



## Electrical Tuning of Exciton Binding Energies in Monolayer WS<sub>2</sub>

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We demonstrate continuous tuning of the exciton binding energy in monolayer WS<sub>2</sub> by means of an externally applied voltage in a field-effect transistor device. Using optical spectroscopy, we monitor the ground and excited excitonic states as a function of gate voltage and track the evolution of the quasiparticle band gap. The observed decrease of the exciton binding energy over the range of about 100 meV, accompanied by the renormalization of the quasiparticle band gap, is associated with screening of the Coulomb interaction by the electrically injected free charge carriers at densities up to  $8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . Complete ionization of the excitons due to the electrical doping is estimated to occur at a carrier density of several  $10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ .

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A common feature of nanoscale materials is the presence of strongly enhanced Coulomb interactions between the charge carriers due to quantum confinement effects and reduced dielectric screening. The resulting formation of bound electron-hole pairs, or excitons, leads to a variety of intriguing phenomena, such as multiple exciton generation and the creation of excitonic molecules and complexes, as well as exciton-polariton condensates. These many-body effects are significant both for the fundamental understanding of the materials and for their use in device applications. As important as the properties of the unperturbed system is the ability to tune excitonic states using external control. In this regard, the new class of semiconducting monolayer transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs) [1–3] shows much promise [4,5]. In single- and few-layered TMDCs, the carriers can form strongly bound excitons [6–10], charged excitons [11,12], and excitonic molecules [13]. The excitons exhibit binding energies of many hundreds of meV [6–10,14–28], strong interband and intraband light-matter coupling [22,29–31], efficient luminescence [2,3,32–34], and intriguing spin-valley physics [35–41]. Recent studies have also reported the manipulation of the ground-state transition energy in monolayer TMDCs using a variety of approaches [29,42–46]. In contrast, external control of the exciton binding energy has not yet been demonstrated. This capability is, however, of great importance, since the optical and optoelectronic properties of the TMDC materials are strongly influenced by the large binding energies of the excitonic particles. In addition, from the practical point of view, semiconductor devices such as transistors, modulators, and emitters are operated using externally applied

fields and at finite carrier densities. A detailed understanding of the material's properties under such conditions is thus crucial for the implementation of atomically thin TMDCs in future devices.

In this work, we demonstrate continuous, electrical tuning of the excitonic states in an electrostatically gated WS<sub>2</sub> monolayer. By measuring the energies of excited states of the band-edge exciton, known as the Rydberg series, we track the evolution of the exciton binding energies and the position of the quasiparticle band gap with gate voltage. We show that by electrostatically gating the WS<sub>2</sub> monolayer from near to neutrality to an electron density of about  $8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  both the exciton binding energy and the quasiparticle band gap energy can be tuned over a range of about 100 meV. The observed phenomena are attributed to the electrical injection (doping) of free charge carriers into the WS<sub>2</sub> monolayer and the resulting decrease of the exciton binding energies from screening of the Coulomb interaction. Our findings further allow us to identify a regime where complete ionization of the excitonic states occurs for electron densities of several  $10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ .

Monolayer WS<sub>2</sub> was obtained by mechanical exfoliation of a bulk crystal onto a 285-nm-thick silicon dioxide thin film on a degenerately doped silicon wafer. The electron density is controlled by fabricating electrical contacts with electron beam lithography and utilizing the silicon substrate as a backgate. The optical properties of the exciton states are studied at different gate voltages by measuring the linear reflectance contrast  $\Delta R/R = (R_{\text{sample}} - R_{\text{substrate}})/R_{\text{substrate}}$  of the sample in vacuum at a temperature of 50 K. All material processing was performed at moderate temperatures ( $< 130^\circ\text{C}$ ) to avoid

possible sample degradation. Additional experimental details are given in the Supplemental Material [47].

Before examining the evolution of the higher states, we need to quantify the doping of the sample. We extract this information from the backgate capacitance and from the evolution of the ground-state exciton. Figure 1(a) shows the reflectance contrast in a color plot over the spectral range of the ground-state transition at different gate voltages  $V_g$ , while the individual  $\Delta R/R$  spectra are presented in Fig. 1(b) for selected voltages. At negative gate voltages, the spectrum is dominated by the neutral exciton resonance ( $X_0$ ) originating from the so-called  $A$  transition at the  $K$  and  $K'$  points of the Brillouin zone. As the gate voltage increases, an additional peak emerges at lower energies, and the  $X_0$  resonance broadens and decreases in strength. The second feature is attributed to the negatively charged exciton or trion ( $X_-$ ), which is composed of an exciton and an additional electron, and is typically observed in monolayer TMDCs at finite doping densities [11,12,39,56–58]. We infer that the charge neutrality point of the sample is around  $V_g = -45$  V; we then estimate the electron density in the monolayer from the capacitance of the backgate to

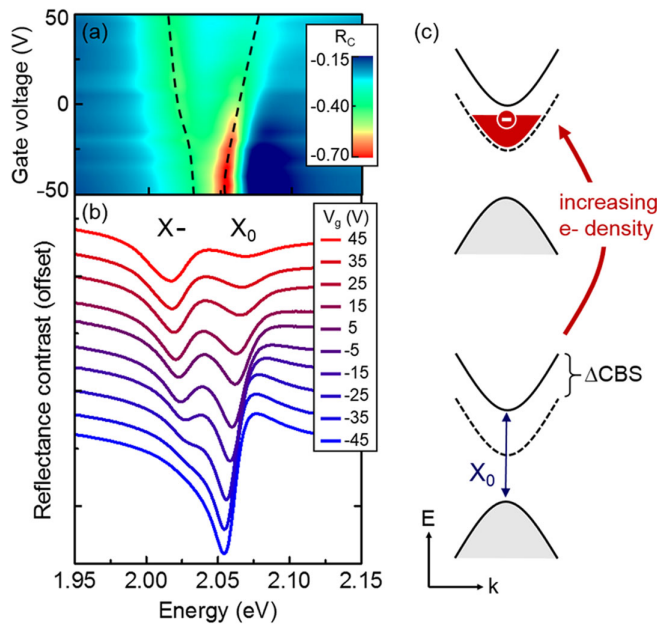


FIG. 1 (color online). (a) Color plot of the reflectance contrast spectra for different gate voltages at a temperature of  $T = 50$  K. Charge neutrality point is estimated to be around  $V_g = -45$  V, and the electron density increases roughly by  $0.8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  per 10 V. The evolution of the charged and neutral exciton peaks is shown by dotted lines. (b) Reflectance contrast spectra for selected gate voltages, offset for clarity. (c) Schematic illustration of the relevant part of the  $WS_2$  band structure around the fundamental band gap transition with (top) and without (bottom) electron doping. The spin splitting of the conduction bands and the bright exciton transition are indicated by  $\Delta CBS$  and  $X_0$ , respectively. The spin-split valence band lies much lower in energy and has been omitted for clarity.

increase to about  $8(\pm 1) \times 10^{12} \text{ electrons cm}^{-2}$  at the highest gate voltage of  $V_g = 50$  V. The doping is consistent with the evolution of the energy difference between the exciton and trion resonances, proportional to the chemical potential of the electrons [11]. Additional information with respect to doping, gate-dependent photoluminescence, and room-temperature response is given in the Supplemental Material [47].

The experimental conditions in our study are further illustrated in Fig. 1(c), where the band structure of the  $WS_2$  monolayer is shown schematically around the fundamental gap of the material. The conduction bands in  $WS_2$  are predicted to exhibit a finite spin splitting  $\Delta CBS$  of about 30–40 meV [59–62], where the optically bright exciton transition ( $X_0$ ) is associated with the higher-lying conduction band (the large splitting of the valence bands has been omitted for clarity). The chemical potential as estimated using the effective masses and band offsets in the  $WS_2$  monolayer from Ref. [59] is in the range of several tens of meV for the typical doping conditions in our experiment (see Supplemental Material [47]). Thus, even at the highest doping density,  $8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ , more than 75% of the electrons reside in the lower conduction band, so that the higher-lying band remains mostly unoccupied. As discussed below, this renders the  $WS_2$  system particularly suitable to separate the screening phenomena from the Pauli-blocking effects in the relevant density regime.

In order to extract the evolution of the exciton binding energy and the quasiparticle band gap for different free carrier densities, we monitor the optically bright excited states of the exciton, in analogy to the analysis in the previous studies of excitons in as-exfoliated  $WS_2$  [8] and  $WSe_2$  [7]. In Fig. 2, we plot the second derivatives of the reflectance contrast for the undoped case [Figs. 2(a) and 2(b)] and at the highest gate voltage [Figs. 2(c) and 2(d)] in the spectral range of the ground- and excited-state exciton resonances. The complete voltage series is presented in the Supplemental Material [47]. In addition to the exciton ground state and trion [Figs. 2(a) and 2(c)], we also observe weak features in the spectral range between 2.2 and 2.3 eV [Figs. 2(b) and 2(d)]. The latter were identified in our previous work [8] as the first and second excited-state transitions of the exciton. The excitonic states, labeled according to their principal quantum number  $n = 1, 2, 3$ , exhibit shifts of their transition energies as the doping density is increased [Figs. 2(c) and 2(d)]. Signatures of higher excited states ( $n > 3$ ) are obscured by the noise in the present measurement. No spectral features associated with the excited states of the trion are observed, which is attributed to the absence of one-electron excited states for the negatively charged hydrogenlike state and the instability of the two-electron excited states due to efficient Auger-like autoionization [63].

Plotted in red and blue lines in Fig. 2 are the fitting functions used to extract the energy of the excited states.

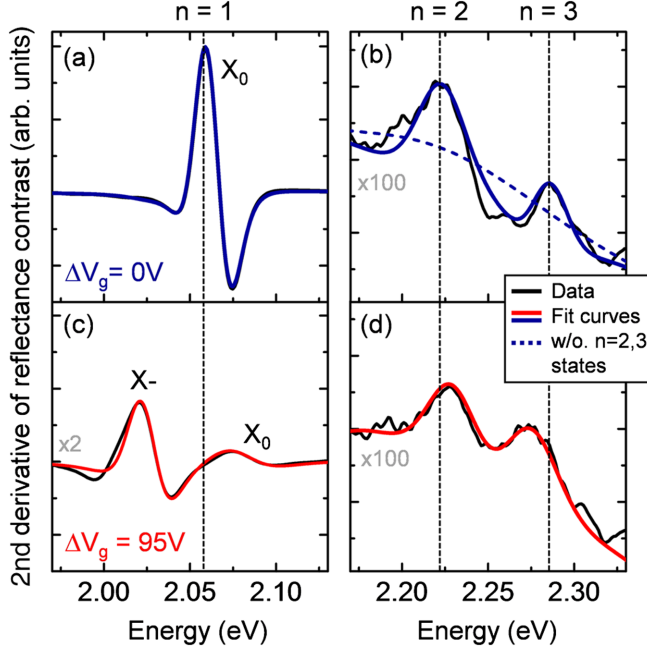


FIG. 2 (color online). Second derivatives of the reflectance contrast spectra for gate voltages relative to the charge neutrality point of  $\Delta V_g = 0$  V (a),(b) and  $\Delta V_g = 95$  V (c),(d), corresponding to an estimated electron doping density of about  $8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . The measured spectra are indicated by the black lines and the results of the multi-Lorentzian model by red and blue curves. Both experimental and simulated curves are smoothed over a spectral range of 10 meV after each derivative is taken. The simulated curve without the  $n = 2$  and  $n = 3$  resonances is included in (b) for comparison.

These curves correspond to the reflectance contrast spectra generated from a multi-Lorentzian parametrization of the dielectric function of the material, taking into account the influence of the dielectric response of the underlying substrate. The parameters describing the excitonic features are adjusted to match the second derivatives of the experimental data. Also shown as dashed line for comparison is the simulated curve without the  $n = 2$  and  $n = 3$  resonances. Figure 3 summarizes the extracted peak energies for the  $n = 1, 2, 3$  exciton states as a function of gate voltage  $\Delta V_g$  relative to the charge neutrality point. At each gate voltage, the measurement is repeated 4 times, and the results are presented together with the respective average. The transition energies of the exciton states shift monotonically with the gate voltage. We use a simple linear relation to quantify the observed behavior, since the experimental uncertainty precludes the meaningful application of a more complex model. The corresponding solid lines in Fig. 3 are thus introduced to summarize the experimental trends and the monotonic evolution of the  $n = 1, 2, 3$  transitions. The corresponding slope parameters are  $\Delta E_{n=1} = 0.172 (\pm 0.0026) \text{ meV/V}$ ,  $\Delta E_{n=2} = 0.054 (\pm 0.013) \text{ meV/V}$ , and  $\Delta E_{n=3} = -0.067 (\pm 0.007) \text{ meV/V}$ .

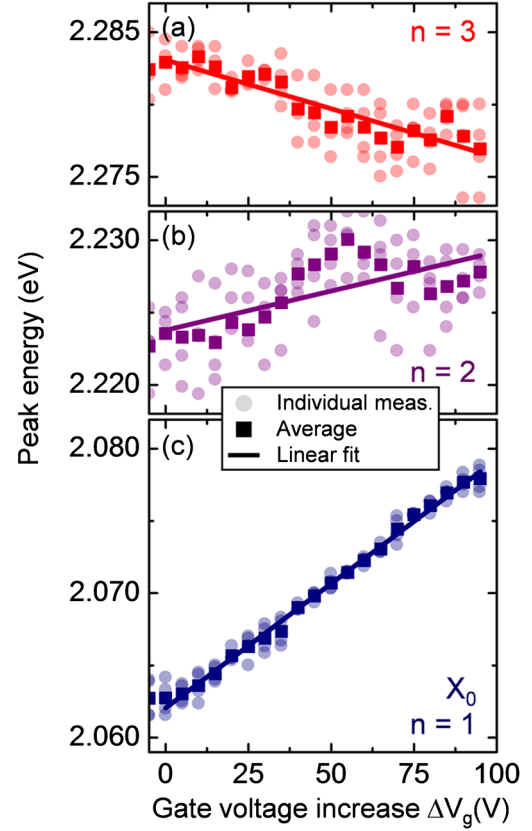


FIG. 3 (color online). Peak energies for the  $n = 3$  (a),  $n = 2$  (b), and  $n = 1$  (c) exciton states as a function of gate voltage  $\Delta V_g$  relative to the charge neutrality point. The estimated electron doping density scales roughly by  $0.8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  per 10 V. Data from four individual measurements (light colored squares) at each gate voltage are presented together with the respective averages (dark colored squares) and linear line fits (solid curves). The vertical scale of the energy axis is the same in all three plots.

Our observations can be considered to be the result both of the electrical doping of the sample and of the influence of the out-of-plane electric field (estimated to be less than  $2 \times 10^{-2} \text{ V \AA}^{-1}$  for the maximum gate voltage of 50 V). As discussed in detail in Sec. 6 of the Supplemental Material [47], changes induced both by the Stark effect and by the recently proposed “brightening” of the dark excitons [64] are negligible in comparison to the influence of gate-induced doping. In particular, the transfer of the oscillator strength from bright to dark states can be excluded as contributing significantly to our observations both because of the conduction band ordering in  $\text{WS}_2$  (with the dark state lying below the bright state) and because of the overall estimated strength of the effect. Thus, to interpret our findings we turn to the well-developed, many-body theory for quasi-two-dimensional (2D) semiconductors [65,66], where the presence of the free charge carriers in the system is predicted to influence the measured optical spectra through three main physical mechanisms: elastic Coulomb scattering, Pauli blocking, and screening of the



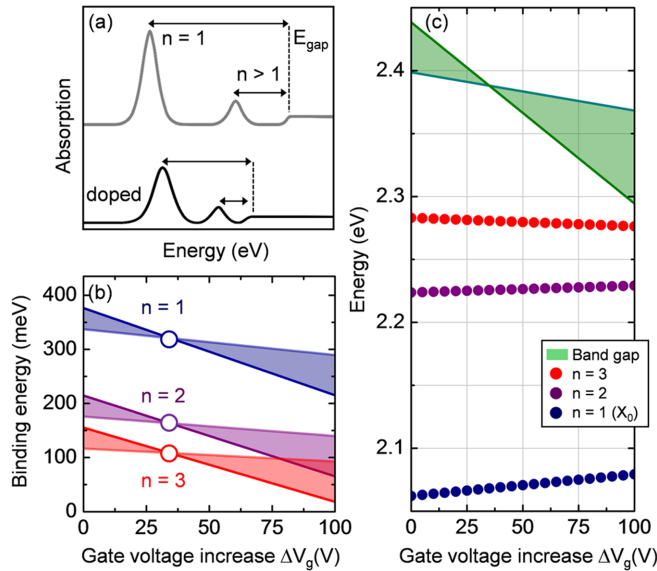


FIG. 4 (color online). (a) Schematic illustration of the absorption spectra for an undoped (top) and doped (bottom) 2D semiconductor. The quasiparticle band-gap energy  $E_{\text{gap}}$  is represented by the dashed line, and the ground and excited exciton states are indicated by  $n = 1$  and  $n > 1$ , respectively. (b) Evolution of the exciton binding energies as a function of the relative gate voltage  $\Delta V_g$  as estimated from the minimum and maximum shifts of the band gap. The estimated electron density increases by roughly  $0.8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  per 10 V. Values for the exciton binding energies at  $\Delta V_g = 35$  V are fixed from Ref. [8] and are represented by circles. (c) Absolute energies of the  $n = 1, 2, 3$  exciton states and the estimated minimum and maximum shifts of the band gap. Linear fits to the experimental data are used in (b) and (c) for clarity.

Coulomb interaction. First, the scattering of excitons with free charge carriers leads to a decrease of the exciton coherence lifetime and thus to a spectral broadening of the exciton transitions. Second, Pauli blocking typically induces a decrease of the exciton oscillator strength and binding energy due to the occupation of the electronic states and the fermionic nature of the electrons. Finally, the screening of the electric fields by the free charges reduces the overall strength of the Coulomb interaction. The screening of the *attractive* interaction between electrons and holes lowers the exciton oscillator strength and binding energy, like the effect of the Pauli blocking. Also, the exciton states with higher quantum numbers are affected more strongly due to their larger Bohr radii. The reduction of the *repulsive* interaction induces a decrease of the quasiparticle self-energy and thus leads to the renormalization of the band gap to lower energies. The combined effect of the three contributions is summarized in Fig. 4(a), where the absorption spectra from an undoped and a doped semiconductor are indicated schematically, including ground and excited exciton transitions, as well as the onset of the band gap. In the doped case, the band gap shifts to lower energies and the exciton peaks broaden and decrease in

strength. The energy intervals between the exciton transitions and the band gap energy also decrease, reflecting the reduction of the respective binding energies. The absolute exciton transitions thus shift due to the combined effect from the reduced binding energies and band gap renormalization.

This scenario matches our experimental findings. Density-dependent broadening and a decrease of the overall oscillator strength of the exciton ground state are clearly observed [see Figs. 1(a) and 1(b) and Supplemental Material [47]]. The shift of the excitonic states closer to one another in energy (Fig. 2) corresponds to the reduction of the exciton binding energy with increased gate voltage. Finally, the  $n = 3$  transition shifts to lower energies following the decrease of the quasiparticle gap. We note that for low to intermediate carrier densities in 2D systems (that is, below the Mott transition from excitons to an electron-hole plasma), the contributions of Pauli blocking to the discussed phenomena is considered minor in comparison to that of screening [67]. In addition, as outlined above, Pauli blocking can be largely neglected for most experimental conditions in our study, since the upper conduction band in the  $\text{WS}_2$  monolayer is barely occupied. Therefore, the observed material response to doping is expected to be dominated by the Coulomb screening from the free electrons.

Within this framework, we can estimate the values for the binding energies and the quasiparticle band gap. Since the extracted shifts for the exciton peak energies are more reliable than the absolute values due to the experimental uncertainty, we fix the band gap and the  $n = 1$  binding energy to previously determined values of 2.4 eV and 320 meV, respectively [8]. The doping conditions for the sample studied in the Ref. [8] correspond to  $\Delta V_g = 35$  V, as determined from the neutral and charged exciton peak energies (see Supplemental Material [47]). In addition, the absolute peak energies of the exciton peaks of  $E_{n=1} = 2.07$  eV,  $E_{n=2} = 2.23$  eV, and  $E_{n=3} = 2.28$  eV compare well with the corresponding values from Ref. [8] of 2.09, 2.23, and 2.31 eV. The respective binding energies are represented by circles in Fig. 4(b). We use two basic assumptions to estimate the minimum and maximum shifts of the band gap. On the one hand, the minimum band gap shift is determined by the condition that the relative change of the  $n = 3$  binding energy has to be larger than the relative change of the  $n = 2$  binding energy for all doping densities. On the other hand, the maximum band gap shift is determined by the observation of the  $n = 3$  peak even at the highest doping level, so that the band gap position has to be higher in energy by at least half of the linewidth of the  $n = 3$  transition. The resulting estimates for the band gap energy are presented in Fig. 4(c) and the evolution of the corresponding exciton binding energies is shown in Fig. 4(b), where the experimental data are represented by the linear fits.

On average, the screening of the Coulomb interaction induces a band-gap shift on the order of 100 ( $\pm 60$ ) meV and a comparable change in the binding energy of the exciton ground state at the highest doping density of about  $8 \times 10^{12}$  electrons  $\text{cm}^{-2}$ . The strength of the effect also agrees well with recent calculations for a similar material system [22]. Extrapolating the evolution of binding energies to even higher doping densities results in the complete screening of the  $n = 1$ ,  $n = 2$ , and  $n = 3$  states at the electron densities of  $3.7(\pm 1.9) \times 10^{13}$ ,  $2.8(\pm 1.7) \times 10^{13}$ , and  $2.4(\pm 1.5) \times 10^{13}$   $\text{cm}^{-2}$ . In particular, the ionization of the exciton ground state ( $n = 1$ ) corresponds to the threshold for the Mott transition from the excitonic to the electron-hole plasma regime. We note, however, that these values should be considered only as rough estimates due to the linear extrapolation.

In summary, we have demonstrated the continuous, electrical tuning of the exciton binding energy in a monolayer  $\text{WS}_2$  integrated into a FET device. The evolution of the exciton properties with the gate voltage is monitored by tracking the optical signatures of the excited exciton states ( $n = 1, 2, 3$ ) via reflectance spectroscopy. By changing the voltage from  $-50$  to  $+50$  V both the exciton binding energy and the quasiparticle band gap position are tuned across the energy range of about 100 meV. The observed phenomena are associated with the electrical injection of free charge carriers into the  $\text{WS}_2$  monolayer at densities up to  $8 \times 10^{12}$   $\text{cm}^{-2}$ . The resulting decrease of the exciton binding energies and the renormalized band gap position are mainly attributed to the screening of the Coulomb interaction by the free charges. The complete ionization of the excitons is estimated to occur at a carrier density of several  $10^{13}$   $\text{cm}^{-2}$ .

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