Biocompatible post-polymerization functionalization of a water soluble poly(p-phenylene ethynylene)

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<td>Swager, Timothy; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Chemistry</td>
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Biocompatible Post-Polymerization Functionalization of a Water Soluble Poly(\(p\)-Phenylene Ethynylene)

Brett VanVeller and Timothy M. Swager*

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A biocompatible post-polymerization functionalization reaction takes advantage of a polymer’s structural motif for the controllable attachment of biotin as a model biosensor that responds to streptavidin.

Strategies for the post-polymerization functionalization (PPF) of polymers are advantageous in that they allow for tuning of a polymer’s properties without synthetically retreating to the monomer stage. Further, PPF permits the incorporation of functional groups that may be incompatible with polymerization conditions. Several strategies have been reported for conjugated polymers. A number of designs involve substitution reactions with pendant halogen,\(^1\) alcohol,\(^2\) or carboxylic acid moieties,\(^3\) and application of high yielding click chemistries\(^4\) like the 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition of alkynes and azides\(^5\) or thiol-conjugate addition\(^6\) have also been reported. Two potential drawbacks are characteristic of the above strategies: (i) an appropriately functionalized monomer specific for the intended PPF must be incorporated into the polymer synthesis—often in protected form and (ii) it can be difficult to control the extent of functionalization.

We recently reported the synthesis of a rigid hydrophilic monomer (1) that—when incorporated into poly(\(p\)-phenylene ethynlenes) (PPEs)\(^7\) (P1) leads to increased spectral purity by preventing hydrophobically induced aggregate emission.\(^8\) We envisioned that the three dimensional array of vicinal hydroxyl groups might be further elaborated through periodate oxidation and reductive amination (P1→2→3, Scheme 1).\(^9\) Similar processes have been widely applied for bioconjugation through periodate oxidation of carbohydrate residues, making this process compatible with existing bioconjugation schemes. Herein we report a biocompatible post-polymerization biotinylation of P1, where (i) the need for a PPF specific monomer is negated by activation of an existing structural motif, and (ii) the extent of functionalization can be controlled by the equivalents of the NaIO\(_4\) reagent. Further, the improved spectral purity imparted by the presence of 1 in 3a is not lost. In turn, this demonstrates an improved signal amplified biosensor\(^10\) response to fluorophore-labeled streptavidin, a tetrameric protein with high biotin affinity (4 x 10\(^{-14}\) M\(^{11}\)) that has been applied to a variety of conjugated polymer affinitychromic\(^5,12\) and agglutination\(^2b\) biosensor designs.

Treatment of P1 with 0.2 equivalents of NaIO\(_4\) in water generated 1,6-dialdehyde moieties at random positions along the backbone (2, Scheme 1).\(^13\) Subsequent incubation with an excess of amine-containing compound (a or b) in aqueous alkaline solution generated the putative Schiff base, which was reduced \textit{in situ} to the tertiary amine 3 with NaCNBH\(_3\) (\textit{vide infra}, Scheme 2).

The azepane linkage in 3 is proposed based on two model studies. Firstly, the broad nature of the \(^1\)H NMR signals of 3a overlapped with the weaker biotin signals making determination of the extent of functionalization difficult. Thus, 3b—exhibiting a strong, unobstructed pivalamide signal—was prepared under identical conditions for 3a. Integration analysis revealed a 18–20% incorporation of \(\text{b}\) (Fig. S3, ESI). Therefore, while 0.2 equivalents of NaIO\(_4\) oxidant should generate 0.4 aldehyde equivalents, there appears to only be 0.2 equivalents of the incorporated amine.

Secondly, acetonide protected 4—a synthetic intermediate in the synthesis of 1\(^8\)—was treated with periodate anion and

Scheme 1 Periodate oxidative activation and reductive amination

Scheme 2 a) Model reductive amination product, b) proposed mechanism
Fig. 1 (a) Absorbance spectra of 1 and 3a in water and PBS solution. (b) Fluorescence spectra of 1 and 3a in water and PBS solution. (c) Energy transfer schematic showing how intra- and interchain exciton migration and energy transfer to TRXS can lead to amplification. (d) Addition of 9.15 pmol aliquots of Texas red X™-labeled streptavidin to 3.46 nmol polymer was examined by varying the pH but no effect was found (pH = 1–12, Fig. S5, ESI). The reduced quantum yield of polymer and diminished quantum yield. In any event, the presence of 1a lead to dramatically increased sensitivity.

Financial support for this work was provided by the Natural Science and Engineering Council of Canada (NSERC). We are grateful for funding from the U.S. Army through the Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies, under Contract W911NF-07-D-004 with the U.S. Army Research Office.

Notes and references

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† Electronic Supplementary Information (ESI) available: Experimental details. See DOI: 10.1039/b000000x/

H NMR analysis of 2 showed little bias regarding which diol moiety (endo or exo) was oxidized. Based on three experiments.


We are herein submitting a manuscript entitled “Biocompatible Post-Polymerization Functionalization of a Water Soluble Poly(p-Phenylene Ethynylene)” for consideration as a publication in *Chemical Communications*. The approach given takes advantage of existing biocompatible reactivity for the functionalization of polymers in a predictable manner. Further, the modified polymers were evaluated within the context of a biotin–streptavidin model biosensor.
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Supporting Information for

Controllable Biocompatible Post-Polymerization Functionalization of Poly(p-Phenylene Ethynylene)s and Highly Sensitive Detection of Streptavidin

Brett VanVeller and Timothy M. Swager*

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Email: tswager@mit.edu

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Synthetic Procedures

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NMR Spectra

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UV-vis and Fluorescence

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**Materials:** Silica gel (40 µm) was purchased from SiliCycle. All solvents used for photophysical experiments were spectral grade. Pd(PPh\(_3\))\(_4\) was purchased from Strem Chemicals, Inc. All other reagent grade materials were purchased from Aldrich, TCI America, and Alfa Aesar, and used without further purification.

**Experimental:**

**NMR Spectroscopy:** \(^1\)H and \(^{13}\)C NMR spectra for all compounds were acquired in CDCl\(_3\), D\(_2\)O and DMF-d\(_7\) on a Bruker Avance Spectrometer operating at 400 and 100 MHz, respectively. The chemical shift data are reported in units of \(\delta\) (ppm) relative to residual solvent.

**Gel Permeation Chromatography (GPC):** Polymer molecular weights were determined using a triple detection method for calibration with poly(acrylic acid) standards on a Viscotek TDA 305-040 instrument equipped with two Viscotek A-MBHMW-3078 columns and analyzed with light scattering and refractive index detectors. Samples were dissolved in 5% NH\(_4\)OH.

**Absorption and Emission Spectroscopy:** Fluorescence spectra were measured on a SPEX Fluorolog-\(\tau\)3 fluorometer (model FL-321, 450 W Xenon lamp) using right-angle detection. Ultraviolet-visible absorption spectra were measured with an Agilent 8453 diode array spectrophotometer and corrected for background signal with a solvent filled cuvette. Fluorescence quantum yields of """" in both water and 1X PBS were determined relative to perylene and are corrected for solvent refractive index and absorption differences at the excitation wavelength.

**Lifetime measurements:** Time resolved fluorescence measurements were performed by exciting the samples with 160 femtosecond pulses at 390 nm from the double output of a Coherent RegA Ti:Sapphire amplifier. The resulting fluorescence was spectrally and temporally resolved with a Hamamatsu C4780 Streak Camera system.
Synthetic Procedures

**Biotin functionalization, synthesis of 3a:** Polymer 1 (11.8 mg, 14.6 µmol based on repeat unit) was dissolved in 4 mL of H₂O and NaIO₄ (2.92 µmol in 0.2 mL) was added dropwise under vigorous stirring. After 30 min, a (Biotin-PEG₃-NH₂, 3 mg, 7 µmol in 1 mL of 0.2M Na₂HPO₄) was added and the reaction was stirred for 20 min. A solution of NaCNBH₃ (15 mg, 239 µmol in 1 mL of 40 mM Na₂HPO₄) was added and the reaction stirred for 3 hours. The reaction was dialyzed against water with 5 changes of water and lyophilized to yield 3a. GPC gave Mₘₙ = 38,474, PDI = 3.4. ¹H NMR (600 MHz, D₂O): δ 7.44 (s, 2H), 4.64 (broad, 4H), 4.37 (broad, 4H), 4.05 (broad, 4H), 3.89 (broad, 4H), 3.80-3.30 (biotin, PEG), 3.18 (broad, 4H) 2.35 (broad, 4H), 1.30-0.90 (biotin).

**Piv-Lysine functionalization, synthesis of 3b:** Prepared using identical conditions as above for 3a except that b (Piv-Lys-NH₂) was used in place of a. GPC gave Mₘₙ = 49,073, PDI = 4.9. ¹H NMR (600 MHz, D₂O): δ 7.42 (s, 2H), 4.61 (broad, 4H), 4.35 (broad, 4H), 4.03 (broad, 4H), 3.88 (broad, 4H), 3.16 (broad, 4H), 2.33 (broad, 4H), 1.05 (broad, tBu, 1.6–1.8*).

*Based on three experiments and corresponds to 18–20%.

**Synthesis of tetraaldehyde 5:** A solution NaIO₄ (0.200 g, 0.935 mmol) in 10 mL of water was added to a solution of 4 (0.200 g, 0.248 mmol) in 10 mL of THF. Solid TBAIO₄ (54 mg, 0.124 mmol) was added directly and the solution was refluxed for 30 min. After cooling, the reaction was partitioned between EtOAc and brine and the organic phase collected. The aqueous layer was washed with fresh EtOAc and the combined organic layers were dried over Na₂SO₄ and concentrated in vacuo. The residue was eluted through a silica gel plug using EtOAc to give 5 (95%). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 9.65 (d, J=2, 4H), 4.98 (nfo, actual ddd, J=6.6, 2.8, 2, 4H), 4.89 (dd, J=6.6, 2.8, 4H), 1.48 (s, 6H), 1.46 (s, 6H), 1.12 (s, 42H). ¹³C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 197.6, 134.1, 125.9, 110.7, 105.7, 101.2, 73.9, 54.5, 25.9, 24.2, 18.8, 11.4. HRMS (EI) calcd. for C₄₆H₆₆O₈Si₂ [M+H] 803.4369, found 803.4344.

**Synthesis of amine 6:** To a solution of 5 (0.150 g, 0.186 mmol) in 10 mL of MeOH was added butyl amine (82 mg, 1.12 mmol). After stirring for 10 min at room temperature, NaCNBH₃ (0.250 g, 3.98 mmol) was added and the mixture was refluxed for 3 hours. Once cool, 1 mL of sat. NaHCO₃ was added and the solvent was removed in vacuo. The residue was partitioned between DCM and sat. NaHCO₃. The organic layer was dried over Na₂SO₄ and evaporated to dryness. Silica gel chromatography (EtOAc:Hex, 8:2) provided 6 (65%) as a white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 4.33 (dd, J=4.0, 2.4, 4H), 4.00 (m, 4H), 2.84 (d, J=12, 4H), 2.58 (dd, J=11.8, 7.5, 4H), 2.29 (br t, 4H), 1.64 (s, 6H), 1.40 (s, 6H), 1.28 (m, 4H), 1.12 (br s, 42H), 1.06 (m, 4H), 0.74 (t, J =7.4, 6H). ¹³C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 139.5, 119.8, 110.8, 103.2, 98.3, 76.5, 57.4, 48.7, 41.5, 28.7, 25.9, 24.7, 20.7, 19.0, 14.1, 11.6. HRMS (EI) calcd. for C₅₄H₇₈N₂O₄Si₂ [M+H] 885.6355, found 885.6357.
NMR Spectra

Figure S1: $^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR spectra of compound 5
Figure S2: $^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR spectra of compound 6
Figure S3: $^1$H spectrum of compound 3b

Figure S4: $^1$H spectrum of compound 3a
UV-vis and Fluorescence data

**Table S1: Summary of photophysical data of 3a**

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<th>Em $\lambda_{max}$ (nm)</th>
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<td>451</td>
<td>4.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>3a, 1X PBS</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>4.58</td>
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**General protocol for energy transfer assays in PBS:**

50 μL of a stock polymer solution (0.056 mg/mL in PBS) was diluted with PBS to a total volume of 3 mL in a fluorescence cuvette. To this was added aliquots of Texas Red-X™ labeled streptavidin (0.5 μL of a 1 mg/mL solution) and fluorescence emission was taken at each addition. Excitation wavelength was 426 nm.

**Figure S5:** Effect of quantum yield of 3a at different pH. Measurements performed in PBS where pH was adjusted with HCl or NaOH.

**Figure S6:** Stern–Volmer quenching analysis of Figure 1d in main text.