Effects of Ligand Coordination Number and Surface Curvature on the Stability of Gold Nanoparticles in Aqueous Solutions

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Received April 22, 2009. Revised Manuscript Received May 23, 2009

The colloidal stability of gold nanoparticles (AuNPs) cap-exchanged with either monothiol- or dithiolane-terminated PEG-OCH₃ ligands was investigated. Three distinct aspects were explored: (1) effects of excess salt concentration; (2) ligation competition by dithiothreitol (DTT); and (3) resistance to sodium cyanide digestion. We found that overall ligands presenting higher coordination numbers (dithiolane) exhibit much better stability to excess added salt and against competition from DTT compared to their monodentate counterparts. Resistance to NaCN digestion indicated that there is a balance between coordination number and density of ligand packing on the NP surface. For smaller NPs, where a larger surface curvature reduces the ligand packing density, a higher coordination number is clearly beneficial. In comparison, a higher ligand density allowed by the smaller curvature for larger nanocrystals makes monothiol-PEG-capped NPs more resistant to cyanide digestion. The present study indicates that balance between the coordination number and surface packing density is crucial to enhancing the colloidal stability of AuNPs.

Introduction and Background

Inorganic nanoparticles such as those made of metallic, semiconducting, and magnetic materials have attracted tremendous interest for use in biological and medical applications.¹⁻⁴ In particular, there has been extensive work aimed at developing gold nanoparticles (AuNPs) as scattering and/or plasmonic probes, as platforms for drug delivery, and for localized heat treatment of cancer tissue.⁵⁻⁷ These applications require that the nanoparticle be stable in buffer solutions and in biological media, which are rich in salt and thiol compounds (e.g., glutathione, cysteine). Water-soluble AuNPs that are uniform in size, stable over a broad pH range and in the presence of high ion concentrations, and surface-functionalized with target reactive groups/functions are thus desired for most of these applications.

A common approach for promoting hydrophilicity and bioconjugation of AuNPs has involved the use of cap exchange or surface modification of citrate-capped nanoparticles often with thiol-terminated ligands.⁸⁻¹⁰ These include thiol-terminated poly(ethylene glycol)s (PEGs), DNAs, and aptamers. This strategy promotes interparticle steric hindrance, prevents nanoparticle aggregation in buffer solutions, and permits control over their interface with the surrounding solution/environment; citrate-functionalized AuNPs are charge-stabilized and tend to aggregate in the presence of added salts.⁹,¹⁰ Because citrate reduction and stabilization provide AuNPs with a size regime spanning ~2 to 100 nm, an array of nanoparticles with different sizes and capped with a variety of functional ligands can be made using this simple ligand-exchange strategy.¹¹,¹² As a result, tremendous effort has been invested in developing surface ligands that enhance the stability and bioavailability of AuNPs.

We should also emphasize that there has been an effort geared toward the synthesis of AuNPs (also known as monolayer-protected clusters, MPC) via a two-phase reaction starting with alkanethiol ligands.¹³ If a hydrophilic segment is appended onto the ligands, water-soluble nanoparticles can be made using this route.¹⁴ Whereas these nanoparticles are a substantial improvement compared to their water-insoluble predecessors, these methods are limited with respect to the accessible range of nanoparticle sizes.

Ligand-to-nanocrystal binding (such as thiol-to-AuNPs) is usually driven by metal chelation (or coordination) of the anchoring group onto the surface, not by covalent coupling, which makes this interaction rather weak. This implies that ligands presenting multiple chelating groups should produce stronger affinity/anchoring to the metallic surface. We have indeed shown that dithiol-terminated ligands provide substantially enhanced stability to CdSe-ZnS core-shell quantum dots (as compared to single thiol ligands) in aqueous solutions.¹⁵⁻¹⁷
One would expect that the colloidal stability of surface-modified AuNPs should also benefit from using ligands that present multiple chelating groups, as was demonstrated for quantum dots. The advantages offered by multidentate ligands for binding to AuNPs compared to their single-point-coordination counterparts have been an open question because monothiol-terminated ligands and receptors have performed relatively well in functional assays.14,18 There are a few reports demonstrating the advantages of functionalizing AuNPs with oligonucleotides and alkanes appended with multiple thiols,19–25 but we are unaware of anyone comparing the stability of AuNPs capped with monothiol versus multithiol-appended PEG ligands. PEGylated ligands promote affinity to water and reduce nonspecific interactions in biological media. In addition, if end-functionalized PEG ligands are used, the resulting NPs can be coupled to a variety of target receptors while providing control over the number of receptors per NP (conjugate valence); low valences can also be achieved with this strategy.

In this study, we investigated the stability of AuNPs under a variety of conditions following cap exchange with modular PEG ligands presenting either mono- or dithiol anchoring groups. In particular, we probed their stability in the presence of excess salts against competition from dithiothreitol (DTT) as well as their resistance to sodium cyanide (NaCN)-induced digestion. One main characteristic that distinguishes the present study from other stability studies reported in the literature is that our system features a more extensive modification of the nanoparticle surface, where a nearly complete removal of the native ligands and their replacement with new ones is realized. In comparison, literature reports involve controllable numbers of thiol-terminated oligonucleotides per NP.19,20 Moreover, our 1,2-dithiolane-terminated ligands feature two closely spaced sulfur groups (constrained by the five-membered ring structure), which may provide better coordination to the NP surface compared to thiol-terminated oligonucleotides, where thiols are appended at the end of rather long chains.19

**Results and Discussion**

To probe the effects of the coordination number on the colloidal stability of surface-modified AuNPs, we synthesized two modular PEG-based ligands; one is appended with a single thiol, and the other presents a disulfide group (Figure 1 inset). The remaining modules of the ligands, namely, the short alkyl chain and the methoxy-terminated PEG segment, are identical for both sets. The bidentate ligand consists of a thioctic acid covalently appended onto a methoxy-terminated PEG (mPEG, MW ∼750 Da) through an amide bond. It was prepared via a simple three-step reaction as reported in ref 10. First, the hydroxy terminal group of commercially available mPEG was transformed to a methanesulfonyl group with methanesulfonyl chloride and then to an azide using sodium azide. Next, the terminal azide group was reduced to an amine using triphenylphosphine, yielding amino-mPEG (H2N-PEG-OCH3). Finally, thiolic acid (TA) was attached to the amine terminal group via N,N′-dicyclohexylcarbodiimide (DCC) coupling to form TA-PEG-OCH3. The monodentate ligand was synthesized using the same H2N-PEG-OCH3 precursor in two steps: (1) 6-(acetylthio)-hexanoic acid was coupled to H2N-PEG-OCH3 via DCC to form acetyl-protected thiol-mPEG (AcS-PEG-OCH3), followed by (2) cleavage of the acetyl group using sodium methoxide to obtain the final HS-PEG-OCH3 ligand (Figure 1 inset).24,25 Further details on the synthesis of the monothiol ligands can be found in the Supporting Information. Citrate-stabilized AuNPs with different sizes (5, 10, and 15 nm) used in this study were purchased as colloidal gold solutions from Ted Pella, Inc. (Reading, CA). When performing cap exchange with HS-PEG-OCH3 and TA-PEG-OCH3 ligands, the number of excess ligands used was adjusted, depending on the AuNP concentration of the citrate-stabilized stock solutions and the size of the nanoparticles used, to maintain a constant ratio of ligand-to-Au surface atoms (larger AuNPs contain more surface atoms per particle). We also adjusted the excess molar concentration of ligands used for HS-PEG-OCH3 to twice that of TA-PEG-OCH3 in order to account for the difference in the coordination number of the two ligands (i.e., the total number of thiol groups added to a given concentration of AuNP solution and the size of AuNPs is equivalent for both ligands). We used ligand molar concentrations ∼800 and ∼400 times that of the concentration of Au surface atoms for mono- and dithiol ligands, respectively. (Further details can be found in the Supporting Information.) Because of the rather large excess ligands used for cap exchange, we anticipate that the resulting NPs will have their surfaces saturated with the PEGylated ligands. We confirmed the effectiveness of the cap exchange by comparing the FT-IR spectra collected from dispersions of TA-PEG-OCH3-capped and HS-PEG-OCH3-capped AuNPs and free ligands. A representative example is shown for TA-PEG-AuNPs (Supporting Information). Data showed that bands attributed to the amide C=O stretch (at 1670 cm⁻¹) and amide N–H bending (at 1540 cm⁻¹), measured for free ligands, were maintained in the spectra measured for TA-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs dispersed in DI H2O: as-purchased citrate-stabilized (black), cap-exchanged with HS-PEG750-OCH3 (purple), and cap-exchanged with TA-PEG750-OCH3 (blue).
the gel well (caused by the presence of excess ions and EDTA in the loading buffer); TA-PEG-OCH₃-AuNPs did not aggregate in the loading buffer but showed a negligible shift, indicative of an overall neutral NP surfaces. These measurements indicate that nearly complete replacement of the native citrate ligands by the new thiol-appended ligands has been achieved. A very small number of the native ligands may persist, nonetheless, given the nature of the cap exchange process. The more intrusive replacement of the surface ligands realized with our nanocrystals contrasts with stability studies conducted using oligonucleotide-modified AuNPs; in those studies, a maximum of ~100–200 ligands per AuNP (13 nm size) was used. Because 13 nm AuNPs present ca. 7300 surface atoms, this implies that oligonucleotide-to-Au atom ratios <1 (~0.03 in this particular case) were used in those studies.

Figure 1 shows the absorption spectra for 15 nm AuNPs cap-exchanged with both sets of ligands along with that of the original citrate-stabilized dispersion. Data indicate that the main absorption characteristics of the nanoparticles, namely, the surface plasmon peak location and shape, before (as purchased) and after cap exchange with the new ligands are preserved; a slight red shift of the plasmon peak (~1–3 nm) is sometimes measured for the newly capped NPs, compared to their citrate-stabilized AuNP precursors. Similar behavior was recorded for nanoparticles with different sizes. The ability of both ligands to effectively displace

H2O, which serve as positive (aggregated) and negative (aggrega-

tion-free) control samples, respectively. (Column 3) TA-PEG-

OCH3-AuNPs and (column 4) HS-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs; both have

1 M NaCl added.

Figure 3. Stability of AuNP dispersions under various conditions:

15 nm (A) and 5 nm (B). (Column 1) Sodium citrate-stabilized

AuNPs in 1 M NaCl and (column 2) TA-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs in DI

H2O, which serve as positive (aggregated) and negative (aggregation-

free) control samples, respectively. (Column 3) TA-PEG-

OCH3-AuNPs and (column 4) HS-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs; both have

1 M NaCl added.

the native citrate on the AuNP surface results from the strong

affinity of the terminal thiol groups (soft base) to the gold surface

(soft acid). 8,27,28

To test if the thiol ligands have any deleterious effects on the

AuNP integrity (due, for example, to potential etching of surface

atoms, etc.), an issue discussed in ref 29 for Au clusters), the

nanoparticles were examined using transmission electron micro-

scope (TEM) and dynamic light scattering (DLS) before and after

cap exchange. Additional experimental details and data analysis

on TEM and DLS are provided in the Supporting Information.

TEM images were collected from 5 and 15 nm NPs, and DLS was

applied only to dispersions of the 15 nm NPs; weak scattering

prevented the collection of reliable DLS data for the 5 nm AuNPs.

The TEM images shown in Figure 2A,B indicate that there is no

transition ultimately depends on the affinity of the initial ligand to the

surface, resulting in progressive particle aggregation; this compe-

tition between the competing molecules was tested by collecting the absorpt-

ion spectra of the cap-exchanged AuNPs in the presence of DTT

and NaCl and by following the rates at which the SPB value

decreased and/or the absorption spectrum red-shifted with time

(Figure 4). We quantified this competition process by defining an

dynamic sizes that are consistently larger than those extracted from

TEM as expected. 30,31 DLS data also indicate that there is a slight

increase in the hydrodynamic diameter measured for the TA-

PEG-OCH3-AuNPs compared to that for the citrate-stabilized

NPs; such an increase arises from differences in the contributions

of the hydrodynamic interactions to the measured diffusion

coefficient for both sets of dispersions. The TA-PEG ligand has a

larger lateral extension and results in a slightly larger contribu-

tion than from citrate functions. 31

The first test probed the effects of excess salt on the colloidal

stability of cap-exchanged AuNPs. Excess ions can influence the

solubility of nanoparticles in two ways. If the steric stabilization

of nanoparticles in solution is controlled by electrostatic repuls-

ions, as is the case with citrate-stabilized AuNPs, added excess salt

will reduce the Debye screening length, hence causing van der

Waal's attractions to become dominant and induce NP aggrega-

tion. Added excess counterions can also alter the solubility of the

surface-bound ligands to the surrounding solvent, thus promot-

ing aggregation buildup. We found that dispersions of citrate-

stabilized AuNPs become unstable in the presence of added NaCl,

with macroscopic aggregation occurring at salt concentrations as

low as 100 mM (Figure 3, column 1 shows solutions containing

1 M NaCl). In comparison, both HS-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs and

TA-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs exhibited better stability to added NaCl,

which indicates that effective cap exchange has taken place

(Figure 3). In addition, no change in the absorption features

was measured for these dispersions after salt addition (Supporting

Information); the AuNP solubility is now controlled by the

hydrophilic nature of the PEG segment. Dispersions of 15 and

5 nm TA-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs were stable in the presence of 1 M

NaCl for at least 6 months. However, although initially stable in

1 M NaCl solutions, we found that for HS-PEG-OCH3-AuNPs

aggregation built up after 18 h of storage at room temperature

(column 4 in Figure 3A,B); macroscopic aggregation of these NP

dispersions was observed after 2 days of storage.

The second test probed the competition by small-molecule

DTT for coordination onto the AuNP surface; this provided an

additional means of assessing the binding strength of both PEG-

appended ligands to the nanocrystals. DTT is a common reducing

agent often used to break disulfide bonds of proteins and other

thiol-containing biomolecules. 32,33 At high concentration, DTT

can effectively displace the thiol ligands away from the NP

surface, resulting in progressive particle aggregation; this compe-

tition ultimately depends on the affinity of the initial ligand to the

Au surface. 20 DTT-induced NP aggregation can occur more

rapidly in the presence of excess NaCl because of added screening

effects. DTT competition and displacement of the ligands alter the

spectroscopic properties of the sample and are manifested in a

decrease in the SPB peak, along with an increase in the absor-

bance at longer wavelengths. The resistance of the capping ligand

to the competing molecules was tested by collecting the absorpt-

ion spectra of the cap-exchanged AuNPs in the presence of DTT

and NaCl and by following the rates at which the SPB value

decreased and/or the absorption spectrum red-shifted with time

(Figure 4). We quantified this competition process by defining an

dynamic aggregation factor (AF) as the ratio between the optical densities

at 615 nm and at the SPB (∼524 nm) because changes in solution

absorbance due to aggregation were most noticeable at these two

wavelengths in our experiments. 34 The change in the absorption

tail around 610–650 nm is reflective of NP-to-NP association

(due to reduced steric stabilization), which builds up in the sample and ultimately results in aggregation. A progressive change in the solution color accompanies a loss in its colloidal stability. We should note that the exact location of the SPB can vary by \( \sim 1-3 \) nm, depending on the solution and NP size. Using this parameter also reduces (compensates for) effects of small fluctuations in the absorption spectra with time due to variations in the excitation intensity. If the water-soluble AuNPs are unstable in the presence of DTT and NaCl, then the aggregation factor will increase with time. Conversely, if the ligand’s affinity to the Au surface is strong, then DTT competition becomes ineffective and the nanoparticles stay well dispersed even in the presence of salt. In this instance, the absorption spectra along with AF would remain either unaltered or exhibit a slow change with time. Figure 4A,B shows the time progress of the absorption spectra of 15 nm AuNPs cap-exchanged with either HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\) or TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\), respectively. (C, D) Normalized aggregation factor (AF) of 15 and 5 nm AuNPs, respectively, extracted from the data in plots A and B. TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs (red squares) and HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs (blue circles). Data consistently show that the TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capping of AuNPs provides stronger resistance to DTT competition than HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\) capping, independent of the AuNP size. TEM images of AuNPs (5.5 nm nominal size) following exposure to DTT for HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capped NPs (E) and TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capped NPs (F); images were collected 18 h after sample preparation. The white bars indicate a 20 nm scale.

Figure 4. Stability test of HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs and TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs to DTT competition. All samples have 1 M DTT and 400 mM NaCl added. (A, B) Time course of the absorption spectra of 15 nm AuNPs capped with HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\) and TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\), respectively. (C, D) Normalized aggregation factor (AF) of 15 and 5 nm AuNPs, respectively, extracted from the data in plots A and B. TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs (red squares) and HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-AuNPs (blue circles). Data consistently show that the TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capping of AuNPs provides stronger resistance to DTT competition than HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\) capping, independent of the AuNP size. TEM images of AuNPs (5.5 nm nominal size) following exposure to DTT for HS-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capped NPs (E) and TA-PEG-OCH\(_3\)-capped NPs (F); images were collected 18 h after sample preparation. The white bars indicate a 20 nm scale.
OCH₃ in the presence of 1 M DTT and 400 mM NaCl, respectively. Figure 4C shows the corresponding progression of AF with time. Solutions of TA-PEG-OCH₃-AuNPs exhibited no signs of aggregate buildup whereas that of HS-PEG-OCH₃-AuNPs showed macroscopic aggregation after 90 min. The data clearly show that TA prior to cap exchange on citrate-stabilized AuNPs.

Figure 5 shows the progression of the absorption spectrum with time collected for the 5 nm AuNP solution following the addition of 7 mM NaCN. There is a clear decrease in the absorption spectrum with time for λ > 250 nm. Figure 5 also shows that new features appear in the spectrum for λ > 250 nm with well-defined peaks at 204, 211, 230, and 240 nm (signatures of Au(CN)₂⁻ formation) that become increasingly visible with time (Figure 5 inset). The quantitative rate of decomposition by measuring the time-dependent decrease of the SPB absorbance and fitting it to a first-order exponential decay function

\[ y = y₀ \exp\left(-\frac{t}{\tau_D}\right) \]  

where \( \tau_D \) is the decay time and \( y₀ \) is the absorbance value at \( t=0 \).

For these experiments, the initial absorbance of the NP solutions at the SPB was maintained at ~0.3 (in a 0.5 cm optical path cuvette), but the concentration of NaCN used was raised with experiments above, this test probed additional effects such as density and packing of the capping monolayer, which can determine the ligand’s ability to shield the inorganic core against strongly etching CN anions. When CN anions come into contact with the inorganic core, they form complexes with the gold atoms, progressively etching the nanoparticle surface. This converts the reddish AuNPs sample into a colorless solution of Au(CN)₂⁻ ions.

Table 1. Parameters Involved in NaCN Digestion

<table>
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<th>NP size (nm)</th>
<th>ε</th>
<th>( N_{T\text{-Au}} )</th>
<th>( N_{S\text{-Au}} )</th>
<th>O.D. (0.5 cm)</th>
<th>[AuNP] (M)</th>
<th>( [N_{T\text{-Au}}] ) (M)</th>
<th>( [N_{S\text{-Au}}] ) (M)</th>
<th>[NaCN] (M)</th>
<th>CN/( N_{S\text{-Au}} ) ratio</th>
<th>CN/( N_{T\text{-Au}} ) ratio</th>
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<td>3.85 x 10³</td>
<td>1002</td>
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<td>6.19 x 10⁻⁸</td>
<td>2.38 x 10⁻⁴</td>
<td>6.20 x 10⁻⁵</td>
<td>7.00 x 10⁻³</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.08 x 10⁴</td>
<td>4412</td>
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<td>1.94 x 10⁻⁴</td>
<td>2.77 x 10⁻⁵</td>
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<td>6.80 x 10⁻²</td>
<td>4292</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The O.D. of the dispersions was ~0.6. ε is the NP extinction coefficient. [AuNP] is the AuNP concentration. \( N_{T\text{-Au}} \) designates the total number of Au atoms per nanoparticle. \( N_{S\text{-Au}} \) designates the number of surface Au atoms per nanoparticle. \( [N_{T\text{-Au}}] \) and \( [N_{S\text{-Au}}] \) are the corresponding molar concentrations.

References:
increasing AuNP size. (See Supporting Information for additional details.) A comparison of mono- versus dithiol capping indicates that NP digestion by added NaCN depends on the nanoparticle size (Figure 6). Data indicate that as the NP size increased from 5 to 15 nm the relative ability of the ligands to protect the inorganic core from cyanide digestion changed. Whereas TA-PEG-OCH$_3$-AuNPs exhibited a much slower digestion rate than their single-thiol analog for 5 nm nanoparticles ($t_D$ was $\sim$5 times longer for TA-PEG-OCH$_3$ ligands, Figure 6A), the trend was reversed for the larger 15 nm NPs ($t_D$ was $\sim$2.5 times longer for HS-PEG-OCH$_3$ ligands, Figure 6C). Similar decomposition curves were measured for the intermediate 10 nm NPs capped with either ligand ($t_D$ was essentially the same for both set of caps, see Figure 6B).

This result is very informative; it indicates that NP resistance to NaCN digestion is affected by a combination of ligand footprint (related to the coordination number of the anchoring group) and packing density on the nanocrystal surface (as schematically sketched in Figure 7).$^{22,23}$ TA-PEG ligands have a larger footprint than their monothiol counterparts, and this implies that a given surface area can accommodate a higher number of HS-PEG-OCH$_3$ than TA-PEG-OCH$_3$ species. The lateral volume that a ligand tail can explore away from the surface is, however, dependent on the nanoparticle surface curvature. A small nanocrystal presents a higher surface curvature, which in turn provides a larger sampling space for the ligand tail (compared to larger nanocrystals). This results in a “loosely” packed ligand layer on the smaller NPs and thus less shielding of the nanocrystal surface. In this regime, the affinity of the anchoring group of the ligand to the surface becomes the dominant factor in defining the NP resistance against cyanide digestion. That is why for 5 nm nanocrystals, TA-PEG-OCH$_3$-AuNPs exhibited a slower digestion rate than HS-PEG-OCH$_3$-AuNPs as shown in Figure 6A. Conversely, larger nanoparticles present a smaller surface curvature, which reduces the lateral space to be sampled by the hydrophilic PEG tails for the same footprint. This implies that the packing of the ligand tails is tighter on larger nanocrystals. Because HS-PEG-OCH$_3$ presents a smaller footprint (single thiol), the resulting AuNPs will have a higher overall ligand density. A higher density of packing would also favor a stronger interaction between the 6-carbon alkyl chains that then act as a hydrophobic barrier to protect the inorganic core from NaCN. Cyanide digestion is weaker for monothiol-capped nanoparticles in this case, as shown in Figure 6C for 15 nm AuNPs. The 10 nm NPs present an intermediate regime where the effects of the coordination number and ligand packing density are balanced. This produced similar digestion rates for both sets of samples. An ongoing topic of interest has been the effects of packing versus the geometrical extension of surface ligands; it has driven the development of dendritic ligands as well as the investigation of the effect of branching chemical structures.$^{12,32,37}$ The present study further complements those findings.

**Conclusions**

We have explored the effects of varying the coordination number on the affinity of molecular-scale ligands to the surface of Au nanoparticles. We carried out several stability experiments on AuNPs cap exchanged with either thiol-terminated PEG-OCH$_3$ or dithiolane-appended PEG-OCH$_3$ ligands. We found that ligands presenting a higher coordination number (dithiolane) exhibit much better stability to excess salt and against competition from DTT compared to their monodentate counterparts. However, stability to NaCN digestion showed that there are added benefits...
of multidentate ligands to NP stability for the smaller nanoparticles, where a larger surface curvature could permit easier access of small molecules in the surrounding solution to the NP surface. Nonetheless, resistance to NaCN digestion indicated a more “nuanced” behavior. We found that in addition to the coordination number the packing density of the ligands could also play an important role in the dispersion stability. There is a clear balance between these two parameters, which is manifested in size- and coordination number-dependent digestion curves. For smaller NPs, a higher coordination is clearly beneficial, whereas a higher ligand density permitted by a lower curvature (characteristic of larger NPs) would make monodentate-capped nanoparticles more resistant to cyanide digestion. The benefits of using higher-coordination-number ligands for capping these metallic NPs are substantial in biology because media rich in excess ions are often used in biological assays. Resistance to DTT offered by TA-PEG ligands, for example, is a very important result because it indicates that there is an added benefit of strong ligand–NP interactions against competition from a whole array of small molecules in biological media.

Acknowledgment. We acknowledge NRL, Office of Naval Research (ONR), the Army Research Office, and the University of Massachusetts–Amherst for financial support. E.O. is supported by a fellowship from the Korea Research Foundation (D00089). We also thank Igor Medintz at NRL for assistance with some experimental details.

Supporting Information Available: Detailed information on the synthesis of HS-(CH\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{5}-PEG750-OCH\textsubscript{3} ligands, cap exchange of citrate-functionalized nanocrystals with TA-PEG750-OCH\textsubscript{3} and HS-PEG750-OCH\textsubscript{3} ligands, DTT and cyanide digestion tests, and an estimate of surface atoms on a given size of nanocrystals. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.