Photonic Devices

Light absorption and emission

Transitions between discrete states

Transition rate determined by the two states: Fermi’s golden rule

Absorption and emission of a semiconductor

“Vertical” transition (momentum conservation).
Why? (Why the photon’s momentum is negligible? – See next page)

Can we make decent light emitters (LEDs) based on band-to-band transitions from an indirect gap semiconductor (e.g. Si)?
Can we make decent light detectors (photodiodes) from an indirect gap semiconductor?
Why?
Energy of the photon

\[ E = h \nu = h \frac{c}{\lambda} = \frac{2\pi \hbar c}{\lambda} \]

\[ E = \frac{1.24 \text{ \mu m}}{\lambda} \text{ eV} \]

For \( \lambda \sim 1 \text{ \mu m} \), \( E \approx 1 \text{ eV} \), on the order of \( E_g \) of many semiconductors.

Momentum of the photon

\[ p = \hbar k \]

\[ k = \frac{2\pi}{\lambda} \quad \lambda \sim 1 \text{ \mu m} \]
Compare the $k$ of a photon to the dimension of the Brillouin zone:

For an indirect gap semiconductor

$$\Delta k_{\text{valley}} \sim \frac{2\pi}{a}, \quad a \sim 5\text{ Å}$$

$$k \ll \Delta k_{\text{valley}}, \quad k \sim 0.$$  
Momentum conservation $\Rightarrow$ vertical transition

(3-particle process involving a phonon, small probability)
Strong field in depletion region sweeps electrons to n side, holes to p side. When dark, no photo-generation. $p_n(x_n) < \text{equilibrium value}$ (i.e. excess concentration < 0) because holes swept by increased field.

(What if you just plot $n$ & $p$ on log scale for all $x$? See your Homework 2 results.)

(Linear scale)

Subscript "0" means no light.

(not equilibrium)
Forward biased

Like an npn BJT with BC junction forward biased
\[ I = I_s \left( e^{\frac{qV}{kT}} - 1 \right) - I_p \]
One problem w/ photodiodes.

Only the region \((L_p + x_d + L_n)\) useful.

The PIN photo diode

Is there band bending in the i region?
Why?
Intraband relaxation time ~ ps
Interband recombination time ~ ns

The concept of quasi-Fermi levels

Within \((L_n + x_d + L_p)\),

\[np > n_i^2\]

\(\Rightarrow\) net recombination

(Not necessarily population inversion)

Where does the recombination primarily happen?
Semiconductor optical amplifiers and lasers

What do you already know about lasers? (How are lasers different from other light sources?)
For discrete levels

Spontaneous emission: Into all possible photon modes. How LEDs work. Stimulated emission: Duplicate the incoming photon. Amplification. Amplification + positive feedback $\rightarrow$ oscillation

The positive feedback and frequency selection mechanism:

$$l = 2n\lambda$$

$$\lambda = \frac{l}{2n}$$
\[ E_2 = \frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m^*_n} + E_g \]

\[ E_1 = -\frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m^*_p} \]

\[ E_2 - E_1 = \hbar \omega = h \nu \]

\[ f_n(E_2) = \frac{1}{e^{\frac{E_2 - E_{F_n}}{k_B T}} + 1} \approx e^{-\frac{E_2 - E_{F_n}}{k_B T}} \]

\[ f_p(E_1) = \frac{1}{e^{\frac{E_1 - E_{F_p}}{k_B T}} + 1} \approx 1 - e^{-\frac{E_1 - E_{F_p}}{k_B T}} \]
$E_2$ and $E_1$ are related by the photon energy

$$E_2 - E_1 = \frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m_n^*} + \frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m_p^*} + E_g = \hbar \omega = h \nu$$

$$\frac{\hbar^2}{2} \left( \frac{1}{m_n^*} + \frac{1}{m_p^*} \right) k^2 = h \nu - E_g$$

Let \( \frac{1}{m_r} = \frac{1}{m_n^*} + \frac{1}{m_p^*} \)

\( m_r \): the reduced effective mass of the e-h pair

$$\frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m_r} = h \nu - E_g \quad \implies \quad k^2 = \frac{2m_r}{\hbar^2} (h \nu - E_g)$$

Density of states of conduction band e’s; see Note #7

Joint density of states

$$\rho(\nu) = \frac{(2m_r)^{3/2}}{\pi \hbar^2} (h \nu - E_g)^{1/2} \propto \sqrt{h \nu - E_g}$$
**Weak injection**

Probability of emission (e at $E_2$, and there's a hole at $E_2$ for it to fall into):

\[
f_e(\nu) = f_n(E_2) \left[ 1 - f_p(E_1) \right]
\]

Probability of absorption:

\[
f_a(\nu) = \left[ 1 - f_n(E_2) \right] f_p(E_1)
\]

Probability of net gain in number of photons:

\[
f_e(\nu) - f_a(\nu) = f_n(E_2) - f_p(E_1)
\]
The LED works by spontaneous emission.

Spontaneous emission rate:
(Emissions per time per volume per frequency interval)

\[ \gamma_{sp}(\nu) = \frac{l}{\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) \]

At equilibrium,

\[ f_e(\nu) = e^{-\frac{E_g - E_F}{k_B T}} e^{\frac{E_i - E_F}{k_B T}} = e^{-\frac{E_g - E_i}{k_B T}} = e^{-\frac{h \nu}{k_B T}} \]

You can calculate the optical power emitted by a slab of semiconductor.
At room temperature, a 2 micron layer of GaAs emits \(1.5 \times 10^{-20}\) W/cm\(^2\).
You have to either heat it up (incandescence) or “pump” e-h pairs into it (electroluminescence).

This and many other figures are adapted from Saleh & Teich, Fundamentals of Photonics.
We are not interested in making incandescent light bulbs from semiconductors. Let’s look at LEDs.

\[ f_e (\nu) = f_n (E_2) [1 - f_p (E_1)] \]

LED: (weak injection)
\[ f_e (\nu) = e^{- \frac{E_F - E_{Fn}}{k_B T}} e^{- \frac{E_1 - E_{Ep}}{k_B T}} \]
\[ = e^{- \frac{E_F - E_{Fn}}{k_B T}} e^{- \frac{h \nu}{k_B T}} \]

\[ r_{sp} (\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho (\nu) f_e (\nu) \]
\[ = e^{- \frac{E_F - E_{Fn}}{k_B T}} r_{sp0} (\nu) \]

Compare to the equilibrium case:
\[ r_{sp0} (\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho (\nu) f_e (\nu) \]
\[ = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \left( \frac{2m_r}{\pi \hbar^2} \right)^{3/2} \int h \nu - E_g \cdot e^{- \frac{h \nu}{k_B T}} \]
LED weak injection:

\[
\tilde{r}_{sp}(\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) = e^{\frac{E_{Fn} - E_{Fp}}{k_B T}} \tilde{r}_{sp0}(\nu)
\]

Equilibrium:

\[
\tilde{r}_{sp0}(\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu)
\]

\[
= \frac{1}{\tau_r} \frac{(2m_r)^{\frac{3}{2}}}{\pi \hbar^2} \sqrt{\hbar \nu - E_g} \cdot e^{-\frac{\hbar \nu}{k_B T}}
\]

Peak at \( E_g + \frac{1}{2} k_B T \)

Same peak, same width, enhanced by an exponential factor

Compare with incandescence
Now let’s talk about semiconductor optical amplifiers and lasers

Stimulated emission rate:  
\[ r_{st}(\nu) = \phi_{\nu} \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) \]

Absorption rate:  
\[ \gamma_{ab}(\nu) = \phi_{\nu} \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_a(\nu) \]

Photon flux  
(photons per time per area per frequency interval)

Compare with the spontaneous emission rate:  
\[ \gamma_{sp}(\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) \]

The origin of the \( \lambda^2 \) dependence: density of modes  
\[ M(\nu) = \frac{8\pi\nu^2}{c^3} \]

The photon density of modes is similar to the electron density of states \( D(E) \).
The difference:  
\[ E = \frac{\hbar^2 k^2}{2m^*} \] for e’s,  
\[ E = h\nu = c\nu/k \] for photons.
Simply put, the larger the \( E \), the more \( k \) states in an interval \( dE \). See Note #7 (Slide 25).
For spontaneous emission, photons are emitted into all modes.

\[ r_{sp}(\nu) = \frac{1}{\tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) \]

For stimulated emission, photons are emitted into the one mode of the incoming photon.

\[ r_{st}(\nu) = \phi_\nu \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_e(\nu) \]

\[ r_{ab}(\nu) = \phi_\nu \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau_r} \rho(\nu) f_a(\nu) \]

For absorption, the absorbed photon is of a specific mode.

For absorption, the modal density should be in the denominator

\[ M(\nu) = \frac{8\pi \nu^2}{c^3} \]

Thus the \( \lambda^2 \) dependence.
A medium absorbs at equilibrium. 

\[ I(x) = I(0) e^{-\alpha(x)x} \]

If “pumped”, net gain is possible: 

\[ I(x) = I(0) e^{\gamma x} \]

\[ \gamma(\nu) = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau_r} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_e(\nu) - f_a(\nu) \right] \]

\[ = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau_r} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_n(E_z) - f_p(E_i) \right] \]

\[ = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau_r} \frac{(2m_r)^{3/2}}{\pi \hbar^2} \frac{1}{\hbar^2} \left[ \sqrt{\hbar \nu - E_g} \right] \left[ f_n(E_z) - f_p(E_i) \right] \]
\[ Y(\nu) = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi^2\tau_r} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_n(\nu) - f_n(\nu) \right] \]

\[ = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi^2\tau_r} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_n(E_z) - f_p(E_\nu) \right] \]

\[ = \frac{1}{8\pi^2} \frac{(2m_r)^{3/2}}{\pi\hbar^2} \frac{\lambda^2}{\tau_r} \sqrt{h\nu - E_g} \left[ f_n(E_z) - f_p(E_\nu) \right] \]

Notations used in figures:

- \( f_g = f_e - f_a \)
- \( f_c(E_z) \equiv f_n(E_z) \)
- \( f_\nu(E_\nu) \equiv f_p(E_\nu) \)
- \( E_{fc} = E_{Fn} \)
- \( E_{f\nu} = E_{Fp} \)
A digression: net absorption at equilibrium

\[ \alpha (\nu) = -\gamma (\nu) \]

\[ \alpha \approx \frac{\lambda^2}{\tau_r} \sqrt{h\nu - E_g} \left[ f(E_2) - f(E_1) \right] \]

\[ \alpha \approx \frac{h^2}{\tau_r} \frac{1}{(h\nu)^2} \sqrt{h\nu - E_g} \]

Calculated absorption of GaAs
\[ y(\nu) = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_e(\nu) - f_a(\nu) \right] \]
\[ = \frac{\lambda^2}{8\pi \tau} \rho(\nu) \left[ f_n(E_2) - f_p(E_1) \right] \]
\[ = \frac{i}{\pi c} \frac{(2m_e)^2}{\pi \hbar^2} \frac{\lambda^2}{\tau} \sqrt{\hbar \nu - E_g} \left[ f_n(E_2) - f_p(E_1) \right] \]

Notations used in figures:

\[ f_g = f_e - f_a \quad E_{fc} \equiv E_{Fn} \]
\[ f_c(E_z) \equiv f_n(E_z) \quad E_{fv} \equiv E_{Fp} \]
\[ f_v(E_v) \equiv f_p(E_v) \]

Net gain: amplification.

Amplification with positive feedback: oscillation
The positive feedback and frequency selection mechanism:

To have oscillation, you must have net gain (of the cavity, not just the medium).

There are losses in the medium other than band-to-band absorption, which is already accounted for in net medium gain $\gamma(\nu)$, or $\gamma_0(\nu)$ in the right figure.

Other losses include scattering and free carrier absorption in the medium, as well as transmission at cavity ends (reflection $R < 1$).

You can prorate the transmission loss to the medium:

$$\gamma(\nu) \geq \alpha_{\text{loss}} + \frac{\ln(R_1R_2)}{L}$$
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\[ \gamma(\nu) \geq \alpha_{\text{loss}} + \frac{\ln(R_1R_2)}{L} \]

Loss other than band-to-band absorption

The concept of “hole burning”. No spectral hole burning in semiconductors due to fast intra-band processes. But there’s spatial hole burning.
Example: spectrum of an InGaAsP laser
Threshold behavior