Polymerization of Anionic Wormlike Micelles

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Polymerizable anionic wormlike micelles are obtained upon mixing the hydrotrropic salt p-toluidine hydrochloride (PTHC) with the reactive anionic surfactant sodium 4-(8-methacryloyloxyoctyloxy)benzene sulfonate (MOBS). Polymerization captures the cross-sectional radius of the micelles (~2 nm), induces micellar growth, and leads to the formation of a stable single-phase dispersion of wormlike micellar polymers. The unpolymerized and polymerized micelles were characterized using static and dynamic laser light scattering, small-angle neutron scattering, 1H NMR, and stopped-flow light scattering. Stopped-flow light scattering was also used to measure the average lifetime of the unpolymerized wormlike micelles. A comparison of the average lifetime of unpolymerized wormlike micelles with the surfactant monomer propagation rate was used to elucidate the mechanism of polymerization. There is a significant correlation between the ratio of the average lifetime to the monomer propagation rate and the average aggregation number of the polymerized wormlike micelles.

Introduction

Hydrotropic molecules can be used as additives in surfactant solutions to promote structural transitions such as the transition from micelles to vesicles or from spherical micelles to wormlike micelles.1–5 Hydrotropes bind strongly to the surfactant headgroup region of the micelles, which reduces the headgroup–headgroup repulsions and causes spherical micelles to be transformed into aggregates of lower curvature.6,7 Although the effect of hydrotropes on the formation of wormlike micelles in mixtures of cationic surfactant solutions has been extensively studied,1–5 much less is known regarding the ability of anionic surfactants to form wormlike micelles upon the addition of a hydrotropic salt. The majority of these studies have focused on sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) solutions,8,9 although more recently anionic wormlike micelles made of sodium oleate in the presence of triethylammonium chloride have been reported.10 Wormlike micelles display rheological behavior similar to that of flexible polymers, and this is often a desired property for a number of applications.11–16 However, the use of wormlike micelles in applications is often limited by the fact that the equilibrium between the micelles and unimers is governed by a delicate balance of intermolecular forces, which can be easily disrupted by changes in temperature, dilution, salt concentration, and the addition of oils or polymers.6,7 This issue of stability can be addressed by chemically fixing the structure of the wormlike micelles through the polymerization of a polymerizable group located either in the hydrophobic portion of the micelles, in the micelle headgroups, or in the micelle counterions.17–21

Reports on the polymerization either in or of wormlike micelles are rare.17–22 Kline et al. showed that rodlike micelles made of cetyltrimethylammonium 4-vinylbenzoate (CTBV) could be polymerized.18–21 The counterion used contains a polymerizable vinyl group that binds to the hydrophilic ammonium headgroup of the wormlike micelles. Upon polymerization, the linked counterions form a shell that retains the cross-sectional structure of the resulting micelle, although there is a reduction in the overall length of the polymerized micelles. Becerra et al.22 reported the polymerization of styrene in wormlike micelles of cetyltrimethylammonium tosylate (CTAT). They concluded that the polymerization of a hydrophobic monomer in the core of the micelles cannot capture the original micellar microstructure, especially at high CTAT concentrations.22

Previously,17 we reported the structural fixation of stable wormlike micelles formed in mixtures of a polymerizable cationic surfactant with an oppositely charged hydrotrropic salt. The tail of these wormlike micelles can be successfully polymerized to yield stable dispersions of polymerized micelles whose structure and properties are insensitive to dilution. The cross-sectional radius of the wormlike assemblies (~2 nm) remains constant, yielding stable dispersions of polymerized micelles whose structure and properties are insensitive to dilution. The cross-sectional radius of the wormlike assemblies (~2 nm) remains constant.
but their length increases considerably upon polymerization. Using a similar approach, we report here the growth and structural fixation of anionic wormlike micelles made of a polymerizable anionic surfactant, namely, sodium 4-(8-methacyrloyloxyoctyl)-oxybenzene sulfonate (MOBS), and the hydrotopic salt p-toluidine hydrochloride (PTHC). Polymerization leads to the uniaxial growth of the micelles and allows for the formation of stable dispersions of polymerized wormlike micelles. The average lifetime of the unpolymerized wormlike micelles was also measured using the stopped-flow method to further understand the interplay of the dynamic exchange of micelle—surfactant unimers and the fast surfactant monomer propagation rate on the change in micellar length during polymerization.

Materials and Methods

**Materials.** 1-Octanediol, phenol-4-sulfonic acid sodium dehydrate, and p-toluidine hydrochloride (PTHC) were purchased from Fluka. The initiator, 2,2′-azobis(2-methylpropionamide) dihydrochloride (V50, Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Ltd.), was recrystallized from methanol. Dowex 50WX8(H) ion-exchange resin was obtained from BDH. Methacryloyl chloride was prepared by reacting methacrylic acid with phosphorus trichloride.23

**Preparation of the Polymerizable Surfactant. 4-Bromo-1-octanol.** A mixture of 1.8-octanediol (25.38 g, 0.174 mol) and 40% octanol. A mixture of 1,8-octanediol (25.38 g, 0.174 mol) and 40% aqueous sodium bicarbonate being continuously extracted with cyclohexane. The cyclohexane extract (500 mL) was washed with a 5% aqueous sodium bicarbonate solution (250 mL), water (250 mL), and brine (250 mL) and then dried with MgSO4. The solvent was removed in vacuo to obtain pure 4-bromo-1-octanol in 85% yield.

**4-(8-Hydroxyoctyl)oxybenzene Sulfonic Acid (MOBS).** Phenol-4-sulfonic acid sodium dehydrate, KOH (7.07 g, 0.126 mol), and H2O (120 mL) were mixed in a 500 mL round-bottomed flask equipped with a condenser. 8-Bromo-1-octanol (30.15 g, 0.12 mol) in 180 mL of ethanol was added, and the reaction mixture was refluxed overnight. A white precipitate of 4-(8-hydroxyoctyl)oxybenzene sulfonate formed when the reaction mixture was cooled in an ice water bath. The solid was filtered and washed with chloroform to remove 8-bromo-1-octanol and was purified by recrystallization from hot water. The resulting white product was dissolved in hot distilled water and eluted through a Dowex 50WX8(H) ion-exchange column preheated to 60–70 °C. After elution, 4-(8-hydroxyoctyl)oxybenzene sulfonate was converted to its sulfonic acid form. The effluent was freeze dried to obtain a white, fluffy solid.24

**Sodium 4-(8-methacyrloyloxyoctyl)oxybenzene Sulfonate (MOBS).** 4-(8-hydroxyoctyl)oxybenzene sulfonic acid (20 g, 0.066 mol) was dissolved in dry THF (200 mL) in a 500 mL three-necked, round-bottomed flask equipped with an air-leak and dropping funnel. Methacryloyl chloride (15.14 mL, 0.156 mol) and a solution of hydroquinone (0.14 g, 0.00127mol) in dry THF (30 mL) were added dropwise. The reaction mixture was stirred for 48 h under N2 protection. Unreacted methacryloyl chloride and THF were removed in vacuo. Ether was added to the orange-brown oil residue, and then a saturated brine solution was added to convert the sulfonic acid into its sodium salt form. MOBS was washed with ether and dried before it was recrystallized from methanol. Purified MOBS was obtained as a white powder with an overall yield of 70%. The chemical structures of the synthesized MOBS and PTHC are shown in Figure 1. Their structures and purity were verified by 1H NMR. The spectra of these species are discussed in detail in the 1H NMR discussion below.

**Polymerization of Wormlike Micelles.** Micelles for polymerization were prepared with water or D2O and depleted of oxygen by bubbling with nitrogen for about 20 min. After dissolution at room temperature of the desired MOBS and PTHC compositions, the solution mixtures were heated to 60 °C. The water-soluble initiator V50, predissolved in degassed water or D2O, was injected (the molar ratio of MOBS to V50 was fixed at 100), and the polymerization was carried out at 60 °C for 1 h.

**Figure 1.** Chemical structures of sodium 4-(8-methacyrloyloxyoctyl)oxybenzene sulfonate (MOBS) and p-toluidine hydrochloride (PTHC).

chain with excluded-volume interactions. This model allows the estimation of the contour length ($L_c$) and the persistence length ($L_p$) of the micelle, which are an indication of micellar flexibility.\textsuperscript{26} The SANS modeling details are described in a previous publication.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{\textsuperscript{1}H NMR Spectroscopy.} \textsuperscript{1}H NMR measurements were performed at 25°C on a Bruker AC300 NMR spectrometer (resonance frequency of 300 MHz for \textsuperscript{1}H) operating in the Fourier transform mode.

\textbf{Stopped-Flow Light Scattering.} Stopped-flow studies were carried out using a Bio-Logic SFM300/S stopped-flow instrument. The SFM-300/S is a three-syringe (10 mL) instrument in which all step-motor-driven syringes (S1, S2, S3) can be operated independently to carry out single to double mixing. This device is attached to the MOS-250 spectrometer, and the collected kinetic data are fitted using the program Biokine (Bio-Logic). For light-scattering detection, both the excitation and emission wavelengths were adjusted to 335 nm with 10 nm slits. Either an FC-08 or an FC-15 flow cell was used, and the typical dead times were about 1.1 and 2.6 ms, respectively.

\textbf{Surface Tensiometry.} Equilibrium surface tensions were measured using a JK99B tensiometer with a platinum plate. The measuring accuracy of the device as reported by the manufacturer is ±0.1 mN/m. The surface tension of pure water (ca. 71 mN/m) was checked periodically between measurements. The reported surface tension at each concentration was the average of three to five measurements that were taken after allowing each of the solutions to equilibrate in the instrument at a temperature of 25.0 ± 0.1 °C.

\section*{Results and Discussion}

Pure MOBS surfactant in water has a critical micelle concentration (cmc) of 13.4 mM at 25°C. With the addition of PTHC, the critical aggregation concentration (cac) of MOBS as measured by surface tension monotonically drops from 13.4 mM (at $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}} = 0$) to 5.7 mM (at $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$), where $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}}$ is defined as the molar ratio of PTHC to MOBS. (See Figure S1 in Supporting Information.) This reduction in cac is relevant because the stability of polymerized wormlike micelles must be probed for concentrations much lower than the cac.

Below the cmc and cac, isotropic micellar solutions of low viscosity form, but for MOBS concentrations ranging from 10 to 20 to 100 mM and for [PTHC]/MOBS molar ratios (i.e., $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}} \geq 0.7$), the samples display a slightly bluish tinge that indicates apparent micellar growth (i.e., a transition from spherical micelles to wormlike micelles to precipitate).\textsuperscript{9} Here, we expect PTHC to insert into the micelles in a similar way. Furthermore, because the polar headgroups of MOBS and PTHC both bear one benzene ring, $\pi-\pi$ interactions between the benzene ring of MOBS and the benzene ring of PTHC are likely. Such interactions should be reflected in significant changes in the corresponding NMR signals as compared to the signals of each of the pure species in solution.

Thus, \textsuperscript{1}H NMR spectra of MOBS, PTHC, and mixtures of these species in D$_2$O were measured (Figure 2). In the spectrum of 50 mM PTHC, the resonances at $\delta = 7.38-7.40$ ppm are ascribed to the two ortho protons on the benzene ring, whereas the signals at $\delta = 7.29-7.31$ ppm are ascribed to the aromatic meta protons. The three methyl protons at the para position are assigned at $\delta = 0.68$ ppm. These shifts are evidence of a strong interaction between the aromatic groups of MOBS and PTHC, which is partially due to the $\pi-\pi$ interaction between the benzene ring of MOBS and the benzene ring of PTHC. Such interactions would enhance the insertion and binding of PTHC to the micelle surface.

At $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$ (Figure 2d), the signals of benzene ring protons of MOBS move further upfield, whereas the ortho and meta protons as well as the $p$-CH$_3$ resonances of PTHC all shift downfield slightly compared to that at $\lambda_{\text{PTHC}} = 0.5$ (Figure 2c). The less-prominent upfield shift is probably due to the contribution of free (unbound) counterions to the total signal.\textsuperscript{17}

With increasing PTHC, the triplet observed at around $\delta = 3.86$, which is the resonance of two protons in the $-\text{CH}_2\text{O}-\text{PhSO}_3\text{Na}$ group of MOBS, also shows an increasing upfield shift. This shift agrees with the upfield shift of the $p$-CH$_3$ resonance of PTHC and clearly indicates that PTHC strongly binds to the surface of the micelles with its benzene ring and $p$-CH$_3$ group intercalated into the micellar interior (in close proximity with benzene ring of MOBS), whereas the $-\text{NH}_3^+$ headgroup of PTHC is protruding from the micelle surface.

Significant changes are also seen in the NMR spectra of the micelles before and after polymerization, and these are evidence of the changes suffered by the micelles during the reaction. Before polymerization (Figure 2a), the signals at $\delta = 1.83$ (CH$_2$ on the methacrylate group of MOBS) and $\delta = 5.4-6.0$ (CH$_2$ on the double bond) characteristic of protons of methacrylate groups can be clearly seen. After polymerization (Figure 2b), all of the signals characteristic of the methacrylate groups disappear, which indicates complete polymerization of the surfactant monomers. Another interesting feature of the polymerized wormlike micelles is that the signal due to the surfactant tail (at 1.8 ppm) is barely noticeable, suggesting that the mobility of the surfactant tail has been greatly restricted by polymerization. This is understandable given that polymerization has covalently linked the hydrophobic tails together such that the fluidity of the hydrophobic core is largely reduced.\textsuperscript{17,27}
After polymerization, the resonances from protons on the benzene ring of MOBS appear only as a broad band when compared to that observed for the unpolymerized wormlike micelles. A more careful examination of parts d and e of Figure 2 shows that the ortho and meta protons as well as the $p$-CH$_3$ resonances of PTHC show further upfield shifts, indicating their stronger intercalation with MOBS after polymerization. This also partially explains the broadening of the MOBS benzene proton signals after structural fixation. As discussed in the following section, much longer wormlike micelles are obtained after polymerization, and this size increase may also lead to the broadening of $^1$H NMR signals.

**LLS Studies**

Dynamic LLS was used to probe the variation in micellar size upon addition of PTHC to MOBS. The approach has been previously described by Hassan et al.\textsuperscript{9} and Liu et al.\textsuperscript{17} and has proven to be applicable to the characterization of relatively short unpolymerized micelles. Briefly, from the average decay rate $\Gamma$ and $q$, the apparent diffusion coefficient, $D_a$, of the micelles can be determined (Figure S2 in Supporting Information). $D_a$ decreases with increasing $x_{\text{PTHC}}$, which suggests the formation of wormlike micelles of increasing length.$^{9,17}$

To extract information about the micellar size (i.e., the length of the wormlike micelles) from $D_a$, the effect of interactions between neighboring micelles was considered, and a set of equations outlined by Hassan et al.$^9$ that relate the micellar length ($L$) to $D_a$ was solved. The micelle length was calculated via an iterative procedure under the assumption that the cross-sectional area remains constant. The micellar radius ($r$) was set at 2.05 nm, which is roughly the length of the hydrocarbon chain of MOBS.$^6$

Figure 3 shows that the addition of PTHC leads to significant micellar growth. When $x_{\text{PTHC}} < 0.7$, the growth is moderate; upon further increasing $x_{\text{PTHC}}$, there is a monotonic increase in the micellar length up to $\sim 100$ nm at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.1$, which corresponds to an axial ratio of $p = L/2r \approx 25$. The dynamic LLS data thus suggest a structural transition from spherical to wormlike micelles.

The variation of the scattering intensities of the polymerized wormlike micelles upon dilution reveals an inflection point at $\sim 2.5$ mM, which likely signals the onset of micellar overlapping (Figure 4).$^{6,27}$ At lower concentrations ($< 2.5$ mM), the scattering intensity varies linearly with concentration, whereas at higher concentrations the slope decreases considerably. Consequently, all of the light-scattering measurements of the polymerized wormlike micelles were made at concentrations below 2.5 mM. Polymerized wormlike micelles exhibit a much lower $D_a$ (Figure S2 in Supporting Information) than the unpolymerized ones, which indicates the presence of substantially longer wormlike micelles in solution after polymerization.

Figure 5 shows the concentration dependence of the average hydrodynamic radius ($\langle R_g \rangle$, directly measured by dynamic LLS) of the polymerized wormlike micellar solutions at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$. It is clear that $\langle R_g \rangle$ remains nearly constant in the concentration range from 0.05 to 1.25 mM, indicating that the wormlike micellar structure remains after polymerization. If the structural fixation had not been successful, then the wormlike micelles would have dissociated into unimers at concentrations well below the cac of MOBS at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$ (5.7 mM). After the structure of the wormlike micelles is fixed, static LLS (Figure 6) can be used to calculate their weight-average molar mass ($M_w$) and average radius of gyration ($\langle R_g \rangle$). The data indicate that $M_w \approx 3.1 \times 10^6$ g·mol$^{-1}$ and $\langle R_g \rangle \approx 92$ nm, results that suggest that each polymerized wormlike micelle contains approximately 7900 MOBS surfactant molecules. As also shown in Figure 5, the apparent $\langle R_g \rangle$ of the polymerized wormlike micelles remains constant ($\sim 92$ nm), whereas the average sphere hydrodynamic radius $\langle R_h \rangle$ is $\sim 44$ nm. The ratio of $\langle R_g \rangle/\langle R_h \rangle$ reflects the density distribution of the scatterers in space; $\langle R_g \rangle/\langle R_h \rangle \approx 1.5$ for monodisperse random coil chains and $\sim 1.3$–4.0 for elongated micelles.$^{29–31}$ Here the high value of $\langle R_g \rangle/\langle R_h \rangle \approx 2.1$ is consistent with an extended wormlike micellar structure.$^6$
Intensity versus concentration (Figure 4). The solid line represents the best fit to the experimental data using a semiflexible model with excluded volume interactions. The polymerization was carried out at 50 mM MOBS with a molar ratio of $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$ and then diluted 5-fold.

The polymerized wormlike micelles at low concentrations are well separated from each other. As the concentration $C$ increases, they are concentrated and eventually come into contact. At the so-called overlap concentration ($C^*$), the whole volume of the solution is filled with these wormlike chains. The overlap concentration can be calculated using eq 1, assuming each wormlike chain occupies the volume equal to a sphere with a radius of $\langle R_g \rangle$,

$$\frac{4}{3} \pi C^* \langle R_g \rangle^3 = \frac{M}{N_A}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $M/N_A$ is the mass of each chain and $N_A$ is Avogadro’s number. The calculated value of $C^*$ is 4.0 mM, which is close to the inflection point (2.5 mM) in the plot of the scattered light intensity versus concentration (Figure 4).15

Small-Angle Neutron Scattering (SANS) Studies. Figure 7a shows the SANS spectrum of the polymerized wormlike micelles, where [MOBS] = 50 mM and $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$. The scattered intensity has a $q^{-4}$ dependence in the intermediate range of $q$, which is the signature of the scattering from 1D objects. The spectrum qualitatively confirms the wormlike micellar structure. Because of the screening effect of PTHC, the SANS intensity profile shows a slight discrepancy in the fit at high $q$ where the scattered intensity is very low. Evidence of the flexibility of the micelles is obtained from a Hutzler plot (Figure 7b), which is constructed to highlight the deviation of the scattering data from that of ideal, rigid cylinders. In this plot, the upturn in the low-$q$ region indicates that the micelles are best described by a semiflexible cylinder model. A rigid cylinder model did not give a good fit to the SANS scattering profile, particularly in the low-$q$ range (data not shown).

For a wormlike chain with a contour length $L_c$ of 203 nm and a persistence length $l_p$ of 26 nm, $L_c \gg l_p$, so the radius of gyration, $R_g$, can be calculated as

$$R_g = \sqrt{L_c l_p}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

The calculated $R_g$ is ~73 nm, whereas the $\langle R_g \rangle$ determined by static LLS is ~92 nm. The discrepancy between these two values reflects the fact that the surfactant concentration used in SANS was 10 mM, which is higher than the micellar overlap concentration, so the intermicellar interactions should have a large effect on the model calculation, especially in the low-$q$ range. Furthermore, in SANS and static LLS, the number- and weight-averaged values are measured, respectively, and for a polydisperse sample, the weight-average value will be higher.

For the polymerized wormlike micelles, on the basis of the average aggregation number deduced from static LLS, the micellar length deduced from SANS fitting, and the cross-sectional diameter, we estimated the surface area ($\omega_a$) of the headgroup per MOBS surfactant to be 0.34 nm$^2$. However, using the chemical structure of the MOBS surfactant, the calculated length $l$ and volume $v$ of its hydrocarbon tail are 2.1 and 0.41 nm$^3$, respectively.6 The estimated packing parameter ($N_v = v/\omega_a$) of MOBS in the presence of PTHC (at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$) is ~0.57, which is close to the theoretical value (0.5) for an infinitely long cylinder.6,36

Stopped-Flow Studies. The above sections provide detailed structural information about unpolymerized and polymerized wormlike micelles. Here, the formation and dissociation kinetics of wormlike micelles before and after polymerization are discussed. The kinetics of forming spherical micelles has been extensively studied by a variety of methods including stopped-flow, temperature-jump, pressure-jump, and ultrasonic absorption. Reports suggest that a micellar solution can be characterized by two relaxation processes, namely, fast and slow relaxation processes.6,36 The fast relaxation ($\tau_1$, which is on the order of microseconds) is associated with the exchange between monomers in the micelles and in the dispersion medium. The slow relaxation ($\tau_2$, which is on the order of milliseconds) is related to the formation and breakdown of the micelles. In other words, $\tau_1$ and $\tau_2$ are respectively related to the residence time of a surfactant molecule in the micelle and the average lifetime.
or stability of the micelle. There are only a few experimental studies of the kinetics of the spherical-to-wormlike micelle transition.37–40

**Kinetics of Wormlike Micelle Formation.** The transition from spherical to wormlike micelles upon mixing different amounts of PTHC with MOBS was probed (Figure 8) using a stopped-flow device coupled with light-scattering detection. At low $\chi_{\text{PTHC}}$ ratios, no relaxation was observed at all, whereas at higher $\chi_{\text{PTHC}}$ ratios ($>0.7$), the relaxation had a negative amplitude that is indicative of a decrease in the length or number of wormlike micelles. The expected initial increase in the scattered light intensity due to micelle growth was not observed, which implies that the initial relaxation is too fast to be observed by stopped-flow mixing. Such rapid relaxation must reflect the short hydrocarbon chain of MOBS because we observed a relaxation process with a positive amplitude for SDS solutions upon the dissociation of wormlike micelles was carried out at 60°C. To deduce the average micelle lifetime or/and stability of the wormlike micelles and to understand the polymerization mechanism, we measured the dissociation kinetics at different temperatures by carrying out 25-fold stopped-flow dilution with water (Figure 11). Analysis yields the estimated dissociation rate constants $k_{\text{diss.}}$

The time dependence of the light-scattering intensity $I_t$ can be converted to a normalized function, namely, $(I_t - I_\infty)/I_\infty$ versus $t$, where $I_\infty$ is the value of $I_t$ at an infinitely long time. Empirically, we found that such a function could be well fit by a double-exponential function

$$\frac{I_t - I_\infty}{I_\infty} = a_1 e^{-k_1 t} + a_2 e^{-k_2 t}$$  

where $a_1$ and $a_2$ are the normalized amplitudes ($a_2 = 1 - a_1$) and $k_1$ and $k_2$ are the relaxation constants.5,35 The mean dissociation...
constant, $k_{\text{diss}}$, can be calculated as

$$\frac{1}{k_{\text{diss}}} = \frac{a_1}{k_1} + \frac{a_2}{k_2}$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

where $1/k_{\text{diss}}$ equals the characteristic delay time $\tau_{\text{diss}}$. Figure 12 shows the temperature dependence of $\ln(1/\tau_{\text{diss}})$. With increasing temperature, $1/\tau_{\text{diss}}$ increases. Extrapolation to the polymerization temperature at 60 °C leads to a good estimate of $\tau_{\text{diss}} \approx 0.13$ s. For concentrations near cac, $\tau_{\text{diss}}$ should be very close to $\tau_2$.41,42

Polymerization Mechanism. Wormlike micelles and unimers coexist in dynamic equilibrium. Such a dynamic nature can be better described in terms of the average micelle lifetime (i.e., the time required for the association of surfactant unimers into the micelles). During polymerization, the mean lifetime of the unpolymerized wormlike micelles ($\tau_m$) can be calculated as43–45

$$\tau_m = N\tau_2$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

where $N$ is the average aggregation number in each unpolymerized wormlike micelle, which can be estimated from the length (Figure 3) and the cross-sectional radius (2.1 nm) of the wormlike micelles as well as the surface area occupied per surfactant (~3.36 nm² per surfactant).17 Thus, for 50 mM MOBS at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$, $N$ is ~2150 and $\tau_m$ is ~280 s.

The actual aggregation number of each micelle fluctuates around $N$ as a result of the diffusion of surfactant unimers into and out of the micelle. As discussed in our previous paper,17 this migration of surfactant is important because the unreacted unimers can move from one micelle to another during polymerization. The time scale for the association of a unimer, $\tau_u$, is given by $(k^+\text{cac})^{-1}$, where the association rate constant is $k^+ \approx 10^9$ (M⁻¹s⁻¹).45 Thus, $\tau_u \approx 2 \times 10^{-7}$ s, so unimers are continuously exchanged and thus can be incorporated into the polymerized micelle.

Finally, let us examine the rate of growth of the oligomeric chains. This growth should mainly depend on the propagation time ($\tau_p$) during which a monomer is added to the growing chain. $\tau_p \approx (k_0[M])^{-1}$, where $k_0 \approx 1000$ (M⁻¹s⁻¹) for n-alkyl methacrylates with a degree of polymerization of 10 or higher and [M] is the monomer concentration.46 For 50 mM MOBS at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$, $\tau_p \approx 2 \times 10^{-5}$ s in the initial stage of the reaction. This value is 4 orders of magnitude smaller than the micelle lifetime (280 s) but much longer than the association time of a surfactant unimer to the micelle ($2 \times 10^{-7}$ s).

The polymerization of wormlike micelles resembles a typical microemulsion polymerization, where monomer-swollen micelles are replaced by wormlike micelles containing polymerizable double bonds inside the hydrophobic core.47,48 The number of micelles far exceeds the number of radicals. Therefore, the probability of more than one radical entering a micelle is negligible. It is quite likely that radicals formed by the decomposition of water-soluble initiators rapidly partition into the micelles.

Because the propagation time step is 4 orders of magnitude faster than the average micelle lifetime, oligomeric radicals are formed during the average micelle lifetime. The length of these oligomeric radicals, given by the ratio of $\tau_u/\tau_p$, is ~10⁴ units. The aggregation number of the polymerized wormlike micelles from 50 mM MOBS at $x_{\text{PTHC}} = 1.0$ is 7900. The good agreement between these two values strongly supports the proposed polymerization mechanism for the wormlike micelles, namely, that the average length of polymerized wormlike micelles is mainly determined by $\tau_u/\tau_p$ and not by the average length of the original wormlike micelles. One may argue that at lower $x_{\text{PTHC}}$ shorter wormlike micelles (lower $N$) are formed with a lower $\tau_m = N\tau_2$. The situation is more complex because $\tau_2$ also changes with $x_{\text{PTHC}}$ for a given MOBS concentration. A detailed investigation of the correlation between $\tau_u/\tau_p$ and the aggregation number in the polymerized wormlike micelles is currently ongoing.

Conclusions

The micellar structural transition from spherical to wormlike anionic micelles can be accomplished upon addition of p-toluidine hydrochloride (PTHC), a hydrotropic salt, to aqueous solutions of sodium 4-(8-methacryloyloxyoctyl)oxybenzene sulfonate (MOBS), a polymerizable anionic surfactant. The polymerization of wormlike micelles leads to stable dispersions of polymerized wormlike micelles. After polymerization, the cross-sectional radius remains unchanged (~2 nm), but the micelle length increases from several tens of nanometers to several hundred nanometers. The average micelle lifetime of the wormlike micelles before polymerization was measured and combined with the surfactant monomer propagation rate to elucidate the mechanism of polymerization.

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Supporting Information Available: Surface tensiometry for solutions of MOBS in the presence and absence of PTHC, apparent diffusion coefficient $D_o$ of wormlike micelles before and after polymerization as a function of $x_{\text{PTHC}}$, and a Guinier plot of $\ln(Iq)$ versus $q^2$ for polymerized wormlike micelles. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

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