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Phys. Rev. Lett. **127**, 186401 — Published 26 October 2021

DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevLett.127.186401](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.127.186401)

1 **Layer-dependent pressure effect on electronic structures of**
2 **2D black phosphorus**

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4 Shenyang Huang¹⁺, Yang Lu^{2*+}, Fanjie Wang¹, Yuchen Lei¹, Chaoyu Song¹, Jiasheng
5 Zhang¹, Qiaoxia Xing¹, Chong Wang¹, Yuangang Xie¹, Lei Mu¹, Guowei Zhang³, Hao
6 Yan⁴, Bin Chen² & Hugen Yan^{1,5*}

7
8 ¹State Key Laboratory of Surface Physics, Key Laboratory of Micro and Nano -
9 Photonic Structures (Ministry of Education), and Department of Physics, Fudan
10 University, Shanghai 200433, China

11 ²Center for High Pressure Science & Technology Advanced Research, Shanghai
12 201203, China

13 ³Institute of Flexible Electronics, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an 710072,
14 China

15 ⁴CAS Key Laboratory of Experimental Study under Deep-sea Extreme Conditions,
16 Institute of Deep-Sea Science and Engineering, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Sanya
17 572000, China

18 ⁵Collaborative Innovation Center of Advanced Microstructures, Nanjing 210093, China.

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21 ⁺These authors contributed equally to this work.

22
23 *E-mail: hgyan@fudan.edu.cn (H. Y.), yang.lu@hpstar.ac.cn (Y. L.)
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1 **Through Infrared spectroscopy, we systematically study the pressure effect on**
2 **electronic structures of few-layer black phosphorus (BP) with layer number**
3 **ranging from 2 to 13. We reveal that the pressure-induced shift of optical**
4 **transitions exhibits strong layer-dependence. In sharp contrast to the bulk**
5 **counterpart which undergoes a semiconductor to semimetal transition under ~1.8**
6 **GPa, the bandgap of 2 L increases with increasing pressure until beyond 2 GPa.**
7 **Meanwhile, for a sample with a given layer number, the pressure-induced shift**
8 **also differs for transitions with different indices. Through the tight-binding model**
9 **in conjunction with a Morse potential for the interlayer coupling, this layer- and**
10 **transition-index-dependent pressure effect can be fully accounted. Our study**
11 **paves a way for versatile van der Waals engineering of two-dimensional BP.**

12

1 Recently, the renaissance of black phosphorus (BP) as an emerging layered two-
2 dimensional (2D) semiconductor has attracted tremendous research interests [1-3].
3 Different from graphene and transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs), BP has a
4 direct bandgap ranging from 0.35 eV (bulk) to 1.7 eV (monolayer) [4,5], which, in
5 conjunction with the remarkable in-plane anisotropy, makes BP a promising candidate
6 for versatile opto-electronic devices [6-10].

7 Pressure can readily induce changes of lattice constants, especially the interlayer
8 distance in layered 2D materials, hence modify the electronic properties of materials
9 [11], such as semiconductor to metal transitions [12,13], bandgap opening in gapless
10 few-layer graphene [14], and band structure engineering in van der Waals
11 heterostructures [15] and Moire superlattices [16,17]. Previous studies show that
12 pressure induces a semiconductor-to-metal transition at ~ 1.8 GPa on bulk BP [18-20],
13 which suggests that the band gap shrinks with increasing pressure. It is tempting to infer
14 that even for thin layers, the band gap also shrinks under pressure and eventually closes
15 up to become a metal [21]. However, except for a few studies on pressure-induced
16 lattice structure transition in thin layers [22-24], there is no experimental report on the
17 electronic structure up to date.

18 Here we systematically investigate the pressure effect on band structures of
19 atomically thin BP (2-13 layer) through Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy.
20 To our surprise, the pressure effect exhibits strong layer-dependence, which strongly
21 deviates from the bulk counterpart. For instance, with the pressure increasing to 2 GPa,
22 the bandgap of 2 L BP is enlarged rather than shrinking, while the bandgap of the bulk
23 is already closed at such pressure. Besides, due to the interlayer interaction, there are
24 multiple optical resonances in few-layer BP, and pressure effect on these optical
25 resonances also varies systematically. Through a tight-binding model in conjunction
26 with a Morse potential, the quantitative evolution of the interlayer overlapping integrals
27 is captured, and the physical mechanism responsible for the layer-dependent pressure
28 effect is unveiled. Our work highlights the critical role played by the tunable interlayer
29 coupling in van der Waals materials.

1

2 In our study, few-layer BP was mechanically exfoliated from the bulk crystal onto
3 polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), then was transferred onto the diamond surface of a
4 diamond anvil cell (DAC), as shown in Fig. 1(a). The layer number and crystal
5 orientation were identified through infrared (IR) extinction spectrum [4,5]. The applied
6 pressure was monitored by the shift of the photoluminescence (PL) peak of a ruby ball
7 placed in the cell. To avoid degradation of few-layer BP, silicone oil was chosen as an
8 inert pressure transmitting medium (PTM) (For details on the experiment procedure,
9 see Methods in Supplemental Materials [25]). It should be noted that PTM usually plays
10 a critical role in pressure experiments on 2D materials. It could compromise the
11 reproducibility of experimental results [29] if the PTM is not optimized. While in our
12 study, the pressure is limited in a moderate range (< 4 GPa), the frequently used PTM
13 is well hydrostatic [30], hence the PTM will not affects our results much and we can
14 treat it as an ideal media.

15 Figure. 1(b) is the photograph of a thin BP flake in the DAC, containing 3 L and 6 L.
16 Figure. 1(d) shows infrared extinction spectra of this sample under different pressure
17 ranging from 0 GPa (ambient pressure) to 3.22 GPa (the spectra are offset vertically for
18 clarity). Three main peaks can be clearly identified (see Fig. 1(d)), which result from
19 the exciton absorption of 3 L and 6 L BP, labelled as E_{11} (the exciton associated with
20 the first valance band to the first conduction band transition, namely the optical bandgap,
21 see Fig. 1(c)) and E_{22} (the second valance band to the second conduction band). The
22 single particle bandgap has a higher energy than the exciton peak position, with a
23 separation as the exciton binding energy [31,32]. Since the pressure effect on single
24 particle bandgap plays a major role when the pressure is only moderate [33], for
25 simplicity, we neglect the possible change of the exciton binding energy and attribute
26 the band effect to the shift of the exciton peak position. Figure. 1(e) plots the peak
27 positions of E_{11} of 3 L, 6 L, E_{22} of 6 L and the bandgap of bulk BP versus pressure. As
28 we can see, with increasing pressure, the E_{11} of 3 L exhibits a non-monotonic shift,
29 which undergoes redshift from the beginning and then blueshift for pressure above \sim

1 0.6 GPa, in stark contrast to the shift of the bandgap in bulk BP (lower panel of Fig.
2 1(e)). Meanwhile, E_{11} of 6 L shows a contrasted behavior as well, exhibiting a nonlinear
3 redshift below ~ 1 GPa and then almost no shift from 1 GPa to 2.92 GPa. The different
4 shift of E_{11} in 3 L and 6 L indicates the pressure effect on the bandgap is strongly layer-
5 dependent. Besides, the pressure-induced shift of E_{22} in 6 L is dramatically different
6 from E_{11} as well, exhibiting almost no change below 1 GPa but a blueshift above 1 GPa.

7 This transition-index dependence of the pressure effect is further verified in an 11 L
8 BP shown in Fig. 2(a), where three optical resonances (E_{11} , E_{22} , E_{33}) can be observed.
9 As shown in Fig. 2(b), E_{11} undergoes redshift nonlinearly with increasing pressure until
10 fully enters the silicone oil absorption region for pressure above ~ 1 GPa. In contrast,
11 E_{33} firstly redshifts below ~ 0.5 GPa and then blueshifts above ~ 0.5 GPa, very similar
12 to E_{11} of 3 L. The pressure-induced shift of E_{22} is in-between E_{11} and E_{33} , which
13 redshifts nonlinearly below 1 GPa and then slightly blueshifts, close to the behavior of
14 E_{11} for the 6 L. In fact, this layer- and transition-index-dependent pressure effect is
15 systematic. Figure. S2 shows more data with different layer number ranging from 2 to
16 13. Besides the pressure-induced peak position shift, E_{11} (also E_{22}) of 6 L is barely
17 discernable under 3.22 GPa, as shown in Fig. 1(d), which could result from the direct
18 to indirect bandgap transition [33,34]. However, E_{11} of 3L is still discernible under this
19 pressure, implying pressure-induced direct to indirect bandgap transition also exhibits
20 strong layer-dependence, which deserves further investigation. In this study, we mainly
21 investigate the pressure effect on the electronic structure in the direct bandgap regime.
22 Bearing in mind of larger error bars for extraction of the peak position in higher pressure
23 (especially higher than 2.5 GPa), we only focus on the pressure below 2.5 GPa in the
24 following analysis.

25
26 Now we can take a closer look at the mechanism responsible for this layer- and
27 transition-index dependence of the pressure effect. As mentioned earlier, multiple
28 optical resonances in the same few-layer BP are due to the interlayer coupling. The
29 energy separation of them is proportional to the interlayer coupling [35], which can

offer us an unambiguous signature to monitor such coupling under pressure. According to previous studies [4,5], the transition energy of optical resonances in N -layer BP can be well described through the tight-binding model:

$$E_{mn}^N(P) = E_{g_0}(P) - \gamma(P) \cos\left(\frac{n\pi}{N+1}\right) \quad (1)$$

where $E_{g_0}(P)$ is the monolayer bandgap at pressure P , n is the subband index, $\gamma(P)$ is the difference of overlapping integrals for conduction band (γ_c) and valence band (γ_v), which is proportional to the interlayer hopping parameter (t^\perp) [35]. From Eq. (1), $\gamma(P)$ can be easily extracted through monitoring the peak separation between optical resonances in the same layer N but with different subband indices (n and m) with the following equation:

$$\gamma(P) = [E_{mn}^N(P) - E_{mm}^N(P)] / [\cos\left(\frac{m\pi}{N+1}\right) - \cos\left(\frac{n\pi}{N+1}\right)] \quad (2)$$

Figure. 3(b) plots the relative change of g , i.e., $Dg = g(P) - g(0)$, versus P , extracted from $E_{22}-E_{11}$ of 6, 7, 9 L and $E_{33}-E_{22}$ of 11 L. The enhancement of γ with increasing pressure is unambiguous in spite of the error bar. This is consistent with the expectation, since pressure can decrease the interlayer distance d (as shown in Fig. 3(a)). As we can see in Fig. 3(b), the relative change of γ can be as large as 0.32 ± 0.08 eV under 1.92 GPa, corresponding to a remarkable change of $(18 \pm 4)\%$ ($\gamma(0)$ is 1.76 eV under ambient pressure [5]). According to our previous studies, only $\sim 5\%$ change of interlayer interaction was achieved by biaxial in-plane strain or thermal expansion [36,37]. Apparently, compared to those tuning schemes, pressure is the most efficient way to tune the interlayer interaction in BP. It should be noted that $g(P)$ extracted from samples with different layer number shows little difference with current error bars, suggesting thickness-independent layer distance under pressure. Hence, for simplicity, we assume no layer-dependence for $g(P)$ in the subsequent analysis.

More quantitatively, we can make use of Morse potential which is typically employed to model interatomic forces in molecules and is also applied for the interlayer

1 interaction in TMDCs, as reported in recent studies [38]. Morse potential is written as
2 $U(d) = U_{\text{depth}} [1 - \exp(-(d - d_{\text{eq}})/d_{\text{width}})]^2$, where U_{depth} is the depth of the potential, d_{eq} is
3 the equilibrium distance (here can be regarded as the interlayer distance without
4 external pressure), and d_{width} is the width of the potential. Through $P(d) = -\frac{\partial U}{S \partial d}$,
5 where S is the basal area of BP, the pressure as a function of interlayer distance d can
6 be obtained (see Supplemental Information). Now let us revisit γ , which is mainly
7 determined by the interlayer hopping parameter t^\perp (see Fig. 3(a)). Generally, the hopping
8 parameter is scaled as d^2 [39]. However, other models are adopted as well. Previous
9 studies reveal that the interlayer hopping parameter can exhibit an exponential decay
10 with d in bilayer graphene [40]. Here we also take the exponential form for γ , i.e.,
11 $\gamma(d) = \gamma_0 e^{-(d-d_{\text{eq}})/d_0}$, where γ_0 is γ under 0 GPa and d_0 is a characteristic length.
12 Without loss of generality and for simplicity, we assume that d_0 is equal to d_{width} , as has
13 been done in ref [38]. Then the relationship between γ and P reads:

$$14 \quad \gamma(P) = \frac{\gamma_0}{2} * (1 + \sqrt{1 + \frac{P}{P_{\text{coh}}}}) \quad (3)$$

15 where P_{coh} is termed as cohesive pressure, representing the threshold pressure to be
16 overcome in mechanical exfoliation of BP layers (details in Supplemental Information).
17 Since γ_0 is known, here only P_{coh} is to be determined. We use Eq. (3) to globally fit
18 $\Delta\gamma$ shown in Fig. 3(b). The overall trend of the model fits well with the experiment
19 data, and P_{coh} is obtained as 2.4 ± 1 GPa, comparable to those obtained in TMDCs [38].
20

21 With the obtained relation between the interlayer coupling and the pressure, the
22 pressure effect on intralayer bonds can be accounted as well. According to previous
23 studies [35], due to the absence of the interlayer coupling, monolayer bandgap is mainly
24 determined by two hopping parameters labelled as t_1'' and t_2'' (see Fig. 3(a)).
25 Besides, our previous studies have shown that the thin BP flake obtained through dry

1 transferring is in good contact with the substrate [36,37]. Moreover, giving the small
2 cross section on the side of a thin BP (noting the force $F=PS$, with S as the side area),
3 it is reasonable to assume that when pressure is not large (as in our case), the thin BP
4 flake always sticks tightly to the diamond surface and the in-plane lattice constants stay
5 the same (the diamond surface has almost no deformation). This is also consistent with
6 the scenario of graphene and quantum wells supported on substrates under pressure
7 [41,42]. Based on this assumption, we know the pressure effect on E_{g0} is mainly due to
8 the change of t_2'' , since the corresponding bond is out-of-plane, as shown in Fig. 3a.
9 More specifically, with an increasing pressure, the monolayer thickness D (see Fig. 3(a))
10 decreases. As a result, t_2'' is strengthened to induce an increase in E_{g0} . This is
11 consistent with theoretical calculations of monolayer BP under normal strain [33,43].
12 To quantify E_{g0} dependence on P , we can make use of Morse potential as well. It should
13 be noted that there is a covalence bond between atoms connected by t_2'' , and the
14 coupling between them is much stronger than the interlayer coupling, suggesting a
15 larger P_{coh} . When $P \ll P_{\text{coh}}$, as in our case, E_{g0} will change linearly with P (refer to
16 Eq. (3)) as follows:

$$17 \quad \Delta E_{g0}(P) = aP \quad (4)$$

18 where $\Delta E_{g0}(P)$ is the relative change of E_{g0} , a is the changing rate, which is
19 presumably positive. According to the x-ray diffraction study of few-layer BP [44], the
20 pressure-induced change of the lattice constant along out-of-plane ($D+d$) shows no
21 difference in different thickness BP. Moreover, as mentioned above, the change of the
22 interlayer distance (d) also shows no layer-dependence. Hence, it is reasonable to
23 assume that the pressure-induced change of the intralayer height (D) has no layer-
24 dependence as well, suggesting a in Eq. (4) is the same for different thickness BP.
25 Based on these assumptions, we can gain some interesting insights. For example, the
26 pressure-induced shift in E_{11} of 3 L, E_{22} of 7 L and E_{33} of 11 L should be the same, since

1 $\cos[n\rho/(N+1)]$ is the same in these optical transitions (see Eq. (1)). Indeed, this is
 2 what we have observed in Fig. S3, which further validates our assumptions.

3 Finally, combining Eq. (1), Eq. (3) and Eq. (4), the pressure-induced shift of the
 4 bandgap can be written as:

$$5 \quad \Delta E_{11}^N(P) = aP - \frac{\gamma_0}{2} * \left(\sqrt{1 + \frac{P}{P_{coh}}} - 1 \right) * \cos\left(\frac{1}{N+1} \pi\right) \quad (5)$$

6 which reproduces the experimental results for samples with different thickness up to 50
 7 nm, as shown in Fig. 4. The overall trend of fitting curves agrees well with the
 8 experiment data. A global fitting procedure, which excludes the bulk data in Fig. 4
 9 (reasons will be discussed later), gives a of 0.18 ± 0.03 eV/GPa, corresponding to \sim
 10 1% normal strain on monolayer under 1 GPa [43]. Moreover, P_{coh} is 1.4 ± 0.1 GPa,
 11 which is consistent with the one extracted from $\Delta\gamma$ in Fig. 3b within error bar. Beside
 12 the bandgap, the pressure-induced shift of optical resonances with higher transition-
 13 indices (E_{22} , E_{33}) can be reproduced as well (Shown in Fig. S4). At last, we can clearly
 14 see this layer- and transition-index-dependent pressure effect is due to the change of the
 15 interlayer interaction $\Delta\gamma$.

16 To globally fit the data in Fig. 4 with Eq. (5), there is a basic assumption that samples
 17 with different thickness have the same lattice constants under a given pressure.
 18 Intuitively, this can be satisfied for few-layer and thin films, since they can stick to the
 19 diamond surface equally well. However, for even thicker samples, like the bulk one
 20 with thickness of 1 μm in Fig. 4, the force induced by the pressure from the side of the
 21 flake can be large enough to loose the contact to the diamond surface and the overall
 22 pressure effect turns to be truly hydrostatic. In other words, besides the normal strain,
 23 there is additional in-plane compressive strain in the bulk BP. As demonstrated
 24 previously, such strain also shrinks the bandgap [36]. Therefore, the bandgap of the
 25 bulk under hydrostatic pressure decreases faster than the one under normal strain. This

1 explains the dramatic deviation of the bulk sample from others in Fig. 4, even though
2 the bandgap of the bulk is almost the same as the 50 nm thick film if they are under the
3 same condition (e.g. at ambient pressure), as shown in the IR extinction spectrum (See
4 Fig. S5). The bandgap of the bulk redshifts linearly with pressure (shift rate is 0.19 eV
5 /GPa, see Fig. 4), and is ultimately closed at ~ 1.8 GPa, which is fully consistent with
6 previous studies in bulk BP with truly hydrostatic pressure [18]. The different
7 conditions of the bulk and thin film under pressure were further verified by monitoring
8 the phonon frequency through Raman spectroscopy (See Fig. S5). If we regard the bulk
9 sample is under hydrostatic pressure, few-layer and thin films of BP experience non-
10 hydrostatic one, which is more like a uniaxial strain normal to the 2D plane. The
11 substrate plays a very important role and tightly holds the few-layer BP along in-plane
12 directions.

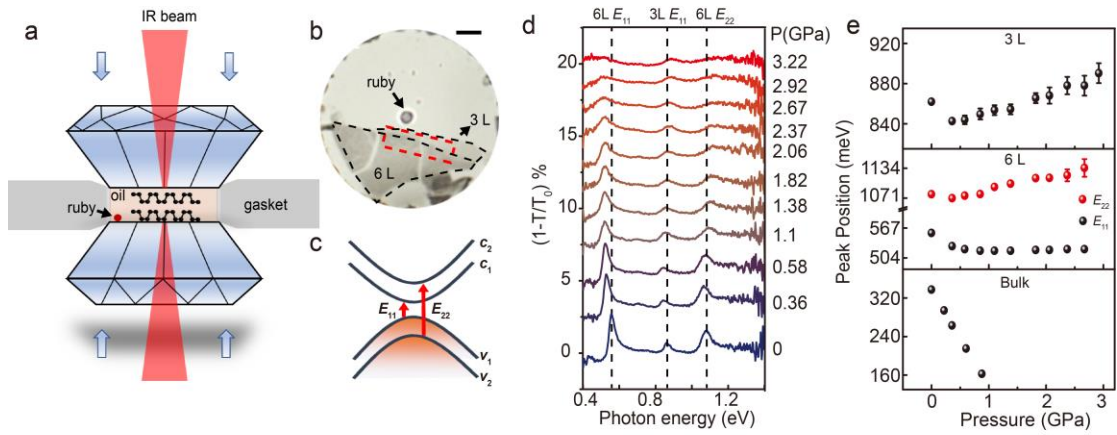
13 In summary, we have systematically investigated the layer-dependent pressure effect
14 on electronic structures of 2D BP. Through the tight-binding model in conjunction with
15 a Morse potential, we have quantified the evolution of the band gap with pressure, and
16 unveiled that the layer-dependent pressure effect on electronic structures of 2D BP is
17 mainly due to the pressure-induced enhancement of the interlayer coupling. Future
18 studies can be devoted to the possible layer-dependent semiconductor-to-metal
19 transition under higher pressure.

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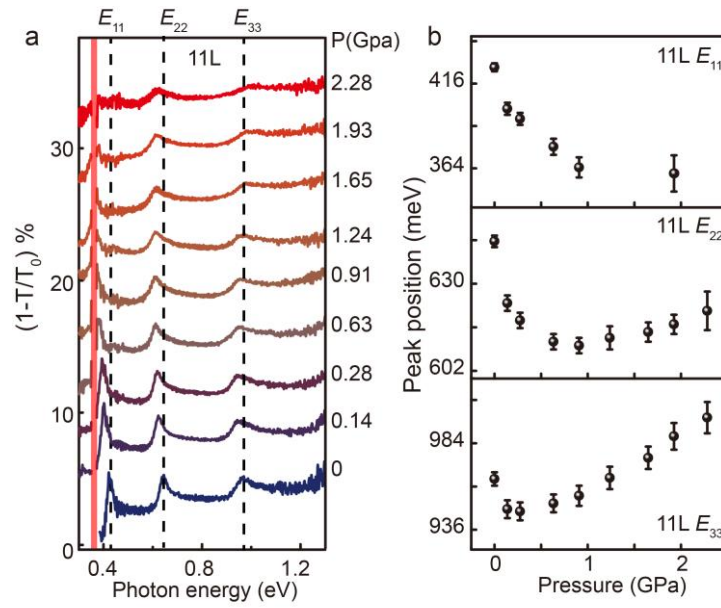


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3 FIG. 1. Pressure effect on electronic structures of few-layer BP. (a) Schematic
 4 illustration of the experimental set-up for band structure engineering in few-layer BP
 5 through diamond anvil cell (DAC). (b) Optical image of a BP flake which contains 3 L
 6 and 6 L in DAC. The region inside the red box is where the IR light shines. Scale bar is
 7 20 μm . (c) Schematic illustration of optical transitions between different subbands in
 8 bilayer BP. (d) Infrared extinction spectra of sample shown in Fig. 1(b) under different
 9 pressure. The spectra are offset vertically for clarity. (e) Peak position versus pressure
 10 for E_{11} of 3 L, E_{11} and E_{22} of 6 L and bandgap of a bulk BP from top to bottom,
 11 respectively. Dashed lines guide to the eye.

12

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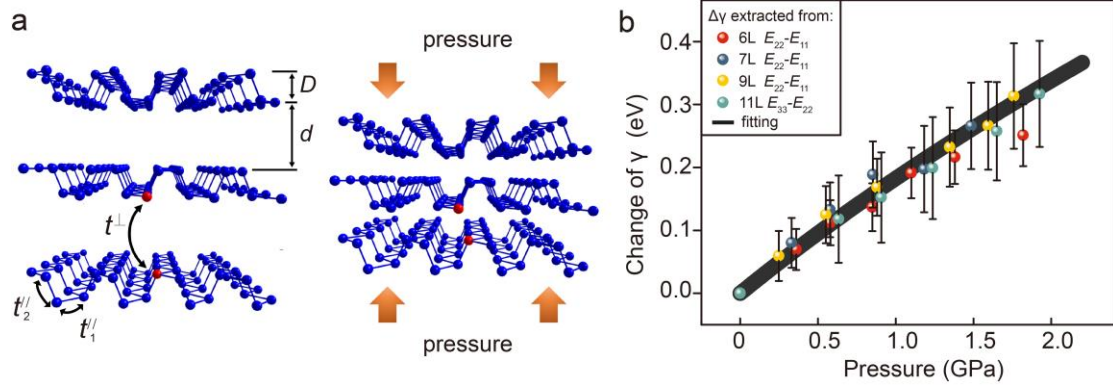


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3 FIG. 2. Pressure effect on electronic structures of 11 L BP. (a) Infrared extinction spectra
 4 of a 11 L BP under different pressure. Silicone oil has strong absorption between 0.35
 5 to 0.37 eV (shaded region). The spectra are offset vertically for clarity. (b) Peak position
 6 versus pressure for E_{11} , E_{22} and E_{33} of 11 L.

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4 FIG. 3. Pressure effect on the interlayer interaction of few-layer BP. (a) Schematic

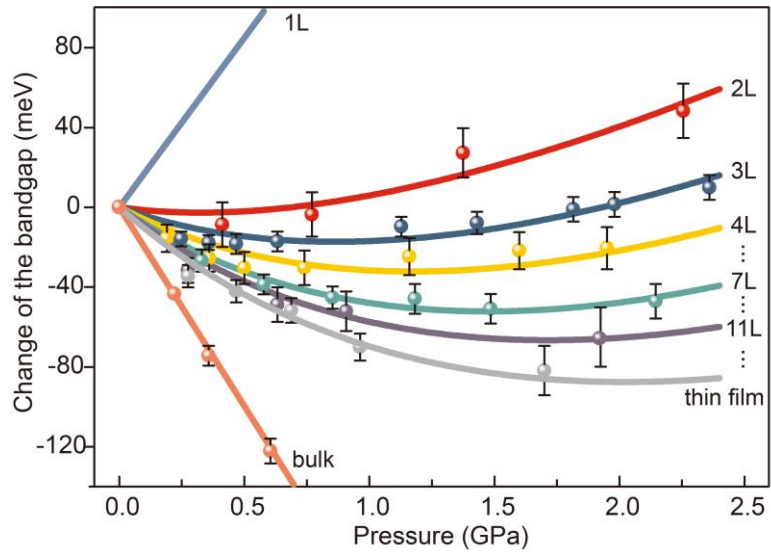
5 illustration for the evolution of the atomic structure of tri-layer BP with pressure. (b)

6 The relative changes of γ versus pressure. Dots are data extracted from $E_{22}-E_{11}$ of 6 L, 77 L, 9 L and $E_{33}-E_{22}$ of 11 L. The solid curve is the fitting based on Eq. (3).

8

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3 FIG. 4. The relative change of optical bandgaps of BP versus pressure. Dots are
4 experiment data and solid curves are the fitting curves. The thickness of the thin film
5 and bulk shown in the figure are ~ 50 nm and $1 \mu\text{m}$, respectively.

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27 **Acknowledgments**

28 H.Y. is grateful to the financial support from the National Key Research and
29 Development Program of China (Grant Nos. 2017YFA0303504 and
30 2016YFA0203900), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant Nos.
31 11874009, 12074085, 11734007), the Natural Science Foundation of Shanghai (Grant
32 No. 20JC1414601) and the Strategic Priority Research Program of Chinese Academy
33 of Sciences (XDB30000000). S.H. acknowledges China Postdoctoral Science
34 Foundation (Grant No. 2020TQ0078). G.Z. acknowledges the financial support from
35 the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 11804398), Natural
36 Science Basic Research Program of Shaanxi (Grant No. 2020JQ-105), and the Joint

- 1 Research Funds of Department of Science & Technology of Shaanxi Province and
- 2 Northwestern Polytechnical University (Grant No. 2020GXLH-Z-026).