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## Ly $\alpha$ emission in high-redshift galaxies<sup>★</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Context.** A significant fraction of the high-redshift galaxies show strong Ly $\alpha$  emission lines. For redshifts  $z > 5$ , most known galaxies belong to this class. However, so far not much is known about the physical structure and nature of these objects.

**Aims.** Our aim is to analyse the Ly $\alpha$  emission in a sample of high-redshift UV-continuum selected galaxies and to derive the physical conditions that determine the Ly $\alpha$  profile and the line strength.

**Methods.** VLT/FORS spectra with a resolution of  $R \approx 2000$  of 16 galaxies in the redshift range of  $z = 2.7$  to 5 are presented. The observed Ly $\alpha$  profiles are compared with theoretical models.

**Results.** The Ly $\alpha$  lines range from pure absorption ( $EW = -17 \text{ \AA}$ ) to strong emission ( $EW = 153 \text{ \AA}$ ). Most Ly $\alpha$  emission lines show an asymmetric profile, and three galaxies have a double-peaked profile. Both types of profiles can be explained by a uniform model consisting of an expanding shell of neutral and ionised hydrogen around a compact starburst region. The broad, blueshifted, low-ionisation interstellar absorption lines indicate a galaxy-scale outflow of the ISM. The strengths of these lines are found to be determined in part by the velocity dispersion of the outflowing medium. We find star-formation rates of these galaxies ranging from  $SFR_{UV} = 1.2$  to  $63.2 M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  uncorrected for dust absorption.

**Conclusions.** The Ly $\alpha$  emission strength of our target galaxies is found to be determined by the amount of dust and the kinematics of the outflowing material.

**Key words.** galaxies: high-redshift – galaxies: ISM – galaxies: emission lines

### 1. Introduction

The 8–10 meter class telescopes and the Hubble Space Telescope have made it feasible to investigate details of the galaxies in the young universe. The majority of the high-redshift galaxies were detected on the basis of their UV colours. Notable examples are the so-called Lyman-break galaxies, which are selected using continuum breaks between 912 and 1216 Å (for a review see Giavalisco 2002). Since a selection by the Lyman break proved to be very efficient in terms of telescope time, a large sample of high-redshift galaxies has been derived. Shapley et al. (2003), e.g., presented the spectra of 798 galaxies at a redshift of  $\approx 3$ . Alternatively, many galaxies, especially in the  $z > 5$  universe, have been found by means of their strong Ly $\alpha$  emission (e.g., Hu et al. 2004), the so-called “Ly $\alpha$  emission line galaxies” (LAEs).

Well-defined gaps in the telluric OH-bands allow one to detect LAEs rather efficiently from their excess in narrow-band filters (e.g., Hu et al. 1998; Kudritzki et al. 2000; Rhoads et al. 2000; Maier et al. 2003; Ouchi et al. 2005; Tapken et al. 2006; Nilsson et al. 2006). The frequency and properties of the LAEs have been used to derive the luminosity function (Hu et al. 2004), the star-formation rate in the early universe (Ajiki et al. 2003),

the epoch of re-ionisation (Rhoads et al. 2004), and led to the discovery of a large-scale structure at  $z \approx 5.7$  (Ouchi et al. 2005). Moreover, their luminosity function can be compared to theoretical models (Haiman & Spaans 1999; Thommes & Meisenheimer 2005; Le Delliou et al. 2005), allowing models of galaxy formation and evolution to be constrained. LAEs are the most distant objects in the universe, to have been detected so far (Iye et al. 2006).

Star-forming galaxies produce huge amounts of Ly $\alpha$  photons by recombination in HII regions that are ionised by young stars (e.g., Charlot & Fall 1993). However, the fact that Ly $\alpha$  is a resonance line makes physical interpretation of the Ly $\alpha$  emission challenging. Many theoretical efforts have been made to treat the radiation transfer of resonance lines, both numerically (e.g., Auer 1968; Adams 1972; Ahn et al. 2001; Richling 2003; Hansen & Oh 2006; Verhamme et al. 2006) and analytically (e.g., Osterbrock 1962; Neufeld 1990). Neutral hydrogen absorbs and re-emits Ly $\alpha$  photons in random directions. As a result the Ly $\alpha$  photons will diffuse in spatial and frequency space (see, e.g., Neufeld 1990). The diffusion in frequency space changes the intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  profile, leading to complex Ly $\alpha$  profile morphologies. The diffusion in space increases the optical path of the Ly $\alpha$  compared to UV-continuum photons. Therefore, any dust distributed uniformly in a neutral medium affects the Ly $\alpha$  photons more strongly than the UV-continuum photons. This could explain the fact that most UV-continuum selected high-redshift

<sup>★</sup> Based on observations (proposals: 69.A-0105(A) and 71.A-0307(A)) obtained at the ESO VLT at Cerro Paranal, Chile, and on observations made with HST ACS (GO proposal: 9502).

galaxies show weak Ly $\alpha$  emission or none at all (Shapley et al. 2003; Noll et al. 2004). As demonstrated by Neufeld (1991) and Hansen & Oh (2006), the spatial distribution of the dust relative to the neutral hydrogen also plays an important role as the Ly $\alpha$  emission can even be less affected by dust than the continuum radiation in a two-phase interstellar medium. Moreover, a large-scale outflow of neutral gas can decrease the number of Ly $\alpha$  resonance scattering (Kunth et al. 1998), if the neutral gas is velocity-shifted with respect to the ionised gas. To conclude, interpretation of the flux, profile, and spatial morphology of the Ly $\alpha$  line is not straightforward. Without further insight into the Ly $\alpha$  emission of star-forming galaxies, the use of LAEs as a tool for constraining models of galaxy formation is limited.

Information about the formation and nature of the Ly $\alpha$  emission in high-redshift galaxies can be derived from the analysis of the UV-restframe continuum, as demonstrated by Shapley et al. (2003). Using average spectra (the so-called composite spectra) of UV-continuum selected high-redshift galaxies, Shapley et al. (2003) and Noll et al. (2004) could show that the strength of the Ly $\alpha$  emission correlates well with other galaxy properties, such as the slope of the continuum or the strength of the interstellar absorption lines. These correlations may be explained by varying amounts of dust and by the kinematics of the host galaxies. Another method for deriving information about the nature of the Ly $\alpha$  emission is to analyse the Ly $\alpha$  profile. Dawson et al. (2002) and Westra et al. (2005) demonstrated that the profile of the Ly $\alpha$  emission can be used to derive properties of the emitting galaxy. The detailed comparison of Ly $\alpha$  profiles with dedicated radiative transfer models can constrain the kinematics of the emitting and neutral ISM. However, the spectra of Shapley et al. (2003) and Noll et al. (2004) had too low a spectral resolution to derive kinematical information from the Ly $\alpha$  profile.

In this paper we analyse a sample of high-redshift UV-continuum selected galaxies in the FORS Deep Field (FDF) to constrain the origin of the Ly $\alpha$  emission, the evolutionary state, and the physical properties of these galaxies. The FORS Deep Field (FDF) is a deep photometric and spectroscopic survey (Appenzeller et al. 2000; Heidt et al. 2003; Noll et al. 2004) carried out with the FORS instruments at the ESO Very Large Telescope (VLT). The analysis of the galaxy sample of this work has made use of the FDF photometric and spectroscopic surveys and the HST-imaging follow-up. In addition  $R \approx 2000$  spectra were obtained, which include the Ly $\alpha$  line. The data are presented in Sect. 2. The properties of the galaxies, including the strength and profile of the Ly $\alpha$  lines, the star-formation rates, and the interstellar absorption lines, are presented in Sect. 3. The Ly $\alpha$  profiles are compared to theoretical models in Sect. 4. The results are discussed in Sect. 5 and the conclusions are given in Sect. 6.

Throughout this paper we adopt  $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.7$ ,  $\Omega_M = 0.3$ , and  $H_0 = 70 \text{ km s}^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^{-1}$ . The magnitudes are given in the Vega system.

## 2. Presentation of the data

### 2.1. Photometric data

The FDF survey consists of deep optical  $U$ ,  $B$ ,  $g$ ,  $R$ ,  $I$  observations obtained with FORS at the VLT and near-infrared  $J$  and  $K_s$  observations obtained with SofI at the ESO-NTT (Heidt et al. 2003). In addition, deep observations with an SDSS  $z$  and a medium-band filter centred at  $8350 \text{ \AA}$  were obtained (Gabasch et al. 2004). The FDF was imaged in the broad-band  $F814W$  filter with the Advanced Camera for Surveys (ACS) on the Hubble

Space Telescope (HST) in autumn 2002. The field was covered with 4 ACS pointings of 40 min exposure each, reaching a  $10\sigma$  limit of 25.6 mag. The data reduction was performed with the standard CALACS<sup>1</sup> pipeline, and the combined final mosaic was produced with the multi-drizzle package (Mutchler et al. 2002). The final combined image has a pixel scale of 0.05 arcsec/pixel.

### 2.2. Target selection for the medium-resolution spectroscopy

The target selection for the medium-resolution spectroscopy was based on the FDF spectroscopic survey (Noll et al. 2004). The FDF spectroscopic survey aimed at obtaining low-resolution spectra ( $R \approx 200$ ) of intrinsically bright galaxies with a photometric redshift (Bender et al. 2001; Gabasch et al. 2004) between  $z \approx 1$  and 5 with a high signal-to-noise ratio ( $\geq 10$ ). Two different selection criteria were applied to select candidates for the medium-resolution spectroscopy from the FDF spectroscopic catalog. First, galaxies with strong Ly $\alpha$  emission were selected. Second, galaxies with bright UV-restframe continuum were added. We included only galaxies whose spectral feature(s) of interest coincide with the wavelength range of the FORS2 grisms 1400V and 1200R and whose expected signal-to-noise ratio was sufficiently high. For the 1400V (1200R) grism, UV-bright continuum galaxies with  $z = 2.3\text{--}3.5$  ( $z = 3.0\text{--}3.5$ ) and  $m_g \leq 24.5 \text{ mag}$  ( $m_R \leq 24.5 \text{ mag}$ ) were selected. Moreover, galaxies with a Ly $\alpha$  emission strength of  $F_{\text{Ly}\alpha} \geq 30 (20) \times 10^{-21} \text{ W m}^{-2}$  at  $z = 3.0\text{--}3.5$  ( $z = 4.5\text{--}5$ ) were included. We also added a few secondary targets selected by their photometric redshifts. Some additional bright objects were included to support the mask positioning during the observation.

### 2.3. Observations and data reduction of the medium-resolution sample

The observations were obtained with FORS2 at the VLT UT4 using the holographic grisms 1400V and 1200R. The spectral resolution was  $R \approx 2000$ . The spectral range of the 1400V (1200R) grism was about 4500 to 5800 (5700 to 7300)  $\text{\AA}$ . The central wavelengths depend on the target position in the focal plane. All data were collected in service mode using one single MXU mask for each grism. The FORS2 detector, which consists of two  $2k \times 4k$  MIT CCDs, was used in the 100 kHz readout mode with high gain. A  $2 \times 2$  binning was performed during the readout. The observations with the 1400V grism were carried out during August 2002. Eight single exposures with each 47 min integration time were taken, resulting in a total integration time of 6.25 h. The average seeing was  $0.81''$ . The observations with the 1200R grism were carried out during July–September 2003. Fourteen single exposures with a total integration time of 10.05 h were obtained. One exposure was excluded from the reduction process, because of moonlight contamination. Therefore, the total effective integration time was 9.45 h. The average seeing was  $0.92''$ .

The raw data were reduced using the MIDAS-based FORS pipeline (Noll et al. 2004; Tapken 2005). The two-dimensional spectra were flat-fielded with a dome flatfield and were wavelength-calibrated using calibration spectra of gas discharge lamps. One-dimensional spectra were extracted with a signal-to-noise optimising algorithm (Horne 1986). A first flux calibration, which included the correction for extinction by the atmosphere, was performed using spectra of standard stars obtained during

<sup>1</sup> [www.stsci.edu/hst/acs/analysis](http://www.stsci.edu/hst/acs/analysis)

the same night. The wavelength calibration was verified and, if necessary, corrected by determining the position of sky lines. The one-dimensional spectra were then co-added according to their weighted signal-to-noise. The efficiency of holographic gratings strongly varies with the angle of incidence and thus with the object's position in the telescope's focal plane. Therefore, the low-resolution spectra were used to improve the flux calibration. Some objects were observed only on the medium-resolution spectra. In these cases the varying response function was corrected using the sky spectrum. For this, the sky was extracted from all slits and was divided by the sky in those slits, which had almost the same position as the corresponding slits used in the standard star calibration exposures. In total, 43 objects have been reduced, and six objects were included in both setups. The majority of the 43 objects are galaxies. Only one object is classified as a quasar (QSO Q0103-260 or FDF-4683), and one as a star (FDF-0511). For more information on the 43 objects see Tapken (2005).

### 3. Results

Since the low-resolution spectra have a broader wavelength range and consequently more spectral features, the redshift for all objects with low-resolution spectra available was taken from the spectroscopic catalog of Noll et al. (2004). FDF-1267 coincided by chance with the slit of a primary target and, therefore, has no corresponding low-resolution spectra. The medium-resolution spectrum shows a strong emission line that has been identified as likely Ly $\alpha$  emission, due to the non-detection of other emission lines and the asymmetric line profile. The redshift of this object is derived from the Ly $\alpha$  emission line. FDF-8304 was selected because its spectral features were expected to coincide with the spectral range of the grism based on the photometric redshift of  $z_{\text{phot}} = 4.02$ . The medium-resolution spectrum shows a Ly $\alpha$  emission line and several low ionisation interstellar absorption lines. In this case again the redshift is derived from the Ly $\alpha$  line.

Thirty galaxies of the medium-resolution sample have a redshift of  $z > 2$ . Twelve of these 30 galaxies having a sufficiently high continuum SNR for studying their absorption line spectra as discussed in Mehlert et al. (2006). In the present paper the analysis of the medium-resolution spectra is restricted to 16 of the 30 galaxies, where (a) the medium-resolution spectrum contains the Ly $\alpha$  line, either in emission or absorption and where (b) the galaxy is included in the FDF photometric catalog (Heidt et al. 2003). Their redshift, apparent magnitude  $m_R$ , spectral coverage, and average continuum signal-to-noise ratio are listed in Table 1. These 16 galaxies are referred to, in the following, as the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample. This sample covers a redshift range of  $z \approx 2.7$  to 5.

In addition to Ly $\alpha$  the galaxies show spectral features such as interstellar absorption lines, stellar wind lines, photospheric lines, and several nebular emission lines. For a detailed discussion of the absorption features, we refer to Mehlert et al. (2006) and Noll et al. (2004). All objects of the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample, which were included in the FDF spectroscopic survey, are classified as starburst galaxies by Noll et al. (2004), based on the observed UV properties. The spectral energy distribution, the stellar wind lines, and the interstellar absorption line of these objects are typical of starburst galaxies. Furthermore, the line ratio of the nebular lines are typical of starburst galaxies. We could not detect broad lines in either the low-resolution spectra or the medium-resolution spectra, which would indicate AGN activity.

### 3.1. Observed Ly $\alpha$ line properties

#### 3.1.1. Fluxes and equivalent widths

The Ly $\alpha$  profiles often display both an absorption and an emission component. Only the spectral resolution of the medium-resolution spectra is high enough to separate the two components for each spectrum. We measured the emission line fluxes in the medium-resolution spectra interactively with MIDAS. To calculate the equivalent widths, we estimated the continuum at the wavelength of Ly $\alpha$  from the continuum redwards of the Ly $\alpha$  line. The observed Ly $\alpha$  emission fluxes  $F_{\text{Ly}\alpha}$  and equivalent widths of the emission component  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha_{\text{EM}})$  derived for the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample are given in Table 2. The error given in Table 2 includes only the contribution of the noise. Any additional error caused by a possibly wrong continuum definition is not included. We also measured the total equivalent widths  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha)$ , which includes the emission and the absorption component. However, the corresponding measurements are less accurate because of the underlying IGM absorption contributions. In this paper the equivalent width is defined as positive for emission lines. All equivalent widths are given in the restframe of the corresponding galaxy. Except for FDF-6063, all objects of the medium-resolution sample show a Ly $\alpha$  emission component. FDF-6063 shows only a broad absorption ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) = -17.1 \pm 0.9 \text{ \AA}$ ). The measured Ly $\alpha$  fluxes reach up to  $184 \times 10^{-21} \text{ Wm}^{-2}$ . For strong Ly $\alpha$  emitters, the emission component dominates the total Ly $\alpha$  line. Some galaxies show a strong absorption component and a weak Ly $\alpha$  emission line. The total Ly $\alpha$  emission line is dominated in these cases by the absorption component. An example is FDF-5903 ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) = -12.0 \pm 0.5 \text{ \AA}$ ,  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha_{\text{EM}}) = 0.6 \pm 0.1 \text{ \AA}$ ). Eight of the 16 galaxies of the medium-resolution sample have total equivalent width  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha)$  higher than  $20 \text{ \AA}$ . We also analysed the Ly $\alpha$  emission line of 91 low-resolution spectra of high-redshift galaxies in the FDF spectroscopic catalog. The total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths range from absorption ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) \approx -20 \text{ \AA}$ ) to strong emission ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) \approx 200 \text{ \AA}$ ), while most galaxies have  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha)$  of  $< 20 \text{ \AA}$ .

#### 3.1.2. Ly $\alpha$ line profiles

In Fig. 1 all Ly $\alpha$  profiles of the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample are presented. The Ly $\alpha$  profile displays a wide variety of morphologies, from absorption (e.g., FDF-6063), to absorption with a weak emission (FDF-5903), and then to strong emission (e.g., FDF-2384). Most profiles show one asymmetric emission line with a sharp drop on the blue side and a pronounced red wing (e.g., FDF-2384, FDF-5550). This profile type is referred to hereafter as the ‘‘asymmetric line profile’’. FDF-4691, FDF-5215, and FDF-7539 show a secondary emission line blueshifted with respect to the main emission line. This profile type is called ‘‘double-peak profile’’ hereafter.

The full width half maximum ( $FWHM$ ) values of the Ly $\alpha$  emission lines are listed in Table 2. The distribution of the  $FWHM$  values corrected for the instrumental profile is shown in Fig. 2. The observed values range from  $200 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  up to  $1500 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . For FDF-4691 and FDF-7539, this value refers to the envelope of the profile. Most lines have widths below  $FWHM \approx 600 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , in agreement with Rhoads et al. (2003), Dawson et al. (2004), and Venemans et al. (2004), who analysed LAEs at a redshift of  $z > 4.5$  and found line widths of  $FWHM < 500 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ .

Figure 3 shows the  $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha)$  as a function of the line width of the emission line. The values of the line width show a

**Table 1.** The Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample. The ID corresponds to the catalogs of Heidt et al. (2003) and Noll et al. (2004). The redshift  $z$  is from Noll et al. (2004), except for FDF-1267 and FDF-8304, where the redshift is derived from medium-resolution spectra. The 2'' aperture magnitude  $m_R$  of the galaxies is taken from Heidt et al. (2003). The signal-to-noise ratio  $SNR$  is the average continuum signal-to-noise ratio measured in the complete wavelength range of the spectra. The covered spectral range is given for the restframe of the corresponding galaxies.

ID	$z$	$m_R$ [mag]	Spectral range 1400V	Spectral range 1200R	$SNR$ 1400V	$SNR$ 1200R
1267	$2.788 \pm 0.001$	$27.08 \pm 0.07$	1158–1465	–	0.36	–
1337	$3.403 \pm 0.004$	$24.15 \pm 0.01$	996–1261	1235–1569	3.53	4.72
2384	$3.314 \pm 0.004$	$24.60 \pm 0.01$	1018–1317	1301–1643	1.17	3.01
3389	$4.583 \pm 0.006$	$25.56 \pm 0.02$	–	1097–1368	–	0.71
4454	$3.085 \pm 0.004$	$26.10 \pm 0.03$	1070–1387	–	0.65	–
4691	$3.304 \pm 0.004$	$24.79 \pm 0.01$	1089–1393	–	3.78	–
5215	$3.148 \pm 0.004$	$24.53 \pm 0.01$	1062–1373	1468–1832	3.01	3.98
5550	$3.383 \pm 0.004$	$23.95 \pm 0.01$	1053–1351	1315–1656	3.78	6.47
5744	$3.401 \pm 0.003$	$24.81 \pm 0.01$	1022–1317	–	2.05	–
5812	$4.995 \pm 0.006$	$27.55 \pm 0.11$	–	1040–1294	–	0.69
5903	$2.774 \pm 0.003$	$23.13 \pm 0.01$	1181–1523	–	12.27	–
6063	$3.397 \pm 0.004$	$23.37 \pm 0.01$	1087–1384	1273–1609	4.18	5.83
6557	$4.682 \pm 0.006$	$25.94 \pm 0.02$	–	1003–1265	–	0.69
7539	$3.287 \pm 0.003$	$24.10 \pm 0.01$	1122–1428	1351–1698	3.45	4.88
7683	$3.781 \pm 0.004$	$24.92 \pm 0.01$	–	1199–1510	–	2.2
8304	$4.205 \pm 0.003$	$24.98 \pm 0.01$	–	1145–1433	–	3.37

**Table 2.** Properties of the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample. The continuum slope  $\beta$  is taken from Noll et al. (2004). They measured the continuum slope  $\beta$  in the low-resolution spectra of the FDF spectroscopic survey following Leitherer et al. (2002). The Ly $\alpha$  fluxes  $F_{Ly\alpha}$  and equivalent widths  $EW(Ly\alpha_{EM})$  refer only to the emission component (Sect. 3.1.1). No Ly $\alpha$  emission line was detected in the medium-resolution spectra of FDF-6063. The star-formation rates  $SFR_{UV}$  and  $SFR_{Ly\alpha}$  were derived from the UV flux, respectively Ly $\alpha$  flux, using the calibration of Kennicutt (1998) and assuming Case B recombination. The line width  $FWHM(Ly\alpha)$  refers to the complete profile (Sect 3.1.2).

ID	$z$	$SFR_{UV}[M_{\odot}yr^{-1}]$	$\beta$	$F_{Ly\alpha}[10^{-21} Wm^{-2}]$	$SFR_{Ly\alpha}[M_{\odot}yr^{-1}]$	$EW(Ly\alpha_{EM})[\text{\AA}]$	$FWHM(Ly\alpha)[km\ s^{-1}]$
1267	$2.788 \pm 0.001$	$1.16 \pm 0.25$	–	$25.38 \pm 1.30$	$1.49 \pm 0.08$	$129.8 \pm 27.41$	$235 \pm 34$
1337	$3.403 \pm 0.004$	$27.28 \pm 1.15$	–2.43	$22.09 \pm 1.52$	$2.10 \pm 0.14$	$6.69 \pm 0.46$	$597 \pm 84$
2384	$3.314 \pm 0.004$	$22.74 \pm 0.77$	–0.55	$121.08 \pm 3.01$	$10.8 \pm 0.27$	$83.19 \pm 3.89$	$283 \pm 47$
3389	$4.583 \pm 0.006$	$14.85 \pm 2.47$	–	$46.51 \pm 2.23$	$9.2 \pm 0.38$	$38.82 \pm 10.95$	$354 \pm 70$
4454	$3.085 \pm 0.004$	$1.98 \pm 0.49$	–2.42	$29.91 \pm 1.02$	$2.25 \pm 0.08$	$74.38 \pm 11.84$	$323 \pm 47$
4691	$3.304 \pm 0.004$	$17.88 \pm 0.75$	–2.46	$184.33 \pm 1.61$	$16.31 \pm 0.14$	$79.44 \pm 1.61$	$840 \pm 115$
5215	$3.148 \pm 0.004$	$26.20 \pm 0.80$	–1.71	$121.55 \pm 2.63$	$9.57 \pm 0.21$	$32.48 \pm 1.06$	$483 \pm 90$
5550	$3.383 \pm 0.004$	$44.78 \pm 1.07$	–1.81	$34.89 \pm 2.14$	$3.27 \pm 0.2$	$6.36 \pm 0.40$	$424 \pm 85$
5744	$3.401 \pm 0.003$	$21.23 \pm 0.87$	–1.02	$4.63 \pm 1.06$	$0.44 \pm 0.10$	$3.30 \pm 0.77$	–
5812	$4.995 \pm 0.006$	$5.24 \pm 0.79$	–	$40.83 \pm 0.78$	$9.60 \pm 0.18$	$153.8 \pm 26.6$	$226 \pm 23$
5903	$2.774 \pm 0.003$	$63.14 \pm 0.75$	–1.15	$6.73 \pm 1.53$	$0.39 \pm 0.09$	$0.60 \pm 0.14$	$627 \pm 140$
6063	$3.397 \pm 0.004$	$56.61 \pm 1.28$	–2.02	–	–	–	–
6557	$4.682 \pm 0.006$	$13.85 \pm 1.39$	–	$16.57 \pm 0.73$	$3.35 \pm 0.15$	$30.51 \pm 3.04$	$380 \pm 135$
7539	$3.287 \pm 0.003$	$29.87 \pm 0.78$	–1.74	$28.01 \pm 1.84$	$2.45 \pm 0.46$	$6.84 \pm 0.46$	$1430 \pm 230$
7683	$3.781 \pm 0.004$	$20.40 \pm 1.46$	–1.16	$15.18 \pm 1.89$	$1.85 \pm 0.23$	$9.08 \pm 1.16$	$435 \pm 70$
8304	$4.205 \pm 0.003$	$24.94 \pm 5.48$	–	$5.63 \pm 0.74$	$0.88 \pm 0.12$	$3.21 \pm 0.43$	$500 \pm 100$

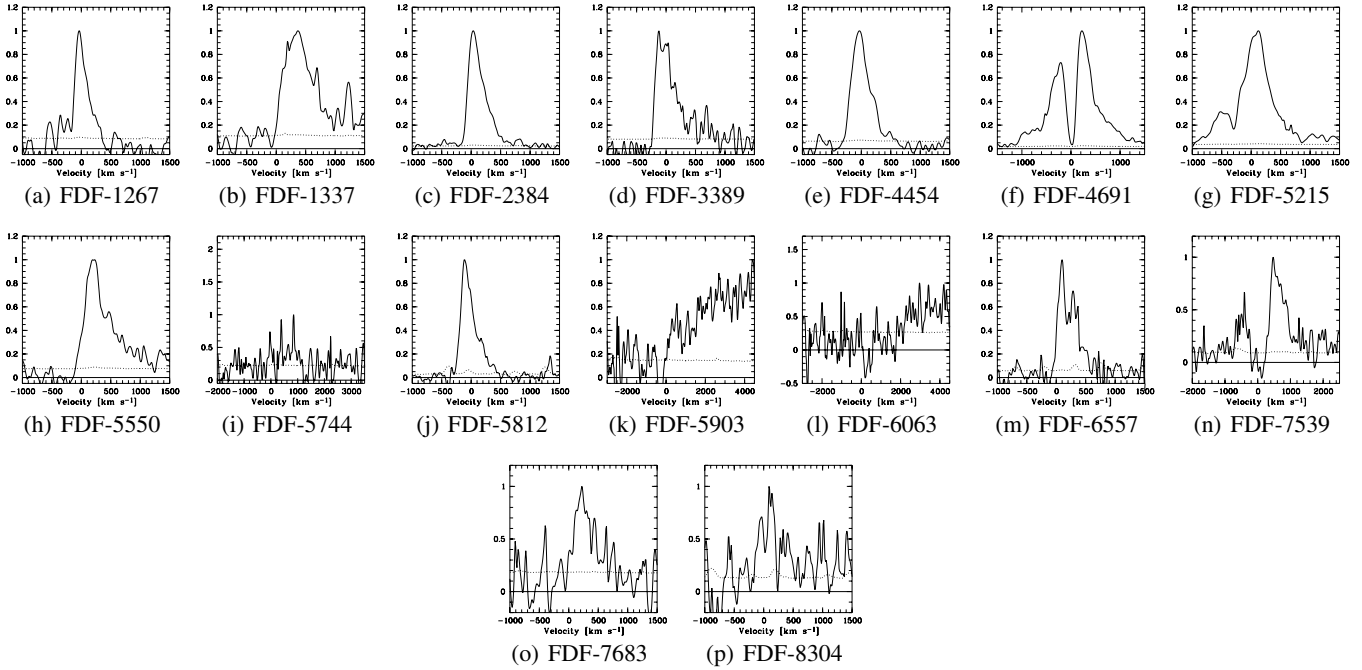
possible anti-correlation with the Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths. The outliers with high line width are FDF-4691 and FDF-7539, both galaxies with double-peak profiles.

### 3.2. Slope of the UV continuum

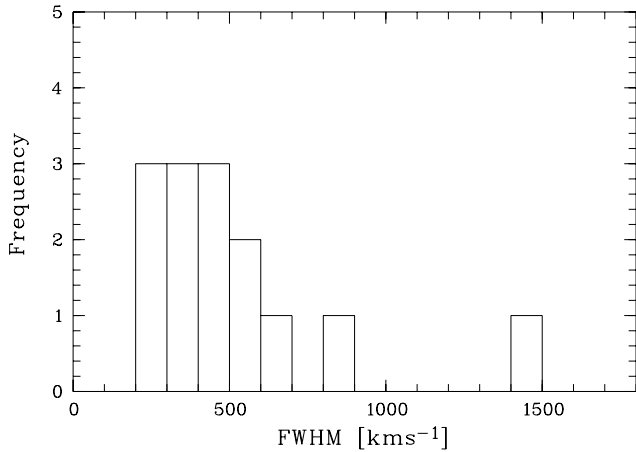
Studies by, e.g., Calzetti et al. (1994) and Heckman et al. (1998) show that the UV-restframe continuum between 1216 Å and 3000 Å of starburst galaxies can be approximated by  $F(\lambda) \approx \lambda^{\beta}$ . Noll et al. (2004) measured the slope  $\beta$  for the galaxies in the FDF spectroscopic survey with  $2 < z < 4$  in the range 1200 to 1800 Å, following Leitherer et al. (2002). The values of  $\beta$  for the medium-resolution sample are listed in Table 2. In Fig. 4 the continuum slope  $\beta$  is plotted as a function of the total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width for the FDF spectroscopic sample  $\beta$  with  $2 < z < 4$ . Figure 4 shows that the scatter of the total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width

increases towards steeper slopes. Galaxies with a continuum slope of  $\beta > -2$  have Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths below 25 Å, while galaxies with a blue continuum  $\beta < -2$  have Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths in the range of  $EW(Ly\alpha) = -20$  to 100 Å. However, the numbers are too small to derive firm conclusions.

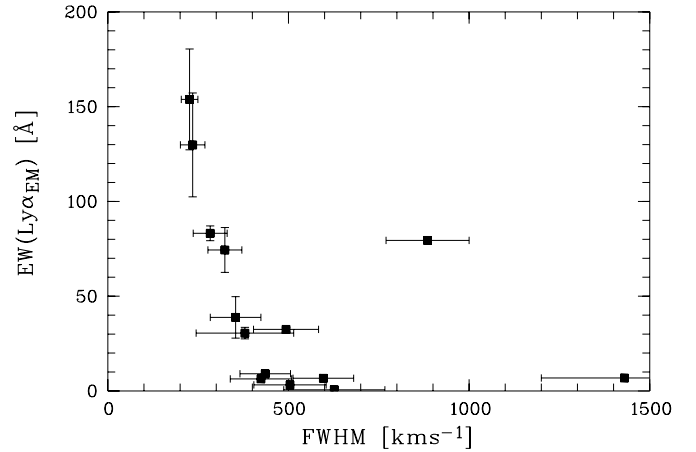
The measured  $\beta$  can be used to derive the dust attenuation for local starburst galaxies (Heckmann et al. 1998). Since the intrinsic slope depends only weakly on metallicity and starburst age for a continuous starburst (and an instantaneous starburst within the first 20 Myrs), the observed slope is determined essentially by the amount of dust (Heckmann et al. 1998; Leitherer et al. 1999). However, the relation of the attenuation and  $\beta$  depends on the physical properties of the ISM and dust in the galaxy. Therefore, this relationship can be ambiguous (Noll & Pierini 2005).



**Fig. 1.** The observed medium-resolution spectra of the Ly $\alpha$  line. The abscissa for each figure gives the radial velocity relative to the redshift of the galaxies (see Table 2). The ordinate gives a normalised flux. The dotted line indicates the noise level.



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of the line widths ( $FWHM$ ) of the Ly $\alpha$  emission line of the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample.



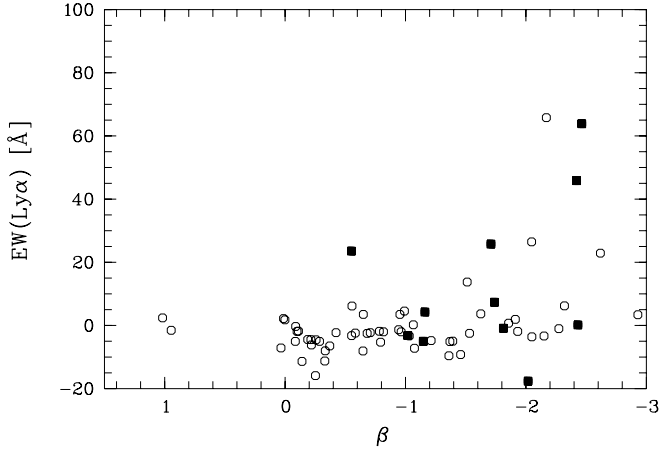
**Fig. 3.** The Ly $\alpha$  emission line equivalent width as function of the Ly $\alpha$  emission line width.

### 3.3. Interstellar absorption lines

The equivalent widths of the prominent interstellar SiII  $\lambda$ 1261, OI/SiII  $\lambda$ 1303, and CII  $\lambda$ 1335 absorption lines were measured for galaxies in the medium-resolution sample. We restricted ourselves to these three lines, because the spectral coverage of the medium-resolution spectra was limited. Only seven galaxies had a continuum signal-to-noise ratio that was high enough to determine the interstellar absorption lines in detail. The equivalent widths of the three lines are given in Table 3. The equivalent widths of the interstellar absorption lines range between  $-1.1 \text{ \AA}$  and  $-3.6 \text{ \AA}$ , in good agreement with previous studies (e.g., Noll et al. 2004). Moreover, the line widths of the interstellar absorption lines were measured in the medium-resolution spectra. Only the mean of the lines SiII  $\lambda$ 1260 and CII  $\lambda$ 1335 are included in Table 3. SiII/OI  $\lambda$ 1303 was excluded, because the two lines of

this blend cannot be separated. The line widths range between 350 and 770  $\text{km s}^{-1}$ . These broad line widths are typical for high-redshift galaxies. For their sample of about 800 spectra of high-redshift galaxies Shapley et al. (2003) found an average velocity dispersion for the low-ionisation interstellar absorption lines of  $FWHM(LIS) = 560 \pm 150 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ .

Velocity offsets of the interstellar absorption lines with respect to the Ly $\alpha$  emission were derived, using the redshift of the Ly $\alpha$  emission component as a reference. For these measurements, the OI/SiII  $\lambda$ 1303 blend was again excluded. The galaxies show a negative velocity offset between the Ly $\alpha$  emission line and the interstellar absorption lines (see Table 3), indicating either a redshifted Ly $\alpha$  emission or blue-shifted interstellar absorption lines, or a combination of both. The mean velocity offset is  $\approx -580 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , in good agreement with the values found in other studies (e.g., Shapley et al. 2003). If we assume that



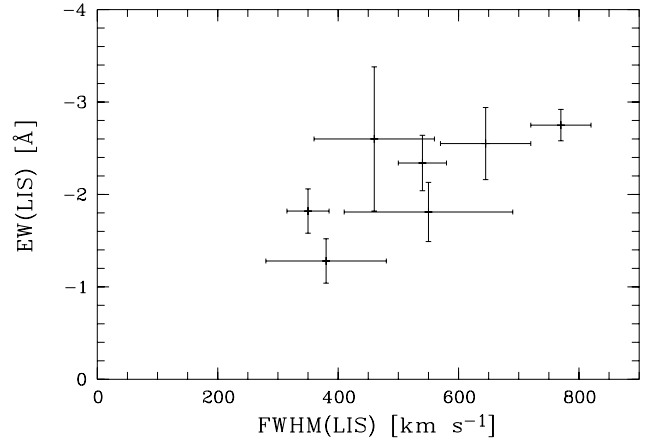
**Fig. 4.** The total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width  $EW(Ly\alpha)$  vs. the continuum slope  $\beta$  for the FDF spectroscopic sample (circles). Black squares indicate the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample. FDF-4752 is not plotted, since it shows a high equivalent width ( $EW(Ly\alpha) = 150 \text{ \AA}$ ). FDF-4752 is in the physical vicinity of a QSO (FDF-4683). Therefore, its Ly $\alpha$  emission may be produced differently.

the redshifts of Noll et al. (2004) represent the systemic redshift of the objects, we derive a mean velocity offset of the interstellar absorption lines of  $\approx -150 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . Therefore, the Ly $\alpha$  emission would be redshifted by  $\approx 430 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , if the Noll et al. (2004) measurements indeed represent the systemic redshift. Adelberger et al. (2003) find for a sample of high-redshift galaxies that the Ly $\alpha$  emission is redshifted by  $310 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  with respect to the optical nebular emission lines, while the low-ionisation interstellar absorption are blueshifted by  $-150 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ .

In Fig. 5 the mean equivalent widths of the interstellar absorption lines SiII  $\lambda 1261$  and CII  $\lambda 1335$  are plotted as a function of the mean line widths. A correlation is indicated in Fig. 5. The strength of the saturated ISM absorption lines does not strongly depend on the column density, but on the covering fraction and on the velocity dispersion of the ISM (Shapley et al. 2003). The covering fraction of the low-ionisation interstellar absorption lines can be measured by the observed residual intensities at the line position, and the velocity dispersion by the line width. While the correlation in Fig. 5 suggests a significant influence of the gas kinematics, the scatter indicates that the covering fraction also plays a role. The galaxies for which the  $EW(LIS)$  and  $FWHM(LIS)$  could be measured have a smaller average Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width (average  $EW(Ly\alpha) = -3.2 \text{ \AA}$ ) than the full medium-resolution sample (average  $EW(Ly\alpha) = 37 \text{ \AA}$ ). This is caused by the fact that the galaxies with smaller observed Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width have a brighter UV continuum in the FDF spectroscopic survey (see also Table 3 in Shapley et al. 2003). It remains unclear whether the tentative correlation found above also applies to galaxies with strong Ly $\alpha$  emission.

### 3.4. Morphology

In Fig. 6 we show HST/ACS F814W images of galaxies of the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample. Since the HST/ACS image covers only the central part of the FDF field, not all the galaxies were imaged. The HST/ACS images show the rest-frame UV of the starburst galaxies, which is dominated by the young stars. Moreover, as the surface brightness scales with  $(z + 1)^{-4}$ , the extended regions of the galaxies are not easily detected. The



**Fig. 5.** The equivalent width of the interstellar absorption lines plotted as a function of the line width of the interstellar absorption lines.

observed diameters of the objects are of the order of  $\approx 2 \text{ kpc}$ . The strong Ly $\alpha$  emitters appear compact (e.g., FDF-4691 or FDF-5215), while the galaxies with a weak (or no) Ly $\alpha$  emission line are elongated and irregular (e.g., FDF-5903 and FDF-6063). We detected neither (strong) spatial extension of the Ly $\alpha$  emissions in the two-dimensional spectra nor a spatial offset between the Ly $\alpha$  emission and the continuum for all of the members of the medium-resolution sample, excepting FDF-2384. Figure 6b shows that FDF-2384 has two components, a compact one and a diffuse component, north east of the compact component. The two-dimensional spectrum shows that the continuum is emitted by the compact object, while the Ly $\alpha$  emission is emitted by the diffuse object.

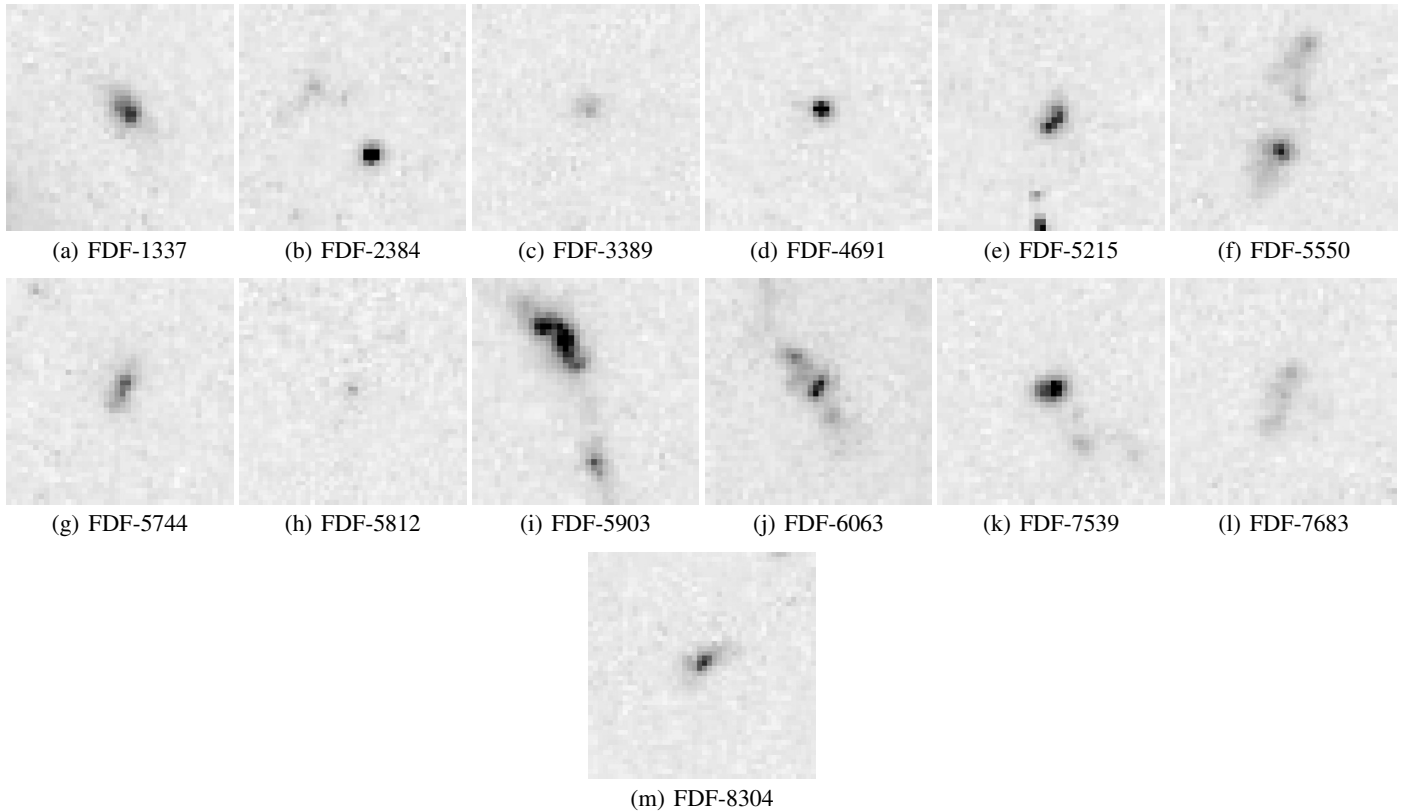
### 3.5. Star-formation rates

Using the flux of the Ly $\alpha$  lines, we computed the star-formation rates for the medium-resolution and low-resolution samples. The line luminosities were derived by assuming an isotropic emission. The star-formation rates  $SFR_{Ly\alpha}$  were derived from the Ly $\alpha$  luminosities using the calibration of Kennicutt (1998) and assuming Case B recombination. Approximately 2/3 of all recombinations lead to Ly $\alpha$  emission assuming Case B recombination (Osterbrock 1989). The derived star-formation rates  $SFR_{Ly\alpha}$  for the Ly $\alpha$  medium-resolution sample are given in Table 2. No correction for dust absorption was applied to these star-formation rate values.

The star-formation rates were also estimated from the UV spectral fluxes, which have been measured in the low-resolution spectra (if available, otherwise measured in the medium-resolution spectra). Again, the calibration of Kennicutt (1998) was used. The resulting star-formation rates  $SFR_{UV}$  range between  $1.16 M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  and  $64 M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  (Table 2). No correction for dust absorption was applied to these star-formation rate values. As shown by Table 2 the star-formation rates derived from the Ly $\alpha$  line are on average lower than the star-formation rates derived from the UV continuum. For the medium-resolution Ly $\alpha$  sample, we find a ratio of  $SFR_{Ly\alpha} / SFR_{UV} \approx 0.2$ . Although the conversion of luminosities to star-formation rates are subject to systematic uncertainties, for most galaxies it can be concluded that the Ly $\alpha$  emission is lower than expected from the star-formation rate derived by the UV continuum. This agrees

**Table 3.** Equivalent widths of the prominent interstellar absorption lines. The equivalent widths were measured in the medium-resolution spectra, except  $EW(\text{OI}/\text{SiII } \lambda 1303)$  and  $EW(\text{CII } \lambda 1335)$  for FDF-5744, which were measured in the low-resolution spectra. The velocity offset  $\delta v$  between the Ly $\alpha$  line and the prominent low-ionisation interstellar absorption lines and the widths  $FWHM(\text{LIS})$  of the interstellar absorption lines are also included. The average values for SiII  $\lambda 1261$  and CII  $\lambda 1335$  are given.

ID	$EW(\text{SiII } \lambda 1261)$ [Å]	$EW(\text{OI}/\text{SiII } \lambda 1303)$ [Å]	$EW(\text{CII } \lambda 1335)$ [Å]	$FWHM(\text{LIS})$ [km s $^{-1}$ ]	$\delta v$ [km s $^{-1}$ ]
1337	$-2.03 \pm 0.42$	$-1.68 \pm 0.4$	$-1.62 \pm 0.25$	$350 \pm 35$	$-607 \pm 45$
5550	$-2.61 \pm 0.27$	$-2.95 \pm 0.70$	$-2.07 \pm 0.55$	$540 \pm 40$	$-620 \pm 85$
5744	$-2.62 \pm 0.43$	$-2.61 \pm 1.1$	$-2.57 \pm 1.52$	$460 \pm 100$	$-560 \pm 120$
5903	$-2.54 \pm 0.26$	$-3.53 \pm 0.29$	$-2.96 \pm 0.22$	$770 \pm 50$	$-760 \pm 80$
6063	$-2.52 \pm 0.59$	$-2.84 \pm 0.65$	$-2.57 \pm 0.66$	$645 \pm 75$	–
7539	$-1.4 \pm 0.34$	$-1.14 \pm 0.3$	$-1.17 \pm 0.35$	$380 \pm 100$	$-80 \pm 30$
8304	$-1.81 \pm 0.32$	$-1.83 \pm 0.38$	$-2.53 \pm 0.44$	$550 \pm 140$	$-860 \pm 140$



**Fig. 6.** HST/ACS images of the sample of medium-resolution galaxies. Each image is  $15 \times 15$  kpc large, north is up, east is left.

with other measurements of star-formation rates derived from the Ly $\alpha$  flux and UV spectral flux (Ajiki et al. 2003).

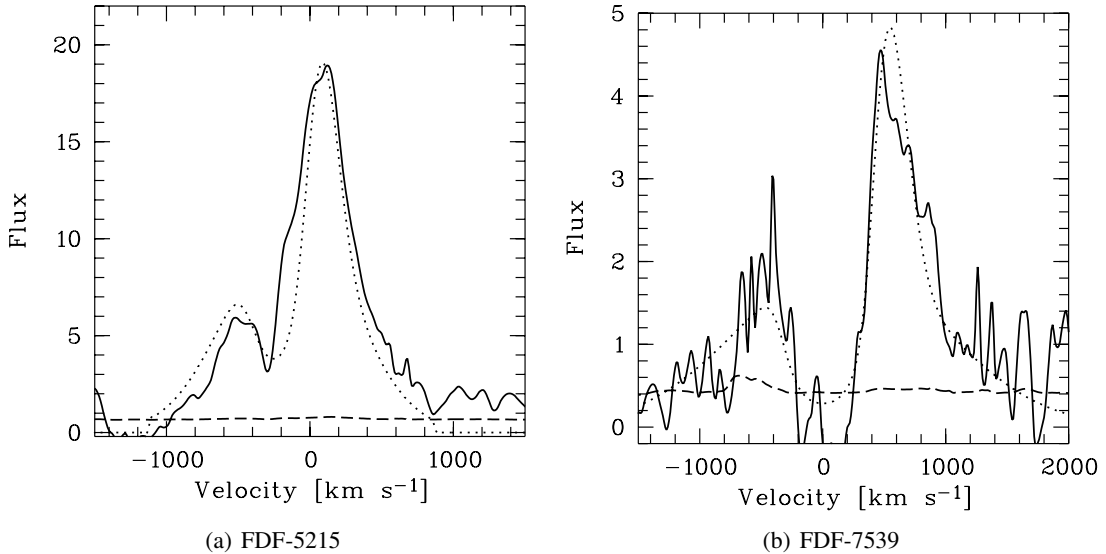
#### 4. The Ly $\alpha$ profile

To constrain the physical properties of the Ly $\alpha$  emitting regions of the galaxies, we compared three of our observed Ly $\alpha$  profiles with calculated model profiles using the finite element line formation code of Richling and Meinköhn (Richling & Meinköhn 2001; Meinköhn & Richling 2002). The code is particularly well-suited to calculating the radiative transfer in a non-static scattering medium. However, the code in its present form is not suitable for high optical depths. Therefore, we restricted the finite element modelling to the double-peaked profiles of FDF-4691, FDF-5215, and FDF-7539. A spherical two-component model with a central line emission region surrounded by a shell of neutral HI gas was assumed. For the emission from the

central region, we assumed a Gaussian emission profile. The model is mainly characterised by the velocity dispersion of the intrinsic emission line, as well as the velocity dispersion, the neutral column density, and the outflow velocity of the shell. The exact geometrical properties of the model are of minor importance for the computed line profiles (Richling et al. 2007). In Fig. 7 the comparison of the Ly $\alpha$  profiles of FDF-5215 and FDF-7539 is shown with the theoretical model. The results for FDF-4691 have already been described by Tapken et al. (2004). The derived fit parameters are listed for the three galaxies in Table 4. While the neutral column density  $N_{\text{HI}}$  could not be constrained well for FDF-4691, an upper limit can be found for FDF-5215: the neutral column density cannot exceed  $N_{\text{HI}} = 2 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ .

FDF-4691, FDF-5215, and FDF-7539 have been modelled with finite element calculations as well as with Gaussian emission and Voigt absorption components. Both approaches assume a central emission region producing a Gaussian emission





**Fig. 7.** Comparison of the observed Ly $\alpha$  lines (solid line) of FDF-5215 and FDF-7539 and the best-fit theoretical models (dotted line). The dashed line indicates the noise level of the observed spectrum.

**Table 4.** The derived fit parameters of the finite-element calculations. The velocity dispersion of the emission region  $v_{\text{dis}}(\text{core})$ , the velocity dispersion of the shell  $v_{\text{dis}}(\text{shell})$ , the HI column density of the shell  $N_{\text{HI}}$ , and the outflow velocity of the shell  $v_{\text{outflow}}$  are given.

ID	$v_{\text{dis}}(\text{core})$ [km s $^{-1}$ ]	$v_{\text{dis}}(\text{shell})$ [km s $^{-1}$ ]	$N_{\text{HI}}$ [cm $^{-2}$ ]	$v_{\text{outflow}}$ [km s $^{-1}$ ]
4691	600	60	$4 \times 10^{17}$	12
5215	500	125	$< 2 \times 10^{16}$	125
7539	1140	190	$2.5 \times 10^{16}$	190

profile. But the models differ with respect to the radiative transfer in the absorption component. The absorption component of the finite element calculations re-emits the photons. The re-emitted photons are redistributed in frequency space, leading, e.g., to two emission peaks. The model with Gauss emission and Voigt absorption assumes that all absorbed photons are lost. They are either absorbed by dust or absorbed by extended neutral clouds, which distribute the photons in physical space and therefore have surface brightnesses that are too low to be detected (Kunth et al. 1998). The assumption that all absorbed photons are lost may not be valid for high-redshift galaxies, where the absorbing HI region is compact with respect to the slit width, and the dust content within the HI region is expected to be low. The line fitting of the Ly $\alpha$  absorption component using Voigt absorption profiles will lead to an underestimate of the true hydrogen column density (see also Verhamme et al. 2006).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Ly $\alpha$ profiles

Meinköhn & Richling (2002) and Ahn et al. (2003) modelled Ly $\alpha$  profiles assuming an expanding neutral shell surrounding the Ly $\alpha$  emission region. If the shell is static, the profile shows two emission peaks with the same flux, blueshifted and redshifted with respect to the systemic redshift. The flux of the blue peak is decreased, if the expansion velocity is increased. If the expansion velocity is sufficiently high, the blueshifted secondary

peak disappears. Ahn et al. (2003), Ahn (2004), and Verhamme et al. (2006) show, that the red wing of the Ly $\alpha$  profile gets more flux. This is caused by Ly $\alpha$  photons, which are backscattered from the far side (from an observers point of view) of the expanding shell, which recedes from an observer. In this case an asymmetric profile is observed, which can show a secondary emission component redshifted with respect to the main emission component. Therefore, the model of an expanding neutral shell surrounding a Ly $\alpha$  emitting region can quantitatively reproduce the asymmetric profiles (see also Dawson et al. 2002) and the symmetric profiles. A parameter that determines the morphology of the emission profile is the expansion velocity of the neutral shell. By a given neutral column density and velocity dispersion of the neutral shell, a low expansion velocity will lead to a double-peaked Ly $\alpha$  profile, while a higher expansion velocity would lead to an asymmetric profile. The fact that asymmetric profiles in most cases are observed seems to indicate that the galaxies show an outflow of interstellar HI. At a redshift of  $z = 3$  the mean transmission of the IGM is  $T = 0.7$  (Songaila 2004). Therefore, we expect that the observed fraction of double-peak profiles at a redshift of  $z = 3$  is not significantly changed by absorption of the blue part of the profile of the IGM. Most profiles of Ly $\alpha$  emission lines in the literature are asymmetric. However, double-peaked profiles are only observable if the signal-to-noise ratio and the spectral resolution of the spectrum is sufficiently high. A significant number of spectra with high SNR and resolution have only been observed for LAEs at  $z > 5$ , where the absorption of the intergalactic medium is severe ( $T < 0.2$ , Songaila 2004). At this redshift a double-peak profile would not be observed, since the blue peak would be absorbed by the IGM. So far, double-peaked Ly $\alpha$  profiles have been observed only at redshift  $z \approx 3$  (Fosbury et al. 2003; Christensen et al. 2004; Venemans et al. 2005).

### 5.2. The strength of the Ly $\alpha$ emission in high-redshift galaxies

We find no indication of AGN activity in our sample (Sect. 3). In the following we assume that the Ly $\alpha$  emission lines are caused

by starburst activity. In principle, other mechanisms are also possible. However, since the UV continuum is caused by an ongoing (or recent) starburst, star formation is a reasonable explanation for the observed Ly $\alpha$  fluxes. The computed total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width  $EW(Ly\alpha)$  can be predicted using stellar population synthesis models if one assumes that the Ly $\alpha$  photons are produced by recombination in HII regions ionised by young stars. The intrinsic total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width  $EW(Ly\alpha)$  also includes the contribution by stars and supernovae remnants. For very young ( $\approx 2$  Myr) and very low metallicity ( $< 4 \times 10^{-4} Z_{\odot}$ ) starburst galaxies, the Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width can reach up to 1500 Å (Schaerer 2003). Star-forming galaxies with moderate age ( $> 10$  Myr) and metallicity and a initial mass function (IMF) in the range of values observed in the local universe have a predicted  $EW(Ly\alpha)$  in the range of 50 to 200 Å (Charlot & Fall 1993). However, for certain star-formation histories, the total Ly $\alpha$  line can even be observed in absorption (Charlot & Fall 1993). The majority of ionising photons are produced by early O main-sequence stars, which have a lifetime less than 4 Myr. Stars with lifetimes greater than 10 Myr do not produce significant amounts of hydrogen ionising photons. If O stars are absent, the intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  flux is very low making the Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width small. While a continuous starburst leads to high ( $> 100$  Å) intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths, as long as the starburst lasts (Leitherer et al. 1999; Leitherer et al. 2001), an exponential decaying star-formation rate (time scale 10 Myr; Charlot & Fall 1993) leads to small equivalent widths after several 10 Myr.

Most observed total Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths of high-redshift UV-continuum selected galaxies are smaller than 20 Å (Sect. 3.1; see also, e.g., Shapley et al. 2003; Noll et al. 2004). Several effects could lead to a small observed Ly $\alpha$  equivalent width: (a) a suitable epoch of the star-formation history, where the O stars have already left the main sequence the observed epoch, while B and A stars producing a strong UV-continuum are still present, (b) orientation effects resulting in the escape of the Ly $\alpha$  photons in a different direction, and (c) absorption of the Ly $\alpha$  photons by dust and neutral hydrogen (Chen & Neufeld 1994). In the following we discuss these three effects.

Shapley et al. (2003) and Noll et al. (2004) present composite spectra of high-redshift UV-continuum selected galaxies. Both present composite spectra, which were produced by certain types of high-redshift galaxies, including galaxies with small observed Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths. Strong stellar wind lines are visible in the composite spectra of galaxies with small Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths (Shapley et al. 2003; Noll et al. 2004). For example, the CIV  $\lambda\lambda 1548, 1551$  line of the composite spectrum of the Ly $\alpha$  subsample group 3 ( $EW(Ly\alpha) = -1$  Å) of Shapley et al. (2003) displays a P Cygni profile. Only in the observed UV-restframe spectra of early O main-sequence stars and supergiant OB stars does the CIV line show a P Cygni profile (Walborn & Panek 1984; Walborn & Nichols-Bohlin 1987). It is possible that we observe the galaxies with weak Ly $\alpha$  emission in a short period of their star formation history (SFH), when the main sequence O stars, which produce most ionising photons, are no longer present, and only massive supergiants are present. However, it appears unlikely that the majority of the high-redshift galaxies with small Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths are in this phase of their SFH. In addition, Noll et al. (2004) find a strong increase of the strength of the Ly $\alpha$  emission from  $z \approx 2.3$  to  $z \approx 3.2$ . There is no obvious reason for the galaxies at a redshift of  $z \approx 3.2$  still to be forming stars, but the galaxies at  $z \approx 2.3$  just turned off their star-formation. Therefore, we conclude that an SFH, where the young OB stars are absent but enough B and A stars produce

a strong UV continuum, cannot explain the weak Ly $\alpha$  emission easily. However, one needs multi-wavelength data to derive the intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  flux in detail (for a discussion of the determination of the intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  flux, see Schaerer & Pello 2005). Therefore, we cannot rule out that some of the observed variety of the Ly $\alpha$  emission in high-redshift galaxies is caused by a different intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  strength.

Another explanation for the observed small Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths can be an orientation effect. In this case the Ly $\alpha$  photons are produced in huge numbers and escape the galaxy but are emitted in a direction not coinciding with the line of sight to us. As discussed by Charlot & Fall (1993) and Chen & Neufeld (1994), a certain geometric configuration could lead to an anisotropic emission of the Ly $\alpha$  photons. The strength of the Ly $\alpha$  line depends on the angle at which we observe the galaxy. Although such orientations effects may play a role for individual galaxies, the observed correlation between the Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths and the strength of the interstellar low-ionisation lines (discussed below) cannot be explained if orientation effects are the only reason for the small Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths.

Since the special stellar population and orientations effects provide no plausible explanation for the small observed Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths, we conclude, that the most reasonable explanation for the variation in the observed Ly $\alpha$  equivalent widths is the combined effect of dust absorption and resonance scattering of Ly $\alpha$  photons in neutral hydrogen, enriched with dust (Charlot & Fall 1993; Chen & Neufeld 1994). As pointed out by Chen & Neufeld (1994), this mechanism can also explain the strong Ly $\alpha$  absorption seen in many high-redshift galaxies, since the combined effect of dust absorption and resonance scattering also affects the stellar continuum. The absorption of the Ly $\alpha$  photons depends on the total amount of dust, the neutral gas, the spatial distribution of the dust relative to the gas, and the kinematical properties. If no neutral gas is present, Ly $\alpha$  photons and UV-continuum photons are affected by the same amount of dust.

The analysis of composite spectra of high-redshift galaxies shows the importance of the ISM for the strength of the Ly $\alpha$  emission: Shapley et al. (2003) and Noll et al. (2004) find a strong anti-correlation between the equivalent width of Ly $\alpha$   $EW(Ly\alpha)$  and the equivalent width of the low-ionisation metallic interstellar absorption lines  $EW(LIS)$ . In Lyman-break galaxies the latter are blueshifted with respect to the system velocity, which is explained by a galaxy-wide outflow, the superwind (Adelberger et al. 2003; Shapley et al. 2003). Observations of Lyman-break galaxies favours a scenario where clouds of cold neutral gas (which are traced by the low-ionisation lines) are embedded in hot, ionised gas (Shapley et al. 2003). The star-formation activity accelerates the cold gas outwards. The cold neutral gas phase of the superwind influences the intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  emission line strongly (see also Ferrara & Ricotti 2006 for a model for gas outflow that explains the observed properties of Lyman-break galaxies, including the strengths of their Ly $\alpha$  emission). The properties of the superwind will determine the observed Ly $\alpha$  flux. One can describe this superwind by the following model parameters: the velocity dispersion  $b$ , the neutral column density of the hydrogen  $N_{HI}$ , the mean outflow velocity  $v$ , and the spatial covering fraction. Concerning the radiative transfer, the superwind is rather similar to the expanding shell model used by us in Sect. 5.1 to simulate the formation of the observed Ly $\alpha$  profiles. Therefore, the agreement of the observed and computed profiles can also be regarded as support of the superwind model. In principle, the observed properties of the superwind (like the mean outflow velocity) can be used to constrain the parameters of the expanding shell model, which describes the

Ly $\alpha$  profiles (Verhamme et al. 2006). This will hopefully help for understanding the observed properties of the Ly $\alpha$  emission in more detail.

## 6. Conclusions

We analysed a sample of 16 restframe UV-continuum selected  $2.7 < z < 5$  galaxies using medium-resolution FORS2 spectra. The Ly $\alpha$  lines range from pure absorption ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) = -17 \text{ \AA}$ ) to strong emission ( $EW(\text{Ly}\alpha) = 153 \text{ \AA}$ ). Most of the Ly $\alpha$  lines show an asymmetric profile, with a sharp drop on the blue side and an extended red wing. Three Ly $\alpha$  lines display a double-peaked profile with two separate emission lines. The double-peaked profiles were compared to calculated profiles computed by a radiative transfer code. Both types of profiles, the asymmetric and the double-peaked profiles, can be explained by a uniform model of an expanding shell of neutral hydrogen surrounding a compact starburst region (see also Ahn et al. 2001, 2003). One parameter, which determines the morphology of the profile, is the expansion velocity of the neutral shell. A low expansion velocity leads to a double-peaked Ly $\alpha$  profile, while a higher expansion velocity would lead to an asymmetric profile. The Ly $\alpha$  emission strengths of our target galaxies are found to be determined by the amount of dust and the kinematics of the outflowing material. Broad, blueshifted, low-ionisation interstellar absorption lines were detected. They indicate a galaxy-scale outflow of the ISM. The strengths of these ISM lines were found to be partly determined by the velocity dispersion of the outflowing medium.

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