2432-Pos
A Theoretical Description of DNA Plectonemes under Tension
Hergen Brutzer[1], Robert Schöpflin[2], René Stehr[2], Gero Wedemann[2], Ralf Seidel[1].
[1]University of Technology Dresden, Dresden, Germany, [2]University of Applied Sciences Stralsund, Stralsund, Germany.
Twisting a DNA molecule held under constant tension is accompanied by a transition from a linear to a plectonemic DNA configuration, in which part of the applied twist is absorbed in a superhelical structure. This is seen as a linear shortening of the DNA length with added turns after the transition. So far no theoretical description exists, which consistently describes the slope of the supercoiling curves as well as the torque in the plectonemic regime and its dependency on the applied force and the monovalent ion concentration in solution. Here, we present a simple model, in which the DNA is treated as a semiflexible rod. The energy of the plectonemic structure is calculated considering DNA bending, applied tension and electrostatic repulsion between the DNA strands but excluding fluctuations. We compare the predictions of our simple static theory with experimental supercoiling data, recorded with magnetic tweezers. We obtain an excellent agreement for the supercoiling slopes and the torque as function of force and monovalent ion concentration only if a reduced DNA charge is taken into account. We verify our theory using Monte-Carlo simulations, in which the same energetic terms are used. Surprisingly, the simple static model describes experimental data much better than more sophisticated models considering fluctuations, which considerably overestimate the torque of the plectonemic phase.

2433-Pos
Monte Carlo Simulation of Supercoiled DNA at Buckling Transition
Robert Schöpflin[1], Hergen Brutzer[2], René Stehr[1], Ralf Seidel[2], Gero Wedemann[1].
[1]University of Applied Sciences Stralsund, Stralsund, Germany, [2]University of Technology Dresden, Dresden, Germany.
Recent studies of high resolution single molecule experiments yielded detailed information of DNA supercoiling under applied tension. Here we use Monte Carlo simulations with a coarse-grained DNA model to improve the understanding of these data. To reproduce experimental conditions, stretching, bending, twisting and electrostatic potentials were explicitly considered in the computer model.
As in single-molecule experiments with magnetic tweezers, we carry out simulations for different applied forces and ionic strengths over a large range of applied supercoils. The simulations reproduce well the experimentally observed behavior: While initially the molecule extension remains almost constant upon twisting, a linear decrease in extension with added twist is observed, once a critical buckling torque is reached. At higher ionic strength this is caused by the formation of a superhelical, i.e. plectonemic, structure. At these conditions the buckling transition between stretched and plectonemic DNA is accompanied by a abrupt DNA length decrease. At low ionic strength however, the buckling phase vanishes and the formation of multiple loose DNA loops is preferred over a superhelical structure. Interestingly under these conditions, the torque does not remain constant anymore with added turns.
Beyond an overall qualitative agreement, the MC simulations reproduce quantitatively most of the experimental parameters, if the interaction potentials are appropriately chosen. This includes the slope and torque of the linear decrease after buckling but also the jump size and the torque change during abrupt buckling. The computer model allows thereby new insights into the torsional and electrostatic behavior of supercoiled DNA. Further details not directly accessible in experiments like plectoneme geometry or singular energy distributions can easily be derived.

2434-Pos
Anharmonic Torsional Stiffness of DNA Revealed under Small External Torques
Alexey K. Mazur.
IBPC, CNRS, Paris, France.
DNA supercoiling plays an important role in a variety of cellular processes by forcing the double helix to bend, fold, and wrap around proteic particles. The torsional stress related with supercoiling can be also involved in gene regulation via local modulations of DNA structure and dynamics. This idea is often invoked in the literature, but the physical mechanisms by which global supercoiling can act locally are unknown.
We tried to get an insight in this issue by using all-atom MD simulations. Recent methodological advances improved the accuracy of the torsional persistence length (l_t) measured from MD data and also made possible simulations with steady torsional stress applied to short stretches of DNA. The steady stress emulates local conditions of a short fragment under global supercoiling. The small DNA length reduces the computational load and makes possible extensive sampling and statistical convergence. We could measure linear elastic responses as well as elastic parameters of DNA under torsional stress corresponding to physiological supercoiling.
We found that small static untwisting significantly reduces l_t of GC-alternating DNA. For the AT-alternating sequence a smaller effect of an opposite sign is observed. For these two sequences, the l_t values are similar under zero stress, but diverge with untwisting. The effect is traced to sequence-specific asymmetry of local torsional fluctuations. Analysis of other sequences suggests that this property is rare and probably undetectable in long random DNA. However, in short stretches of some specific sequences, small natural modulations of supercoiling can significantly alter the probabilities of twisting fluctuations by making the double helix locally softer or stiffer, which gives a simple possibility of gene regulation. Our results also have interesting implications for the role of local DNA twisting in complexes with some transcription factors.

2435-Pos
DNA Melting Induced by Temperature and Mechanical Strain
B Montgomery Pettitt.
University of Houston, Houston, TX, USA.
The polyelectrolyte nature of DNA greatly complicates the reaction coordinates for both hybridization and melting. Here we consider mechanism of the melting of DNA by thermal and mechanical means. To study the melting transition of DNA, we used molecular dynamics simulations of a homogeneous 12-basepair DNA d(A12)•d(T12) with explicit water and ions at 400 K. The trajectories were analyzed with principal component analysis and revealed various processes which occurred on different time scales. A multistep mechanism is proposed where the untwisting of the duplex coupled with the breakup of the ion atmosphere is determined to be the rate-determining step of the melting process. To complement this study, sequences of DNA in states of linking number from +10 to −10 were studied. The mechanical strain is intimately coupled to the ionic distributions which determines the relaxation mechanism. The two mechanisms are remarkably different.

2436-Pos
A Molecular Dynamics Study of DNA Bending in the IHF-DNA Complex
Elizabeth Wheatley, David L. Beveridge, Susan Pieniazek.
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA.
The complex of the protein Integration Host Factor (IHF) with oligomeric DNA results in a structure in which the DNA is bent by nearly 180 degrees, referred to by the crystallographers reporting on the structure as a "U-turn". This is a highly unusual form of duplex DNA, and the nature of how the structure forms is a question of current research interest. This project involves using molecular dynamics (MD) computer simulation to study the dynamics involved in the bending process, in particular the extent to which the U-shaped structure is pre-programmed into the DNA sequence or induced by the IHF-DNA interaction. The protein-DNA crystal structure consists of a 35-mer B-strand singly-nicked DNA sequence and the IHF protein unit of 193 amino acid residues (PDB #1IHF). Additionally, an MD simulation was run on a canonical B form DNA oligomer of identical sequence to examine the resulting convergence of the two starting DNA structures. The MD was performed using the AMBER suite of programs as implemented on the Wesleyan PC cluster. The molecular graphics and animations were carried out using the programs VMD and SwissPDB DeepView. Simulations including water and counterions were performed on both the nicked and sealed versions of the U-turn DNA, the fabricated canonical B DNA, the free IHF protein, and the entire IHF-DNA complex.

2437-Pos
Understanding Protein-DNA Interactions through Dynamics
Morten Källberg, Robert Langlois, Matthew Carson, Hui Lu.
U of Illinois at Chicago, chicago, IL, USA.
Transcriptional regulation is a key factor in controlling proper cellular behavior. For this reason, so-called regulation networks (quantifying the molecular interactions controlling the transcription), have been heavily studied. One goal is to enrich these networks through in silico identification of DNA-binding proteins and their respective binding sites. Often such work assumes a specific distance between atoms as constituting an interaction and construct models based on this assumption. However, this ad hoc rule fails to account for many of the complexities that lie behind the physical nature of binding. We present a framework for studying these interactions in more realistic settings accounting for both overall energy and dynamics of protein-DNA complex. We demonstrate that short molecular dynamics simulations better characterize biomolecular interactions and that a better definition of interactions improves the prediction of protein-DNA docking. Specifically, interacting residues are identified through the analysis of MD energy functions and results are