existence or absence* of intervalley coupling, this is often discussed in the literature by considering the overall symmetry of the composite system.<sup>10,11</sup> This type of analysis can be used, for example, to explain<sup>10</sup> why the  $G_{1c}-X_{1c}$  anticrossing gap is zero for odd  $n$  (Fig. 1), while the anticrossing gap for  $G_{1c}-X_{3c}$  is zero for even  $n$ . But the applicability of the symmetry-based analysis is limited to highly symmetric composite systems. In many cases, such as the alloy system illustrated in Fig. 2-a), the overall symmetry is too low to be useful in this respect. Regarding (ii), the *magnitude and scaling* of intervalley coupling is important for understanding optical bowing in alloys,<sup>8,9</sup> the indirect optical transition without phonon interaction,<sup>1,12</sup> the resonant intervalley tunneling in quantum well electron transmission,<sup>13</sup> and the characteristic pressure-induced changes of photoluminescence.<sup>14,2</sup> Regarding (iii), the size scaling of  $E(g, g\mathbf{8})$  is related to the order of the transition from direct to indirect

was calculated via a plane-wave screened pseudopotential method using a ; 33 000 atom cubic supercell (see Sec. III). It is then projected onto a set of virtual-crystal-approximation (VCA) zinc-blende Bloch functions  $f_{m,k}^{\text{VCA}}(r)$ :

$$c^{-i}(r) = \sum_{m,k} A_{m,k}^{-i} f_{m,k}^{\text{VCA}}(r), \quad (1)$$

where  $k$  is the reciprocal vector of the supercell within the zinc-blende Brillouin zone and  $m$  is the band index. The amplitude  $P_k^{\text{CBM}} = (\sum_m |A_{m,k}^{\text{CBM}}|^2)^{1/2}$  is shown in Fig. 2-a) vs the  $k$  points of the supercell. As we can see, a single zinc-blende component  $k=G$  contributes 90% of the total weight of the alloy CBM wave function. Further analysis shows that the weight on  $k=G$  comes mainly from a single zinc-blende VCA state  $G_{1c}$ . The 10% minority contribution of other  $k$  points (mostly from the  $L$  point in Fig. 2-a)) results from intervalley coupling. Although small, these minority  $P_k^{\text{CBM}}$  components contribute significantly to the optical bowing (a nonlinear dependence of the alloy eigenvalues on composition) in this system.<sup>8,9</sup>

We are interested here in establishing (i) the existence or absence of intervalley coupling  $E(g, g\mathbf{8})$  between given states  $g$  and  $g\mathbf{8}$ , (ii) the magnitude of the coupling, and (iii) its scaling with the systems size. Regarding item (i), i.e., the

The first term is limited to the neighborhood  $dk$  of  $k_0$  and gives the “majority representation.”  $dk$  equals zero for alloys (Fig. 2), but includes a few points for superlattices (Fig. 3). We will use  $g=(n_0, k_0)$  to denote the constituent basis function at the center of the majority representation.

The anticrossing gap  $E(g, g')$  between the states  $c^{(i)}$  with a majority contribution  $g$

entire intervalley coupling between the states of Eq. 10 originates from the minority representation of the wave functions. On the other hand, for other pairs of states, we have a nonzero majority contribution to the coupling provided that the overlap factor  $F(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g})$  is not zero.

In the remainder of this paper, we will show that we can distinguish two main types of intervalley couplings:

1) *Large majority contribution in alloy* (“strong coupling”): This is the coupling between the “VCA-allowed pairs” e.g.,  $G_{1c}-X_{3c}$ ,  $G_{1c}-L_{1c}$ ,  $X_{1c}-L_{1c}$ ,  $X_{1c}-L_{3c}$ , and  $X_{3c}^x-X_{3c}^y$  which are not in Eq. 10. We will see that, in alloys, where the coupling states are extended and have a large overlap  $F(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g})$ , the majority term alone, using the model potential, can explain the full coupling quantitatively. The full coupling will be calculated by a direct diagonalization technique –see Sec. III, while the model coupling will be represented by the leading terms of Eqs. 5–10. Evaluating the structure factor  $S(k_0 - k)$  using the random distribution of A atoms in Eq. 7, we have

$$E_{\text{maj}}^{\text{alloy}}(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g}) = 2F(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g})V(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g}) > 2S(k_0 - k)V(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g}) \\ = A \frac{8^{x-1-x}}{N} V(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g})$$

We use  $V(\mathbf{G}_{1c}, X_{3c}) = 0.374$  eV, obtained from our wavefunctions. This gives for  $x = 0.5$  alloy composition!  $E_{\text{maj}}^{\text{alloy}}(\mathbf{G}_{1c}, X_{3c}) = 1.06/\sqrt{N}$  eV, which agrees well with the directly calculated values (Fig. 4!), demonstrating that in this case, the contribution of the minority representation included in the direct calculation, but omitted in the model calculation! is small.

### **B. Why is $\mathbf{G}_{1c}$ - $X_{3c}$ coupling stronger than $\mathbf{G}_{1c}$ - $X_{1c}$**

It is clear from Fig. 4 that the  $\mathbf{G}_{1c}$ - $X_{3c}$  anticrossing gap ~“strong coupling”! is 20–100 times larger than the  $\mathbf{G}_{1c}$ - $X_{1c}$  results ~“weak coupling”!. This

where  $V(r, nk)$  is just the  $V(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{g})$  of Eq. ~8!. This second-order perturbation in eigenenergy corresponds to the first-order perturbation in wave function of Eq. ~15!. If we neglect the intervalley coupling, i.e., if we use only the majority representation state  $\mathbf{g}$  as the alloy wave function, we obtain  $b_{\text{tot}} = b_{\text{VCA}}$ . In the case of  $\text{Ga}_x\text{Al}_{1-x}\text{As}$ , we find that  $b_{\text{VCA}} = -0.38$  eV for the  $\text{G}_{1c}$ - $\text{G}_{15v}$  energy gap, while the experimental result is  $b_{\text{tot}}^{\text{expt}} = 0.37$  eV.<sup>26</sup> This large discrepancy is due to  $b_{\text{coupl}} = b_{\text{tot}} - b_{\text{VCA}}$ . In our current supercell calculation,  $b_{\text{tot}} = 0.45$  eV,<sup>20</sup> which is close to the experimental result. The large difference  $b_{\text{VCA}} - b_{\text{tot}}$  comes mainly from intervalley couplings in the conduction band. If we separate the band gap  $b_{\text{tot}}$  into  $b_{\text{CBM}} - b_{\text{VBM}}$ , we find that

$$b_{\text{VBM}} = -0.05, \quad b_{\text{CBM}} = -0.43: \text{ VCA},$$

*b*

contribution, we compare in Fig. 5 the directly calculated  $G_{1c-X_{3c}}$  anticrossing gap with the results obtained using the single- $k$ -point coupling of Eq. 9. In the alloy, this single- $k$ -point coupling represented the majority contribution term, and thus agreed well with the directly calculated results (Fig. 4). But in superlattices, the single- $k$ -point result is much larger (5–100 times!) than the directly calculated results. Furthermore, while the results of the single- $k$ -point coupling scale in superlattice as  $1/n$ , where  $n$  is the superlattice period, our directly calculated  $G_{1c-X_{3c}}$  and  $G_{1c-X_{1c}}$  couplings scale as  $1/n^3$ . We find that these differences are due to the localization of the superlattice states  $c^{(i)}$  and  $c^{(j)}$ . As a result, the extended single- $k$ -point VCA states  $f_g^{\text{VCA}}$  and

square rms value for the LDA results is 0.11 meV. On the other hand, the values at the lower half of Table I -case II! are not predicted to be zero by symmetry; they have a rms value of 84 meV, about 1000 times larger than the values of case I. So, the violation of the superposition assumption Eq. 4!# due to the self-consistent potential is very small, only 0.1% as measured by the  $\hat{f}_g^{\text{VCA}}$  & values.

### B. Effects of atomic relaxation on superposition assumption

As we see above, the self-consistent LDA potential does not violate Eq. 4! very much. Thus, here we will use the EPM to generate the total potential  $V(\mathbf{r}; N_A, N_B)$ . We calculated an  $\text{In}_{0.5}\text{Ga}_{0.5}\text{As}$  64-atom supercell with the same substitutional configuration as the above  $\text{Ga}_{0.5}\text{Al}_{0.5}\text{As}$  system (Ga→In, Al→Ga). We used valence-force-field -VFF! -Ref. 28! method to relax the atomic positions. The fully relaxed atomic positions have average displacements of 0.13 Å for anions, and 0.05 Å for cations. Note that although the total potential can be written as a summation of the atomic screened potentials as in Eq. 13!, Eq. 4! which uses unrelaxed ideal position  $\mathbf{R}_\lambda^0$  instead of the relaxed position



the selection rule of Eq. ~10!. This minority representation is important in order to obtain the correct bowing coefficients of the alloy eigenstates. ~4! In a simple superlattice  $(\text{GaAs})_n/(\text{AlAs})_n$ , both  $G_{1c}\text{-}X_{1c}$  and  $G_{1c}\text{-}X_{3c}$  couplings are weak coupling, due to the vanishing overlap factor  $F(g, g$