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Simple Molecule-Based Fluorescent Sensors for Vapor Detection of TNT

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ABSTRACT

1,4-Diarylpentiptycenes (1a–e) were synthesized from 1,4-dichloro- or 1,4-difluoro-2,5-diarylbenzene derivatives by double base-promoted dehydrohalogenation to give corresponding arynes, which in the presence of anthracene undergo cycloaddition providing 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes in moderate overall yields. The resulting 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes show fluorescence modulated by the 1,4-aryl residues. The fluorescence is quenched in the presence of vapors of nitroaromatic compounds suggesting potential application in sensing of explosives.

Host materials that form inclusion complexes with small molecules are the subject of considerable interest owing to potential applications in the preparation of sensors and materials for selective sequestration of substrates of interest. Growing attention is currently devoted to studying supramolecular complexes of a wide variety of lipophilic hosts for electroneutral species that include calixarenes and related macrocycles, cyclodextrins, cycloveratrylenes, cryptophanes, cucurbiturils, and their derivatives.

The interest in pentiptycene receptors was sparked by the discovery that iptycenes bind nitroaromatic explosives used in landmines and improvised explosive devices. The materials successfully used for detection of nitroaromatics are fluorescent polymers with the ability to form complexes with nitroaromatics while changing their emission. Examples are polyphenyleneethynylenes with integrated pentiptycene receptors, polyphenylenebutadiynylenes, polyacetylenes, and polymetalloles such as polysiloles.

As a part of our work on polythiophene conductivity-based sensors, we decided to investigate electropolymerizable pentiptycene receptors carrying thiophene moieties to be deposited as electrochemical sensors for TNT.

Pentiptycene derivatives are most frequently synthesized by the Clar synthesis, which involves double Diels–Alder...
cycloaddition of an acene to benzoquinone.\textsuperscript{(10)} The resulting pentyptcene quinone\textsuperscript{21} may then be reacted with organometallic reagents such as lithium acetylides to yield 1,4-substituted derivatives\textsuperscript{3} according to Scheme 1, which was utilized by Swager to generate poly-(phenyleneethynylene)s comprising pentyptcene moieties.\textsuperscript{(6)} Unfortunately, there is no literature describing a similar approach using aryllithiums or arylmagnesium halides.

This pattern of limited reactivity of both ptytene-benzoquinone carbonyls was also observed by Yang et al.\textsuperscript{(12,13)} who synthesized pentyptcenes with middle ring substituents (described here as 1,4-positions based on the p-benzoquinone).\textsuperscript{(14)} Yang et al. successfully attached a variety of substituents to 1,4-positions, however, carbon substituents proved difficult to introduce to both 1,4-positions. Notable exceptions are the acetylene derivatives introduced following the outline in Scheme 1.

Originally, we believed the lack of a direct coupling method to be due to the limited availability of the 1,4-dihalo derivatives.\textsuperscript{(12,15,16)} However, Yang et al.\textsuperscript{(12,13)} were able to successfully perform a Suzuki-Miyaura\textsuperscript{(17)} coupling on 1-alkoxy-4-iodopentyptcene in 72\% yield. In an effort to circumvent the problem of limited availability of 1,4-dihalo derivatives, we synthesized the corresponding 1,4-triflate\textsuperscript{4} which we hoped would react in Pd\textsuperscript{4}-catalyzed reactions such as the Stille,\textsuperscript{(18)} Suzuki-Miyaura,\textsuperscript{(16)} and Negishi\textsuperscript{(19)} couplings (Scheme 2). The reduction of quinone 2 to the corresponding

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**Scheme 1. Synthesis of 1,4-Substituted Pentyptcenes**

![Scheme 1](image)

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**Scheme 2. Alternative Synthesis of 1,4-Diaryl Pentyptcenes**

![Scheme 2](image)

"X-ray ORTEP representation of 4 (displacement ellipsoids are scaled to the 50\% probability level)."

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(16) Rare Sonogashira coupling of 1,4-diodopentyptcene was reported by: Williams, V. E.; Yang, J. S.; Lugmair, C. G.; Miao, Y. J.; Swager, T. M. Proc. SPIE 1999, 3710 (Pt. 1), 402.


result in overall yields exceeding 40% of the precursor for the preparation of diaryl bisaryne 5. Because we are targeting low-cost precursors for the sensor polymers, we decided to focus on a more straightforward method that would utilize few synthetic steps and would be easy to scaleup.

For this reason, we decided to investigate the simple dehydrohalogenation/Diels−Alder cycloaddition of an in situ generated arylene to anthracene. There are literature precedents, albeit not for diarylpentiptycenes, suggesting that this reaction would proceed. For example, Hart\(^{28}\) described a Bu-Li promoted reaction of 3,6-substituted 1,2,4,5-tetramethoxybenzene derivatives in the presence of anthracene to yield pentiptycene, 1,4-dimethylpentiptycene, and 1,4-dimethoxy-pentiptycene in 26, 14, and 21% yield, respectively. An earlier report by Cadogan\(^{29}\) describes the reaction of sterically crowded 1,4-dibromo-2,5-di-t-butylbenzene and tBuOK as a base in the presence of anthracene, which yielded t-butyl aryl ethers as well as a pentiptycene side-product, albeit in ∼2% yield.

First, we explored the reaction conditions described by Cadogan\(^{29}\) using 3-halo-1,4-bis(thien-2-yl)benzene and potassium t-butoxide in the presence of anthracene (Scheme 3). Reaction condition tuning allowed to generate the corresponding di(thien-2-yl)tritylene 7 in up to 87% yield. The identity of 7 was confirmed by spectroscopic methods as well as X-ray crystallography.

Similar conditions were then used to synthesize 1,4-diaryl pentiptycenes 1a–e. While the previous reaction was carried out using 3-bromo- or 3-iodo-1,4-bis(thien-2-yl)benzene, for the synthesis of 1a–e we decided to use the 3,6-dichloro congeners. While the chloride is certainly not as good a leaving group as bromide or iodide, the preparation of the starting 1,4-diaryl-2,5-dichlorobenzenes 9a–e in photonic purity\(^{30}\) using appropriate aryboronic acid\(^{16}\) or aryl-tin derivative\(^{17}\) to give the corresponding dichloro-derivatives 9a–e was easier. In the case of 1,4-diaryl-2,5-dibromobenzenes prepared from 1,4-dibromo-2,5-diiodobenzene using Pd\(^6\) coupling procedures, the presence of 1−5% of difficult to separate side-products was observed.\(^{31}\) Following the arylation of 1,4-dibromo-2,5-dichlorobenzene 8 the 1,4-diaryl-2,5-dichlorobenzenes 9a–e were subjected to double t-BuOK-promoted dehydrohalogenation/cycloaddition to anthracene present in excess (∼5 equiv) in the reaction mixture. Pentiptycenes 1a–e were purified by column chromatography and the pure products were obtained in respectable yields of 20−56%. Similarly, sodium amide also furnished expected pentiptycenes, albeit in a lower amount. The synthesis of 1,4-diarylpentitoxycenes 1a–e is shown in Scheme 4.

**Scheme 3.** Base-Promoted Reaction of 3-Halo-1,4-bis(thien-2-yl)benzene (X = Br, Cl)\(^a\)

| X-ray ORTEP representation of 7 (displacement ellipsoids are scaled to the 50% probability level). |

\(^{a}\)X-ray ORTEP representation of 7 (displacement ellipsoids are scaled to the 50% probability level).

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(30) Photonic materials were purified to obtain satisfactory results using MS/NMR/elemental analyses, but also single-exponential luminescence lifetime decays. Even small amounts (<1%) of brightly fluorescent terphenyl-type impurities would invalidate the later spectroscopic measurements.
(31) These side-products were observed even when the reaction was carried out at low temperature (30−45\(^{\circ}\) C). According to MS spectra these minor products originated from deiodination and coupling to m-position (i.e., result of C-Br oxidative addition).
rather than their electronic properties, the nature of the leaving group or the method generating the aryne determine the reaction yield.

The ability of 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes to act as TNT sensors was studied in solution and in the solid state following Swager’s procedures utilizing fluorescence as a measure of the pentiptycene receptor-nitroaromate interaction. The fluorescence quantum yields were estimated as follows: 1a (10%, 4.03 ns), 1b (19%, ND), 1c (15%, 0.3 ns), 1d (~25%, 0.8 ns), 1e (20%, 0.82 ns) using anthracene as a standard. Fluorimetric titration of 1a-e by various nitroaromates such as nitrobenzene (NB), 2,4-dinitroanilene (2,4-DNT), trinitrotoluene (TNT), 1-nitronaphthalene (NN), and 2,3-dimethyl-2,3-dinitrobutane taggant (DMDNB) in dichloromethane showed an expected decrease in fluorescence intensity (Figure 1). Fits of the first linear part of the Stern–Volmer plots allowed estimating apparent quenching constants to be in the range of 1000–3300 M⁻¹ in the case of TNT. These values of quenching constants are comparable to the ones found for amplifying polymers.⁸a

To estimate the ability of 1a-e to sense nitroaromate vapors, we used a glass slide with round wells (1.3 mm diameter; 0.8 mm deep; 4 × 3 wells, 3 compounds in 4 replicas), and the sensors 1d and 1e were cast in the wells as a polyurethane solution in THF. Tetraphenylporphyrin (TPP) was used as an internal standard.

Upon illumination with black light (~360 nm), TPP as well as 1d and 1e showed emission in the solid state. The order of fluorescence intensity from the slides in Figure 2, that is, before being exposed to equilibrium vapors of DNT (0.18 ppm) or TNT (7.70 ppb), was 1e > TPP > 1d. The glass slide and sensor films were imaged before and after exposition to DNT or TNT vapors. Within 30 min the sensors fluorescence was quenched (Figure 2). Comparison of all slides shows the red TPP fluorescence did not change, presumably because the electron excited to the TPP LUMO level does not possess the energy to reduce the nitroaromates.⁸a 1d and 1e, on the other hand, displayed DNT and TNT-mediated fluorescence quenching suggesting an interaction between 1d and 1e and DNT or TNT.

**Figure 1.** (Left) Emission quenching observed with 1e (5.0 μM in CH₂Cl₂) upon DNT addition. (Right) Stern–Volmer plots for 1e and various nitroaromates. Excited at 325 nm (abs. maximum).

**Figure 2.** (Top) Photograph of the sensor slide before and after exposure to DNT and TNT in their equilibrium vapors at 22 °C, and finally upon recovery in the stream of clean air. (Bottom) Integrated light output from the sensors represented as a quasi-3D graph (X-Y-Intensity) allows for signal quantitation.

Given the difference in the LUMO-levels of the two sensors as well as the quenchers it is not entirely surprising that the sensor films show a different degree of quenching for each vapor analyte. The fluorescence of the sensor films was largely restored when the films were washed by a stream of clean air. This suggests that these easy-to-make sensor films may be used in differential (array-based) sensors for nitroaromates. ³⁵

In summary, we have developed a simple method for synthesis of 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes in two steps from 1,4-dibromo-2,5-dichlorobenzene that involves double dehydrohalogenation followed by aryne cycloaddition to anthracene. The yield of the respective 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes is moderate considering that four consecutive steps are involved (20–56% overall for four steps, i.e., 60–85% per step). Moreover, the synthesis is easy to perform from inexpensive starting materials. Preliminary fluorescence quenching experiments aimed at evaluation of 2,4-DNT and TNT interaction with 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes 1d and 1e showed a high degree of fluorescence quenching characterized by apparent quenching constant in the range of 1000–3300 M⁻¹ for TNT. Solution-cast polyurethane films doped with 1d and 1e showed similar quenching patterns in the solid state. Taken together these observations suggest that 1,4-diarylpentiptycenes could be of potential interest for the fabrication of sensors for explosives. The preparation of such materials and devices is underway.

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**Supporting Information Available:** Experimental procedures and spectroscopic data for 8a–e, 1a–e, X-ray data for 3 and 6. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.