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Citation: Journal of Applied Physics 117, 015703 (2015); doi: 10.1063/1.4905316
View online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4905316
View Table of Contents: http://scitation.aip.org/content/aip/journal/jap/117/1?ver=pdfcov
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**Ab initio study of shallow acceptors in bixbyite V$_2$O$_3$**

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(Received 25 September 2014; accepted 19 December 2014; published online 5 January 2015)

We present the results of our study on $p$-type dopability of bixbyite V$_2$O$_3$ using the Heyd, Scuseria, and Ernzerhof hybrid functional (HSE06) within the density functional theory (DFT) formalism. We study vanadium and oxygen vacancies as intrinsic defects and substitutional Mg, Sc, and Y as extrinsic defects. We find that Mg substituting V acts as a shallow acceptor, and that oxygen vacancies are electrically neutral. Hence, we predict Mg-doped V$_2$O$_3$ to be a $p$-type conductor. Our results also show that vanadium vacancies are relatively shallow, with a binding energy of 0.14 eV, so that they might also lead to $p$-type conductivity. © 2015 AIP Publishing LLC.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4905316]

**I. INTRODUCTION**

There is continued interest in the semiconductor research community in novel $p$-type conductors. This is motivated by the desire of improving the properties of the materials currently used in electronic components such as light emitting diodes, transistors, or photovoltaic cells, or by the need of finding alternative materials to those already used, for reasons of cost or ease of synthesis.

Recently, we performed a DFT-based high-throughput screening of the properties of oxides with the bixbyite structure. In this study we found that V$_2$O$_3$ presents very good $p$-type dopability. This called for a more detailed study of this material, looking in particular for dopants resulting in possible $p$-type conductivity. Because of its unique properties, such as an intriguing metal-insulator transition, and its different applications in catalysis, chemical sensors, and cathode materials, V$_2$O$_3$ has been the subject of numerous investigations. The study of V$_2$O$_3$, however, has been mostly limited to its rhombohedral (corundum) and monoclinic structures. Vanadium sesquioxide was only recently synthesized in the bixbyite structure, and although several of its basic properties have now been reported, a more complete characterization requires further investigation.

In this work, we address specifically the prediction of V$_2$O$_3$ in the bixbyite structure as a novel $p$-type conductor by calculating the formation energies and charge transition levels of V and O vacancies as native defects and of elements Mg, Y, and Sc substituting V as impurities.

In Sec. II, we explain the methodology used, and in Sec. III we present our results together with a discussion. We finish this work with Sec. III, where we summarize our main findings.

**II. COMPUTATIONAL METHOD**

We performed first-principles computations based on DFT$^{9,10}$ using the plane-wave Vienna Ab-initio Simulation Package (VASP)$^{11,12}$ The projector augmented wave (PAW)$^{13,14}$ potentials are used to describe the electron-ion interactions. We use the HSE06 hybrid functional$^{15,16}$ approximation to the exchange-correlation potential, both for structural relaxation and formation energy calculations. This is of particular importance in the present study, because the HSE06 functional is free of the band gap underestimation problem faced by other commonly used functionals and is capable of a reliable description of defect levels in semiconductors.$^{17}$ Because of the computational cost of the HSE06 functional, we first perform our calculations on the primitive cell of the bixbyite structure, a body-centered cubic lattice (space group Ia3, No. 206) with a basis containing 8 formula units, i.e., 40 atoms. Defects behaving as acceptors are then studied using the bixbyite conventional cell, containing 16 formula units, i.e., 80 atoms. An energy cutoff of 400 eV was used for the plane-wave basis set. For structure relaxation and total energy calculations, the Brillouin zone of the primitive and conventional cells was sampled using a $3 \times 3 \times 3$ and a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ Monkhorst-Pack (MP) grid, respectively.$^{18}$ Atomic relaxations were made until residual forces on the atoms were less than 0.01 eV/Å and total energies were converged to within 1 meV.

The bixbyite structure can be obtained from the fluorite structure by removing one fourth of the anion atoms, i.e., one fourth of the O atoms in the present case. As shown in Fig. 1, the V atoms in V$_2$O$_3$ occupy two inequivalent Wyckoff sites, $b$ (site symmetry S6) and $d$ (site symmetry C2), and have a sixfold O coordination in a distorted octahedral configuration (as opposed to the fluorite structure). Four of the V atoms occupy $b$ sites, and 12 occupy $d$ sites. This means that there are two possible inequivalent positions to substitute a V atom with a dopant atom. Note that a previous study shows that in the case of rare earth oxides with the bixbyite structure, if the substituting cation is larger than the host cation the dopant prefers the $b$-site, while the $d$-site is preferred if the substituting cation is instead smaller.$^{19}$ We also look into this question further down.

**III. RESULT**

By performing full optimization of the lattice constant and atomic positions using the HSE06 hybrid functional, we obtain a calculated lattice parameter of 9.287 Å. This is in
very good agreement with the experimental value of 9.395 Å.6 First-principles calculations are reported in Refs. 6 and 7, but the calculated lattice parameters are not indicated, so a comparison is not possible. We find −10.43 eV for the enthalpy of formation of V2O3 in its bixbyite structure, which is 0.07 eV per formula unit higher than the enthalpy of formation we obtain for V2O3 in the corundum structure. This is in line with the findings in the first studies reporting bixbyite-V2O3 as a metastable polymorph of vanadium sesquioxide. In those studies, it is found that the bixbyite phase is about 0.09 eV per formula unit less stable than the corundum phase.5,7 It is also shown through quasiharmonic phonon calculations that the bixbyite phase is dynamically stable.6

Our HSE06 calculations indicate that bixbyite V2O3 is an indirect gap semiconductor, with the valence band maximum (VBM) at the Γ point and the conduction band minimum (CBM) at the H point, and a fundamental gap of 1.61 eV. The optical gap has a value of 1.98 eV and is located at the H point, although the optical gap at other k-points is almost the same. Thus, the onset of optical absorption in this material should be rather clear in experiment. For some applications, such as light absorber layers, it is the optical gap that is relevant. Figure 2 shows the band structure of bixbyite V2O3 along high symmetry lines. Experimentally, the optical gap of bixbyite V2O3 colloidal nanocrystals has been reported in Ref. 8, where UV-vis spectroscopy absorbance indicates a direct gap of 1.29 eV.

There can be several reasons for the discrepancy between our result and experiment. In Ref. 8, it is indicated that the nanocrystals have a structure that is closer to the fluorite structure, due to the filling of the oxygen vacancies in the original bixbyite structure and present a uniform lattice expansion with respect to the latter. Hence, the observed gap in the nanocrystals may not be directly comparable to our calculated results because a lattice expansion usually results in a gap reduction, and the oxygen interstitials may give rise to impurity states in the gap, resulting again in an apparently smaller gap compared to the bulk bixbyite gap. On the other hand, it appears that the HSE06 functional tends to overestimate the band gap of vanadium oxides. This is the case for VO2 and V2O5,20,21 and it might also be the case for V2O3, further contributing to the mismatch between our result and the reported value. However, it is important to recognize that the exact value of the band gap has very little bearing on the energy levels of the acceptor impurities we study in this work.

We note that the ground state structure of the bixbyite phase of V2O3 is found to be canted antiferromagnetic, with a phase transition to a paramagnetic phase around 50 K.6 Focusing on applications at room temperature, or at temperatures slightly above that, we can safely ignore magnetic effects in our calculations and consider bixbyite V2O3 as paramagnetic.

The mobility of the holes in a p-type material depends on the hole effective mass matrix. The bixbyite structure is cubic, so the corresponding matrix at the VBM is isotropic and it suffices to calculate the hole effective mass along one direction. We find a value of 6.807 along the Γ − X direction. This value is somewhat high, but the high doping concentrations considered here can nevertheless lead to reasonably good conductivities.

The position of the CBM and VBM of a material with respect to its branch-point energy (BPE) can indicate whether it is n- and/or p-type dopable.22 If the BPE falls high up in the band gap, or above the CBM, it is a good indication that the material is easily n-type dopable. Conversely, if the BPE falls low in the band gap or below the VBM, then the material will be easily doped p-type. The BPE can be calculated as a weighted average of the midgap energies over the Brillouin zone using the formula

\[
E_{BP} = \frac{1}{2N_k} \sum_{k} \left[ \frac{1}{N_{CB}} \sum_i e_{ci}(k) + \frac{1}{N_{VB}} \sum_i e_{vi}(k) \right],
\]

where \(e_{ci}(k)\) and \(e_{vi}(k)\) is the energy of the i-th conduction (valence) band at point \(k\), \(N_k\) is the number of points in the \(k\)-point mesh, and \(N_{CB}\) and \(N_{VB}\) are the number of conduction and valence bands considered. The number of valence and conduction bands depends on the number of valence electrons in the primitive cell (excluding d electrons) and is determined following the scaling rule introduced in the work of Schleife et al.23

In Fig. 3, on the left side, we plot the band edges of V2O3 with respect to the BPE, setting the latter to 0 eV. One can readily see that it can be considered as a p-type dopable oxide. Hence, it should be possible to find dopants leading to

FIG. 1. Schematic illustration of atomic arrangements in V-O octahedra for V(b) and V(d) sublattices. The oxygen atoms are denoted by solid red circles, V atoms by green circles, and missing oxygen atoms by open circles.

FIG. 2. HSE06 calculated Band structure of bixbyite V2O3.
As already mentioned, the formation energies of the defects are calculated using the HSE06 hybrid functional. For a defect X in charge state q, the formation energy is given by

\[ E_f(X^q) = E_{tot}(X^q) - E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) - \sum_i n_i \mu_i + q(E_F + E_v + \Delta V), \]

(2)

where \( E_{tot}(X^q) \) is the total energy of the cell containing the defect and \( E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) \) is the total energy of the pure \( V_2O_3 \). \( n_i \) is the number of atoms of type \( i \) added or removed from the cell (\( n_i < 0 \) if the atom is removed, and \( n_i > 0 \) if the atom is added), and \( \mu_i \) is the corresponding chemical potential. \( E_F \) is the Fermi energy, measured with respect to the VBM, \( E_v \), of the pure system and varies between zero and the gap value. \( \Delta V \) is the shift required to align the potentials in the undoped and doped cells for the purpose of band alignment. It was shown by Lyons and co-workers that the potential alignment can also correct the finite cell size effects on the formation energies of a charged defect, with an accuracy comparable to that of other methods. Here, we align the potentials in the defect and pure cells by calculating the \( \Delta V \) following the procedure used in Ref. 29.

The formation energies depend on the chemical potentials, which in turn depend on the experimental growth conditions. For V and O, we take the limits imposed by the formation of \( V_2O_3 \) in the bixbyite phase. The formation of \( V_2O_3 \) is accomplished by oxygen, i.e., oxygen vacancy defects. Indeed, this may result in a net electron deficiency and might give rise to acceptor levels. Thus, we prefer the acceptor, a donor, or remain electrically neutral. Hence, we consider first a vanadium vacancy, which we denote \( V^V \) vacancy.

\[ E_{tot}(X^q) = E_{tot}(X^q) - E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) - \sum_i n_i \mu_i + q(E_F + E_v + \Delta V), \]

(2)

where \( E_{tot}(X^q) \) is the total energy of the cell containing the defect and \( E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) \) is the total energy of the pure \( V_2O_3 \). \( n_i \) is the number of atoms of type \( i \) added or removed from the cell (\( n_i < 0 \) if the atom is removed, and \( n_i > 0 \) if the atom is added), and \( \mu_i \) is the corresponding chemical potential. \( E_F \) is the Fermi energy, measured with respect to the VBM, \( E_v \), of the pure system and varies between zero and the gap value. \( \Delta V \) is the shift required to align the potentials in the undoped and doped cells for the purpose of band alignment. It was shown by Lyons and co-workers that the potential alignment can also correct the finite cell size effects on the formation energies of a charged defect, with an accuracy comparable to that of other methods. Here, we align the potentials in the defect and pure cells by calculating the \( \Delta V \) following the procedure used in Ref. 29.

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Table I compares the atomic radii of Mg, Sc, and Y with A substituting V in the bixbyite conventional 80-atom cell. This represents an

\[ \Delta R_{AV} = R_A - R_V \]

where \( R_A \) and \( R_V \) are the atomic radius of substitutional impurity, and V atom, respectively.

\[ \Delta E_{tot}(X^q) = E_{tot}(X^q) - E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) \]

where \( E_{tot}(X^q) \) is the total energy of a donor with respect to the BPE, and \( E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) \) is the total energy of the pure \( V_2O_3 \).

\[ \Delta E_{tot}(X^q) = E_{tot}(X^q) - E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) - \sum_i n_i \mu_i + q(E_F + E_v + \Delta V), \]

(2)

where \( n_i \) is the number of atoms of type \( i \) added or removed from the cell (\( n_i < 0 \) if the atom is removed, and \( n_i > 0 \) if the atom is added), and \( \mu_i \) is the chemical potential of the cell containing the defect and \( E_{tot}(\text{bulk}) \) is the total energy of the pure \( V_2O_3 \).
impurity concentration of 1.25 at. %, which corresponds to the typical concentrations in n- and p-type transparent conducting oxides. In Fig. 5, we compare the transition levels of these two defects in the primitive and conventional bixbyite cells, both in V-rich [Fig. 5(a)] and O-rich [Fig. 5(b)] conditions. We immediately see that Mg\textsubscript{V} becomes a shallow acceptor at this concentration, with the \( \epsilon(0/-) \) lying below the VBM. Furthermore, its formation energies remain low, while those of V\textsubscript{O} (not shown) remain high. Thus, we predict Mg-doped V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} to be a stable p-type conductor. The behavior of the V\textsubscript{V} defect is somewhat different. In the bixbyite primitive cell, the \( \epsilon(0/-) \) transition level of this defect (not seen in Fig. 4, shown in Fig. 5) is slightly above the \( \epsilon(0/-2) \) transition level, with both transition levels almost touching. As shown in Fig. 5, in the conventional cell \( \epsilon(0/-) \) lies clearly below \( \epsilon(0/-2) \), at an energy 0.14 eV above the VBM. Thus, as an acceptor, V\textsubscript{V} is shallower in the conventional cell by 0.05 eV compared to the primitive cell.

For a more complete description of the system studied, Fig. 6 plots the projected density of states (PDOS) for V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} and Mg-doped V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}. From Fig. 6(a), it can be seen that the character of the VBM and CBM of V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} is V\textsubscript{3d}, and V\textsubscript{t2g}, respectively. Note that the fact that the VBM and CBM consists of V 3d states appears to be typical of V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}, occurring also in its other phases. This is thought to be linked to its Mott-Hubbard insulator behavior at low temperature. In Mg-doped V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}, the Fermi level lies below the VBM, as expected. This leads to the empty states seen as a small shoulder with partial Mg character just above the Fermi level.

Finally, Table II summarizes the cation – O bond lengths in each defect system before and after optimization. Fig. 7 shows the relaxed positions of the V\textsubscript{V} and Mg\textsubscript{V} in V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}. All substitutional atoms prefer to sit at the b-site (cf. Table I), where, because of symmetry, the A-O bond lengths of all six nearest neighbors are the same. Hence, there is only one bond length parameter for the nearest neighbors of each dopant. In the unrelaxed structure, the bond length is 2.00 Å. After optimization of the atomic positions, the bond length changes. Comparing Table II and Table I, we can see that by increasing the atomic radius of atom A (from Mg to Sc and then to Y), the A-O bond length increases.

IV. CONCLUSION

We report on the electronic structure and defect properties of V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} as a novel p-type conductor. We study Mg, Y, and Sc as impurities substituting V, as well as oxygen and vanadium vacancies as native defects. Our DFT calculations

FIG. 4. Calculated intrinsic defect and impurity formation energies as a function of the Fermi energy under (a) V-rich, and (b) O-rich conditions. The calculations are performed for the primitive cell of V\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} using the HSE06 functional.

FIG. 5. The effect of diluting the defect concentration on the position of the transition level. The calculated formation energies of Mg\textsubscript{V} and V\textsubscript{V} as a function of the Fermi energy under (a) V-rich, and (b) O-rich conditions with HSE06.
Furthermore, we find that oxygen vacancies are electrically neutral, and hence do not behave as hole-killing defects. Thus, we predict Mg-doped V$_2$O$_3$ to be a $p$-type conductor. We also show that V$_{d}$ acts as a relatively shallow acceptor, with an activation energy of 0.14 eV. Thus, it may also lead to $p$-type conductivity. On the other hand, we find that substitutional Sc and Y (Sc$_{V}$ and Y$_{V}$) behave as deep donors.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the FWO-Vlaanderen through Project No. G.0150.13 and a GOA fund from the University of Antwerp. The computational resources and services used in this work were provided by the VSC (Flemish Supercomputer Center) and the HPC infrastructure of the University of Antwerp (CalcUA), both funded by the Hercules Foundation and the Flemish Government–department EWI.


$^{30}$A. Stadler, Materials 5, 661 (2012).


33Note that in Ref. 1 the amount of exact exchange used for the hybrid functional calculations is 0.325, while in the present work we use the standard value of 0.25. For this reason the band gaps and band alignment are somewhat different in that work.