Photoconductivity of liquid crystalline derivatives of pyrene and carbazole†

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Two structurally related discogens containing either pyrene (1a) or carbazole (2a) were investigated by thermal, XRD, spectroscopic, and time-of-flight (TOF) methods. Experiments demonstrated for 1a a narrow range Colh phase, which easily forms a glass state at ambient temperature. TOF measurements showed an ambipolar charge transport for 1a with the mobilities on the order of $10^{-3} \text{ cm}^2\text{V}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$. The carbazole 2a has two enantiotropic phases (Crcol and Colh) and behaves as a p-type semiconductor. The activation energy for positive charge mobility in 1a was found to be $0.10 \pm 0.01 \text{ eV}$.

Introduction

Photogeneration of an electron–hole pair and one dimensional charge transport1–8 along the self-assembled columns in aromatic discotic liquid crystals9,10 has been recognized as an attractive property for construction of light emitting diodes,11 photovoltaic cells,12 and field-effect transistors.13,14 The initial focus was on triphenylene-based discotics,1 however other classes of discotics, including perylenes,15 phthalocyanines,16,17 hexabenzocoronenes,18 and other polycyclic aromatics19 have been recently investigated for their photophysical properties. Typical charge mobility in these systems has been found to be in the range of $10^{-4}$–$10^{-1} \text{ cm}^2\text{V}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$,9,20 which is comparable with those of polycrystalline organics21,22 and attractive for device applications. In this context, we set out to investigate the photophysical behavior of discotic derivatives of pyrene and carbazole.

Photoconductive properties of pyrene were investigated in pure crystals,23 in thin films,24 and also in solutions of liquid hydrocarbons.25 Carbazole derivatives are attractive for technological applications and they have been intensively studied in polymers26–29 and as components of a discotic triphenylene derivative.30 To date, no photoconduction studies of discotic liquid crystals solely based on pyrene or carbazole have been reported.

Recently, we prepared discotic derivative of pyrene 1a.31 Here, we report the preparation of the carbazole analog 2a, and also XRD phase characterization and photoconductive properties of both pyrene and carbazole discotics 1a and 2a, which contain four 3,4-dioctyloxyphenyl substituents each. For comparison with other structurally similar discotics,31 we also prepared and characterized carbazole derivatives 2b and 2c.

Results and discussion

Synthesis

Tetraarylcarbazoles 2 were prepared from 1,3,6,8-tetrabromo-carbazole12 (3) and appropriate boronic esters 4 according to the general Suzuki coupling procedure33 (Scheme 1). Biphenyls 5 were obtained as the homocoupling byproducts. The
desired tetraarylated carbazoles 2 were separated by column chromatography from partially arylated arenes and biphenyls 5 using a gradient polarity eluent. Chromatographic purification of 2a and 2b was followed by recrystallization from a hexane–ethanol mixture. Derivative 2c was found to be an isotropic liquid at room temperature. Tetrabromide 3 was obtained by direct bromination of the parent carbazole according to a literature procedure.32,34 Preparation of boronic esters 4, characterization of biphenyls 5, and preparation of pyrene derivative 1a are described elsewhere. 31

Liquid crystalline properties

The investigation of carbazoles 2a–2c using polarized optical microscopy and differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) showed that only 2a forms a liquid crystalline phase. Compound 2b showed only melting to an isotropic phase upon heating at 114 °C (38 kJ mol⁻¹) and crystallization upon cooling, and derivative 2c is an isotropic liquid at ambient temperature. These results are consistent with the observed behavior of pyrene and other analogs of 2.31 For instance, the benzo[c]cinnoline analog of 2c was also found to exist as an isotropic liquid at ambient temperature. This was ascribed to the poor core–core interactions resulting from steric hindrance of the 3,5-dioctyloxyphenyl substituent.31

The mesophases obtained on cooling of compounds 1a and 2a displayed fan-shaped textures that are characteristic for columnar mesophases35,36 (Fig. 1). The texture for 1a was highly birefringent. In contrast, carbazole derivative 2a showed large homeotropic domains with discotic columnar axes oriented perpendicular to the substrate in both liquid crystalline and crystalline phases. These textures remained virtually the same after cooling to room temperature.

Pyrene derivative 1a melts to a discotic hexagonal phase at 73 °C, which is followed by isotropization at 87 °C (Fig. 2a).31 On cooling, the isotropic–discotic transition is supercooled by 8 °C and no crystallization peak is observed at a scanning rate of 10 °C min⁻¹. The optical texture remained practically unchanged indicating the formation of an oriented glass at room temperature. This was confirmed by an attempt to shear the cover slip.

The DSC trace for carbazole derivative 2a exhibits three transitions (Fig. 2b). The first endotherm at 60 °C with a small enthalpy of 3 kJ mol⁻¹ was assigned as a transition to a crystalline columnar phase (Cr(col)) as identified by XRD (vide infra). This was followed by melting to a hexagonal columnar mesophase at 109 °C and isotropization at 126 °C with an enthalpy of 20 kJ mol⁻¹. The cooling trace showed all three transitions progressively shifted to lower temperatures as the viscosity of the phases increased. Thus, the lowest transition temperature was supercooled by 16 °C. The second heating curve reproduced the transitions obtained for the virgin sample.

The formation of the crystalline columnar phase by 2a and glassification of the Colh in 1a are consistent with observations for other discogens with the “pinwheel” substitution patterns and are desired for opto-electronic applications.37–39 This can be rationalized by the relatively large core–core distance in the mesophase (vide infra) and consequently ineffective π–π interactions which typically drive the crystallization and molecular tilting of small aromatics.40

![Fig. 1](image1.png)

**Fig. 1** Optical textures of (a) discotic hexagonal phase of 1a at 75 °C (magnification 60 ×), (b) glass phase, retaining structural features of the preceding hexagonal mesophase of 1a at room temperature (magnification 300 ×), (c) crystalline columnar phase of 2a at 80 °C; the texture is identical with that of the discotic hexagonal phase obtained at higher temperature (magnification 300 ×).

![Fig. 2](image2.png)

**Fig. 2** DSC traces of a) pyrene 1a and b) carbazole 2a. Heating rate 10 °C min⁻¹. Transition temperatures (°C) and enthalpies (in italics, kJ mol⁻¹): Cr = crystalline, Cr(col) = crystalline columnar, Colh = hexagonal columnar, Iso = isotropic.
Powder X-ray diffraction (XRD)

Liquid crystalline derivatives 1a and 2a were investigated by variable temperature powder X-ray diffraction to determine their phase structure. The results are shown in Fig. 3 and 4 and tabularized data is provided in the ESI. The cell parameter $a$ was calculated to be 28.9 Å for 1a and 29.8 Å for 2a using eqn (1) and assuming a hexagonal columnar mesophase structure for both compounds. The cell parameter $a$ is smaller than the van der Waals diameter of the molecule (37 Å) in the most extended conformation. This indicates either interdigitation or partial folding of the chains in both 1a and 2a.

$$a = d_{200} \times 4\sqrt{3}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

Diffractograms obtained for both compounds in the temperature regions identified to be liquid crystalline (vide supra) showed reflection patterns that can be ascribed to a two-dimensional hexagonal lattice of a columnar discotic liquid crystal. Graphs of one-dimensional intensity as a function of the diffraction angle $2\theta$ show the strong (100) peak and weak higher-order reflections ($hk0$) in the approximate spacing ratio of $d_{100}/3$, $d_{100}/4$, $d_{100}/7$, etc. (Fig. 3 and 4a). For both compounds the (110) peak is surprisingly weak albeit detectable, and together with the more intense (210) and (310) reflections support the phase assignment to columnar hexagonal (Colh). Both diffractograms are dominated by the (h00) reflections, with the (200) reflection being the second strongest. This rather unusual diffraction pattern observed for both compounds may result from incomplete powder averaging and, in consequence, unreliable relative intensities of the reflections.

The wide-angle region of the diffractograms shows a broad halo at around 4.6 Å indicating the mean distance between the molten alkyl chains within one column. The peak on the right side of the diffused feature arises from the core–core correlation. For 1a the core-core mean distance is 3.9 Å at 80 °C, which is larger than the 3.7 Å measured for 2a at 120 °C, both in the Colh phase. Both of these values are larger than a typical 3.5 Å mean core–core separation in other discotics. A comparison of results obtained for carbazole 2a at 120 °C and 70 °C shows similar X-ray diffraction patterns in the low angle, but significant differences in the wide-angle areas (Fig. 4). The wide-angle X-ray pattern for the hexagonal columnar mesophase at 120 °C shows only the broad halo, while the pattern at 70 °C displays additional sharp reflections in the range of 4.2 Å–5.9 Å. Thus, the X-ray diffraction pattern recorded at 70 °C appears to arise from periodic arrangement of molecules within each column, incorporating column-to-column registry, i.e. a three-dimensional crystal. However, alkyl chains in this phase are still significantly disordered, as indicated by the broad halo at about 4.5 Å. This pattern can be tentatively assigned to a crystalline columnar phase (Cr$_{col}$) based on the fact that the phase is formed upon cooling of the Colh mesophase with unnoticeable texture change (vide supra).

Absorption spectroscopy

The UV absorption spectra for pyrene 1a and carbazole 2a derivatives in cyclohexane are shown in Fig. 5. Substitution of the parent carbazole with four 3,4-dioctylxoyphenyl groups results in a red-shift of its lowest energy transition by 33 nm to
363 nm in 2a. The lowest energy absorption band for 1a has a maximum at 391 nm, which is shifted by 56 nm to the red relative to the allowed $1L_a$ transition or 36 nm relative to the forbidden $1L_b$ band in pyrene. The absorption at 391 nm tails into the visible range, which results in a light yellow color for 1a.

**Photoconductivity**

Charge carrier mobilities of pyrene 1a and carbazole 2a derivatives were measured by a standard TOF (time-of-flight) method in 17.0 µm or 30.8 µm thick ITO-coated glass cells, respectively (for details see the Experimental section and ESI†). Natural textures of the samples were grown from the isotropic phase (see Fig. 1).

Raw data for photocurrent as a function of time were analyzed in double logarithmic plots. A typical presentation of data is shown in Fig. 6 for positive and negative photocurrents generated in the Colh phase of pyrene 1a at 60 °C.

The intercept of the two lines corresponding to the pre- and post-transit slopes of the photocurrent in the double logarithmic plot gave the transit time $t_T$, which was used to calculate the charge carrier mobility $\mu$ according to eqn (2) ($l$ is the sample thickness and $V$ is the applied voltage).

$$\mu = \frac{l}{t_T V}$$

Photocurrent generation was investigated over a range of temperatures and results for positive charge carriers (holes) mobility as a function of temperature are shown in Fig. 7. The full tabularized data are listed in the ESI.

In general, the charge mobility recorded within the same phase was decreasing with decreasing temperature, and was bias-independent, which is characteristic for liquid crystalline semiconductors. Analysis showed that the charge transport in columnar mesophases of pyrene 1a and carbazole 2a derivatives and also in the crystalline columnar phase Cr$_{col}$ of 2a was non-dispersive and the bundle of charge carriers, electrons (when the top electrode was negative) and holes (when the top electrode was positive), was moving through the sample with a constant velocity. This was indicated by the well-defined plateau on the photocurrent curves (Fig. 6). At the transit time $t_T$ the photocurrent decay broadened, when the charge carriers arrived at the bottom electrode.

Positive charge (hole) mobilities in unaligned samples of both compounds were found to be on the order of $10^{-3}$ cm$^2$ V$^{-1}$ s$^{-1}$, which is typical for many other discotic mesogens in the Colh phase. Measurements of the negative charge mobility for pyrene 1a at several temperatures gave values that are close to the hole mobility. Such ambipolar charge transport has been observed for other well-purified discogens including phthalocyanines and triphenylenes, and is consistent with a hopping transport mechanism. In
contrast, measurements of negative photocurrents in both Colh and Cr(col) phases of carbazole 2a were less unequivocal, and precise values for charge mobility could not be obtained. This is presumably due to the presence of small ionic impurities which obscure the analysis and determination of μe, especially in a thick cell (30.8 μm).46

Upon cooling from the Colh phase, carbazole 2a shows an abrupt increase of charge mobility by a factor of 3 at the phase transition to the Cr(col) phase (Fig. 7). This is consistent with a transition to a more organized phase and better intermolecular contact within the columns. Support for this is provided by XRD results, which show a decrease of the mean core-core distance by 0.2 Å upon Colh to Cr(col) transition (Fig. 4). Measurements conducted at 30 °C for the crystalline phase of carbazole 2a showed completely dispersive charge transport. This can be interpreted as a disruption in hexagonally arranged transport tunnels in the Cr(col) phase by creating the grain boundaries during crystallization.2 Consequently, charge carriers were deeply trapped before they were able to reach the counter electrode.

The behavior of pyrene 1a is different from that of 2a, and the charge mobility follows a monotonous decrease with decreasing temperature (Fig. 7). Pyrene 1a supercools to room temperature forming a rigid glass (vide supra) with structural features of the preceding Colh phase and without disruption of the charge transport tunnels. An Arrhenius plot of the positive charge mobility data gave an activation energy for 1a of 0.10 ± 0.01 eV (Fig. 8). This low Ea value and weak temperature dependence of μe are consistent with the charge hopping mechanism and intracolumn charge transport.7,50 Ionic charge transport shows larger temperature dependence and Ea in the range of 0.2–0.4 eV.48

The observed charge mobilities in 1a and 2a are comparable to those obtained for typical materials25 with natural homeotropic alignment such as triphenylenes51 in which large homeotropic domains are formed by slow cooling from the isotropic phase. The alignment of samples by slow cooling in a magnetic field does not significantly affect the photoconductivity results.1 Higher charge mobilities close to 1 cm² V⁻¹ s⁻¹ are observed for large planar systems52 such as hexabenzocoronenes and superphenalenes,19 and other highly ordered systems.2 Similarly, high electron mobilities on the order of 0.1 cm² V⁻¹ s⁻¹ have been reported for large π-electron deficient discotics.53

Conclusions

TOF results indicate that the charge transport in pyrene 1a is ambipolar, while the carbazole derivative 2a behaves as a p-type semiconductor. Positive (hole) carrier mobilities are on the order of 10⁻³ cm² V⁻¹ s⁻¹ and are typical for a hexagonal mesophase. The formation of an ordered glass phase rather than a crystal lattice in 1a results in a broad range Arrhenius-type behavior of charge mobilities. Phase behavior of 1a and 2a allows for the formation rigid phases (frozen Colh and Cr(col)) with charge mobilities typical for a fluid mesogen.

Experimental

All NMR spectra were obtained at 300 MHz (¹H) and 75 MHz (¹³C) in CDCl₃. Chemical shifts were referenced to TMS (¹H) or solvent (¹³C). IR spectra were recorded for neat samples (liquid or microcrystalline) on NaCl plates. Elemental analysis was provided by Atlantic Microlabs.

Optical microscopy was performed using a PZO Biolar microscope equipped with an HS1 Instec hot stage. Phase transition temperatures were reported as onset of the peak and were obtained from a TA Instruments DSC 2920. Samples were heated and cooled with the temperature rate of 10 °C min⁻¹. UV spectra were recorded in cyclohexane and molar absorption was obtained from a Beer’s law plot of 4–5 concentrations. XRD measurements were carried out using a Rigaku RINT2000 X-ray diffractometer with a homemade heater.

The charge carrier mobilities of liquid crystals were measured by the TOF (time-of-flight) method using a nitrogen gas laser (Nippon Laser, λ = 337 nm) and a polarizing microscope with a hot stage. The cells were mounted on a commercially available hot stage and electric bias was applied by a stabilized DC power supply. Depending on the polarity of the applied field, positive (holes) or negative (electrons) charge carriers were moving through the sample, causing displacement photocurrent, which was detected on a digital oscilloscope with a homemade preamplifier. A schematic diagram of the experimental apparatus is shown in Fig. 9.

The cell thickness was 17.0 μm for pyrene derivative 1a and 30.8 μm for carbazole derivative 2a. The cells were filled with isotropic material by capillary forces. The material was

![Fig. 8](image-url)

**Fig. 8** Arrhenius plot for positive charge mobility in 1a in the temperature range of 45 °C–85 °C.

![Fig. 9](image-url)

**Fig. 9** Schematic diagram of the experimental apparatus (TOF method).
slowly cooled to a discotic hexagonal phase and stabilized. No magnetic field was used for sample alignment. Polarized optical microscopy showed a highly birefringent texture for 1a practically with no homeotropic domains, while the texture of the carbazole derivative 2a exhibited large homeotropic domains with discotic columnar axes perpendicular to the electrodes.

1,3,6,8-Tetraarylcabazole (2). General procedure

A mixture of 1,3,6,8-tetramethoxyazulene 32 (4.482 mg, 1 mmol), appropriate boronic ester (0.2 mmol), 2 M aqueous solution of Na₂CO₃ (4 ml), EtOH (4 ml), and toluene (40 ml) was refluxed for 24–72 h under N₂ until a single major product was observed by TLC. The reaction mixture was cooled, Et₂O was added, and the organic layer was separated and dried (Na₂SO₄). The solvent was evaporated and the crude product was passed through a silica gel plug with hexanes–CH₂Cl₂ (2 : 1 ratio). The product was isolated by column chromatography (pure hexanes followed by increasing ratio of hexanes–CH₂Cl₂) followed by recrystallization from a hexanes–ethanol mixture.

1,3,6,8-Tetrakis(3,4-dioctyloxyphenyl)carbazole (2a). Cr 61 (3 kJ mol⁻¹) 

1H NMR δ 0.78–0.85 (m, 24H), 1.22–1.44 (m, 80H), 1.73–1.85 (m, 16H), 3.95–4.07 (m, 16H), 6.92 (d, J = 1.6 Hz, 2H), 6.95 (2H), 7.15–7.22 (m, 8H), 7.55 (d, J = 1.5 Hz, 2H), 8.16 (d, J = 1.5 Hz, 2H), 8.44 (s, 1H); IR 3438 (NH), 1514 (C–O–C) cm⁻¹.

1,3,6,8-Tetrakis(4-octyloxyphenyl)carbazole (2b). Cr 104 (6 kJ mol⁻¹) 

1H NMR δ 0.83 (t, J = 6.5 Hz, 12H), 1.19–1.45 (m, 40H), 1.71–1.81 (m, 8H), 3.96 (t, J = 6.5 Hz, 4H), 3.97 (t, J = 6.5 Hz, 4H), 6.94 (d, J = 8.7 Hz, 4H), 6.99 (d, J = 8.7 Hz, 4H), 7.54 (s, 2H), 7.55 (d, J = 8.3 Hz, 4H), 7.60 (d, J = 8.7 Hz, 4H), 7.71 (d, J = 8.3 Hz, 2H), 8.18 (s, 1H); 13C NMR δ 14.1, 22.7, 26.1, 29.7, 29.32, 29.36, 29.40, 31.8, 68.1, 114.8, 115.3, 117.1, 124.7, 125.0, 125.1, 128.3, 129.2, 131.0, 133.4, 134.4, 136.8, 158.3, 158.7, 1591 (C–C) cm⁻¹.

References
