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Systematic Evaluation of 1,2-Migratory Aptitude in Alkylidene Carbenes

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Cite This: J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2021, 143, 2097–2107
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ABSTRACT: Alkylidene carbenes undergo rapid inter- and intramolecular reactions and rearrangements, including 1,2-migrations of β -substituents to generate alkynes. Their propensity for substituent migration exerts profound influence over the broader utility of alkylidene carbene intermediates, yet prior efforts to categorize 1,2migratory aptitude in these elusive species have been hampered by disparate modes of carbene generation, ultrashort carbene lifetimes, mechanistic ambiguities, and the need to individually prepare a series of ¹³C-labeled precursors. Herein we report on the rearrangement of ¹³C-alkylidene carbenes generated *in situ* by the homologation of carbonyl compounds with [¹³C]-Li-TMS-diazomethane, an approach



that obviates the need for isotopically labeled substrates and has expedited a systematic investigation (${}^{13}C{}^{1}H$) NMR, DLPNO-CCSD(T)) of migratory aptitudes in an unprecedented range of more than 30 alkylidene carbenes. Hammett analyses of the reactions of 26 differentially substituted benzophenones reveal several counterintuitive features of 1,2-migration in alkylidene carbenes that may prove of utility in the study and synthetic application of unsaturated carbenes more generally.

■ INTRODUCTION

Alkylidene carbenes^{1–3} can be liberated, *inter alia*, by the deprotonation of terminal alkenyl (pseudo)halides,^{4–6} thermolysis of diazoalkenes,^{7–12} and photolysis of cyclopropanated phenanthrenes,^{13–15} Scheme 1A. Alkylidene carbenes are extremely short-lived, readily undergoing 1,2-migration of a β -substituent to generate an alkyne.¹⁶ This has been applied in well-established synthetic methodologies, such as the Corey–Fuchs reaction¹⁷ and the Seyfirth–Gilbert,^{8–10} Colvin,^{7,12} and Fritsch–Buttenberg–Wiechell (FBW) rearrangements.² However, this propensity for 1,2-migration can interfere with other desired modes of reactivity, such as H–Y insertion and [1 + 2]-cycloaddition,^{1,18} especially when these require intermolecular interception of the alkylidene carbene.

The identities of the alkylidene β -substituents (R_{χ} , R_{γ} ; Scheme 1B) influence the propensity for 1,2-migration, and both their relative and absolute migratory aptitudes should be considered. These factors dictate not only which group (R_{χ} , R_{γ}) migrates but also the intrinsic lifetime of the carbene during which it can be diverted. Furthermore, this lifetime is contingent on both substituents: the migrator and the stationary (or "bystander") β -substituent, and thus onedimensional trends for absolute migratory aptitude are inherently misleading.² Measurement of absolute rates of 1,2migration requires direct detection of the alkylidene carbene, with Phillips, Hadad, and Thamattoor reporting the first observation in solution (PhMeC=C:) by femtosecond spectroscopy just 2 years ago.¹⁵ It has long been recognized that some alkylidene β substituents (R_X , R_Y) have a much greater propensity for 1,2-migration (e.g., H, aryl, alkynyl) than others (e.g., alkyl),⁶⁻⁸ yet only a few studies have sought to explicitly assess this, using isotopic ${}^{13}C/{}^{14}C$ labeling. Milestones in this regard are studies by Stang (vinyl triflates; Ph vs Me),¹⁹ Thamattoor (cyclopropanated phenanthrenes; H vs Ph,¹³ Me vs Ph¹⁴), and Tykwinski²⁰ (Colvin rearrangement and vinylidene dibromides; $-C \equiv CSiR_3$ vs alkyl, Ar, alkenyl).

While these studies confirmed several postulated trends of relative migratory aptitudes (e.g., H > alkyne > Ph > Me), the scope contrasts the extensive studies reported for saturated carbenes.^{21–23} As such, systematic analysis of structure–reactivity relationships in alkylidene carbenes remains limited and subject to a number of caveats.² For example, migratory aptitudes determined from different carbene precursors, under different rearrangement conditions, may or may not be directly comparable on a microscopic level. Moreover, while diazoalkenes and cyclopropanated phenanthrenes are considered reliable precursors to *bona fide* alkylidene carbenes, the

Received: November 27, 2020 Published: January 11, 2021



Article



Scheme 1. Alkylidene Carbene Liberation, Reactivity, Migratory Aptitudes, and Bystander Effects

A) Alkylidene carbene liberation and reactivity





 k_X/k_Y = Relative migratory aptitude of R_X

^{*a*}Primary alkenyl triflates are likely the most reliable liberator of *bona fide* carbenes of all the alkenyl (pseudo)halides. ^{*b*}K^tOBu is a common choice for generating "free" carbenes. ^{*c*}Alkylidene carbenes can also undergo R–X insertion following ylide formation from Lewis bases (e.g., THF, THT, NEt₃). ^{*d*}C–H insertions appear only to be feasible on an *intra*molecular basis. ^{*b*}Diazoalkenes are not readily isolable, and are postulated to be liberated from e.g., silylated α -diazoalkoxides, *N*-nitrosocarbonamides, and *N*-(1-aziridinyl)aldimines.^{1,2}

possible intermediacy of carbenoids^{24–28} must also be considered when, for example, alkenyl halides are employed.

Furthermore, although not previously discussed, the highly reactive nature of alkylidene carbenes poses additional questions about the microscopic basis for product selection, especially when both substituents are efficient and thus competitive migrators. In such cases, incomplete conformational equilibration in, and/or dynamic bypassing of, an incipient carbene cannot be excluded *a priori*. Thus, even when the formation of the free alkylidene carbene appears likely, a fundamental question remains as to whether the observed selectivity is established at the migration stage or influenced by prior "upstream" events.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With all of the above issues in mind, we sought a systematic analysis of structure–reactivity relationships for 1,2-migration in alkylidene carbenes. As noted above, the measurement of relative migratory aptitude requires isotopic labeling (¹³C, ¹⁴C), and if the label is installed in the precursor bearing the β substituents, this becomes impractical and expensive if a large array of examples is to be surveyed. Herein we report on (a) the use the Colvin rearrangement^{7,12,20} (Scheme 2) to expedite generation of isotopically labeled, *bona fide* alkylidene carbenes from unlabeled carbonyls and (b) an extensive analysis of the 1,2-migratory aptitudes by quantum chemical calculations (KS-DFT; DLPNO-CCSD(T)). Scheme 2. Expedient *in Situ* Generation and Rearrangement of ¹³C-Labeled Alkylidene Carbenes (5)



Preparation of [¹³**C**]**-TMSDAM.** Application of the Colvin rearrangement, Scheme 2, required in situ preparation of lithium [¹³C]-trimethylsilyldiazomethane ([¹³C]-Li-TMSDAM) by deprotonation (LDA) of $[^{13}C]$ -TMSDAM. The commercially available unlabeled TMSDAM reagent is conventionally prepared from TMSCH₂Cl via the corresponding Grignard.²⁹ However, after a range of preliminary experiments involving $TMS^{13}CH_2X$ (X = Cl, Br, I) we pursued an alternative route based on amine diazotization.³⁰ The requisite ¹³C-labeled amine (11) was prepared via a multistep chromatography-free sequence, starting from ¹³CH₃OH (7), Scheme 3. With the amine 11 in hand, we utilized Lebel's diazotization procedure and after careful reoptimization for ¹³C-labeled synthesis³¹ prepared a large stock solution of ^{[13}C]-TMSDAM (12, 0.6 M in 2-Me-THF; dried over molecular sieves).

Determination of Migratory Aptitudes. By use of a single set of standardized conditions (Scheme 4), a broad

Scheme 3. Preparation of $[^{13}C]$ -TMSDAM (12)



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Scheme 4. Colvin Rearrangement of Aromatic Aldehydes and Ketones (1) Employing Lithiated [¹³C]-TMSDAM^a



^{*a*}[13 C]-Li-TMSDAM generated *in situ* from LDA (1.0–1.2 equiv) and [13 C]-TMSDAM (12, 1.0 equiv). Alkyne isotopomer ratios were determined by ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectroscopy after isolation by chromatography. Selectivities for diaryl alkynes were calculated by integration of the two alkynyl ¹³C resonances; no significant effects from differential rates of longitudinal relaxation (T_1) were observed, with selectivities corroborated by integration of parent/¹³C–¹³C satellite signals for each *ipso* carbon; see Supporting Information.

range of aldehydes and ketones were converted to the corresponding [¹³C]-alkynes via Colvin rearrangement with [¹³C]-Li-TMSDAM. *In situ* low-temperature ¹³C{¹H} NMR spectroscopic analysis of the reaction of [¹³C]-4-fluorobenzophenone with [¹³C]-Li-TMSDAM confirmed >85% consumption of the ketone in under 20 min at -78 °C to generate intermediates (tentatively assigned, see below and Supporting Information, as [¹³C₂]-**2**/**3**) and substantial rearrangement to the alkyne ([¹³C₂]-**6**-Ph,Ar^{4+F}; ¹*J*_{CC} = 183 Hz), as expected of an aryl alkylidenecarbene.³² Controlled warming to -50 °C led to complete alkyne formation within minutes.

Prior studies on alkylidene carbenes liberated by photolysis of $\begin{bmatrix} {}^{13}C_1 \end{bmatrix}$ -cyclopropanated phenanthrenes have shown 1,2migration is highly selective (exclusive) for H over Ph¹³ and for Ph over Me^{14,19} (i.e., H \gg Ph \gg Me). Exclusive Hmigration was also observed herein, with no attenuation by $electronic^{20}$ (1-H,Ar^{4-OMe}) and isotopic perturbation (1-D,Ar^{4-OMe}), the latter indicative that the selectivity is not predicated on quantum tunneling. Analogously, exclusive aryl migration was observed for aryl/alkyl alkylidene carbenes generated from 1-Alk,Ph, where Alk = Me, i Pr, t Bu. However, benzophenones (1-Ar^X,Ar^Y) gave both alkyne ¹³C-isotopomers in quantifiable ratios, with spectroscopic differentiation achieved by a combination of ¹H, ¹³C, ¹⁹F NMR spectroscopy and, where necessary, ¹H-¹H COSY and ¹H-¹³C/¹⁹F-¹³C HMBC analysis. The fractional migration of $Ar^{X}(F_{X})$ in each case was quantified by ¹³C NMR (see Supporting Information), with values corroborated by integration of multiple distinct pairs of ¹³C signals. The relative migratory aptitude of Ar^{X} , k_{X}/k_{H} , was then determined via eq 1.

$$\frac{k_{\rm X}}{k_{\rm H}} = \frac{F_{\rm X}}{1 - F_{\rm X}} \tag{1}$$

Migratory aptitudes were initially determined for 17 monom/p-substituted benzophenones 1-Ph,Ar^X, with substituents spanning from very electron-deficient (X = 4-NO₂; σ = 0.78) to highly electron-rich (X = 4-N(Me)₂; σ = -0.83). Relative migratory aptitudes were found to be approximately proportional to the electron-richness of the migrating group. For example with 4-(*N*,*N*-diethylamino)benzophenone, migration of Ar^X dominated ($F_{4-N(Et)2} = 79\%$; $\Delta\Delta G^{\ddagger}_{195K} = -2.1$ kJ mol⁻¹), whereas the converse was found with 4-nitrobenzophenone ($F_{4-NO2} = 16\%$; $\Delta\Delta G^{\ddagger}_{195K} = +2.7$ kJ mol⁻¹). Hammett analysis, Figure 1, revealed a modest sensitivity to electronic perturbation ($\rho \approx -0.7$) and, interestingly, a small but significant deviation from linearity across the series, with



Figure 1. Hammett analysis of the Colvin rearrangement of monosubstituted benzophenones. [¹³C]-Li-TMSDAM generated *in situ* from LDA (1.2 equiv) and [¹³C]-TMSDAM (1.0 equiv) prior to the addition of ketone. Product isotopomer ratios were determined by ¹³C{¹H} NMR, with selectivity corroborated by integration of multiple distinct pairs of ¹³C signals. Substituent constant (σ) for N(ⁱPr)₂ estimated from N(Pr)₂. Use of KHMDS in place of LDA gave identical isotopomer ratios within experimental error for cases where the alkyne could be isolated in reasonable yield (X = 4-N(Me)₂, 4-OMe, 4-F).

selectivity tending toward a plateau for the most electrondonating substituents. No improvements in linearity were observed with other substituent parameters, e.g., σ_n^+ .

Ultradonating, anionic substituents (e.g., X = 4-S⁻) unfortunately proved impractical, affording no alkyne products. However, exploration of other substituents led to ferrocenyl (Fc) as an interesting exception: although C-sp² hybridized, π conjugated, and strongly electron-donating, phenyl migration dominated, giving >99:1 Ph:Fc, Scheme 4. To probe the influence of the "stationary" substituent on migratory aptitudes, we next generated truncated Hammett correlations using an additional 13 benzophenones, in this case 4,4'disubstituted 1-Ar^x,Ar^Y; Y = p-N(Me)₂, p-CF₃; Figure 2.



Figure 2. Truncated Hammett correlations for Colvin rearrangement of 4,4'-disubstituted benzophenones. Left hand plot: Hammett correlations for the rearrangement of p,p'-disubstituted benzophenones 1-Ar^X,Ar^Y Right hand chart: overlaid correlations normalized according to the relative migratory aptitude of Ar^Y in the monosubstituted benzophenone 1-Ph,Ar^Y. [¹³C]-Li-TMSDAM was generated *in situ* from LDA (1.2 equiv) and [¹³C]-TMSDAM (1.0 equiv) prior to the addition of ketone. Isotopomer ratios in **6** were determined by ¹³C{¹H} NMR spectroscopy.

Strikingly, all three correlations were effectively indistinguishable in their gradient and curvature, as evident from overlay following *y*-axis normalization. Such behavior apparently precludes the involvement of any bystander effect on intramolecular selectivity, indicating that relative migratory aptitudes (but not absolute rates, *vide infra*) remain unaffected by the polar influence of the stationary substituent. These results also suggest that the nature of the migratory transition states remains fundamentally comparable across all of the substrates, irrespective of their polarity, i.e., discounting mechanistic discontinuities in limiting cases.

Generation of Alkylidene Carbenes. Seeking to rationalize the observed selectivities (Scheme 4), in particular the curvature of the Hammett correlations (Figures 1 and 2), and to develop a general model for the 1,2-migration rates and aptitudes, we conducted extensive quantum chemical calculations using a combination of Kohn–Sham density functional theory (KS-DFT; Gaussian 09) and local coupled cluster theory (DLPNO-CCSD(T); ORCA 4.0). In accordance with previous theoretical studies,^{13,14,33–40} independently computed T1 diagnostic values (DLPNO-CCSD(T), T1 < 0.02), exploratory unrestricted KS-DFT calculations, and wave function stability tests, all species were treated as closed-shell singlets in their ground states (see Supporting Information for details).

To ensure the accuracy of optimized geometries for carbenic species, a range of KS-DFT functionals were carefully benchmarked against highly correlated DLPNO-CCSD(T)/CCSD(T)-F12 reference calculations, using several model alkylidene carbenes (PhMeC=C:, Ph₂C=C:; see Supporting Information). PBE0+GD3BJ, ω B97XD, and B3LYP+GD3BJ were considered sufficiently robust in this regard, affording disparate energies but, crucially, equilibrium geometries in close agreement with the coupled-cluster surfaces.

Initial DLPNO-CCSD(T) computations established a thermally feasible pathway from acetophenone (1-Me,Ph) to 1-phenylpropyne (6-Me,Ph), Figure 3. Consistent with Colvin and Hamill's original proposal⁷ and later work by Gilbert,⁹ the diazoalkene MePhC==CN₂ (4-Me,Ph) was identified as a key intermediate, formed via a nucleophilic addition,^{41,42} [1,3]-silyl migration, and elimination sequence. Although the ionic nature of the intermediates mean that quantitative comparisons made in the absence of explicit solvation should be interpreted with caution, lithiated silyl ether 3-Me,Ph appears to be marginally favored over lithium alkoxide 2-Me,Ph ($\Delta G_{195K} = -5$ kJ mol⁻¹), in a delicately balanced [1,3]-Brook equilibrium,^{43-46,32} in which pre-equilibrium between lithium α -diazoalkoxide 2-Me,Ph and cyclic siliconate 7-Me,Ph is kinetically insignificant.

Elimination of LiOTMS from silvl ether 3-Me,Ph generates diazoalkene 4-Me,Ph, which contrary to most depictions, has a bent structure on the ground state surface, thus resembling a diazonium ylide rather than a heterocumulene.^{47,48} Dediazoniation of Z-4-Me,Ph affords singlet carbene 5-Me,Ph. Analogously, E-4-Me,Ph (not shown) generates 5-Ph,Me. The two conformational isomers (5-Ph,Me and 5-Me,Ph, see Figure 3 inset) undergo rapid equilibration relative to ensuing 1,2-migration. Both carbenes have distorted structures, and in isomer 5-Ph,Me¹⁴ ($C_{ipso}-C_{\beta}-C_{\alpha}$ bond angle, 91°) the position of the aryl ring allows stabilizing π -p* and σ -p* donor– acceptor interactions (see inset to Figure 3). Exergonic 1,2phenyl migration in 5-Ph,Me ($\Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195K} = 7$ kJ mol⁻¹) generates alkyne 6-Me,Ph. The analogous 1,2-methyl migration from 5-Me,Ph is noncompetitive ($\Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195K} = 42$ kJ mol⁻¹).

On the basis of the free energy profile in Figure 3, the dediazoniation and migration steps $(4 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 6)$ proceed rapidly, sequentially, and irreversibly after rate-limiting [1,3]-silyl migration/LiOSiMe elimination $(2/3 \rightarrow 4)$. In situ ¹³C NMR spectroscopic monitoring of the reaction of $[^{13}C]$ -1-Ph, Ar^{4-F} with $[^{13}C]$ -Li-TMSDAM at -78 °C (see Supporting Information) revealed two intermediates with ¹³C NMR shifts and couplings $(^{1}J_{CC} = 39 \text{ Hz})$ consistent with a mixture of $[^{13}C_2]$ -2-Ph,Ar^{4-F} and $[^{13}C_2]$ -3-Ph,Ar^{4-F}, albeit likely present as higher-order lithium aggregates rather than monomers.

Analysis of Relative Migratory Aptitudes. Having identified key intermediates en route to alkyne 6, we set out to understand which processes are responsible for the phenomenological migratory aptitudes (Scheme 4, Figures 1 and 2). The extremely low barrier predicted for aryl migration (Figure 3 inset) poses several subtleties for the reactions of benzophenones, which nominally lead to highly reactive $\beta_{,\beta}$ diaryl alkylidene carbenes (Ar^XAr^YC==C; 5). In such carbenes both substituents appear liable to undergo rapid migration, meaning that (i) the rate of conformational equilibration in the incipient carbene 5 cannot necessarily be assumed to be rapid



Figure 3. Computed reaction pathway for the Colvin rearrangement of acetophenone (1-Me,Ph). Geometries and solvation free energies were obtained via restricted KS-DFT at the PBE0+GD3BJ/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM(THF,UFF)/Ultrafine level of theory. Thermochemical corrections were computed at T = 195 K using the rigid-rotor harmonic-oscillator approximation (GoodVibes) and linearly scaled harmonic frequencies ($v_{scale} = 0.95$), with vibrational entropies corrected in accordance with Grimme's quasi-harmonic approach ($f_{cutoff} = 100 \text{ cm}^{-1}$) and translational entropies adjusted to reflect a standard state of 1.0 M. Single-point, gas-phase potential energies were computed at the DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO level. A transition state for concerted elimination of LiOTMS from 2-Me,Ph leading *directly* to 4-Me,Ph could not be found. The transition states for loss of LiOTMS from 3-Me,Ph leading to *E*-4-Me,Ph and for loss of N₂ from *E*-4-Me,Ph leading to 5-Me,Ph are higher in energy and are not shown. See Supporting Information for full details.

with respect to migration and (ii) nonstatistical dynamic effects on selectivity cannot be discounted *a priori*. DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-QZVPP calculations indicate, for example, that after extrusion of N₂ from Ph₂C=CN₂ ($\Delta G_{195K} = -28$ kJ mol⁻¹), subsequent 1,2-phenyl migration in the nascent carbene **5** ($\Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195K} = 10$ kJ mol⁻¹) is only marginally higher in barrier to its degenerate conformational interconversion ($\Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195K} = 7$ kJ mol⁻¹).

With this in mind, we considered two limiting intramolecular regimes for product selection (Scheme 5). In regime 1, classical Curtin–Hammett conditions prevail: conformational equilibration of $5\text{-Ar}^{X}\text{Ar}^{Y}$ is rapid and the observed product ratio depends only on the two competing 1,2migration transition states. In regime 2, conformational equilibration is slow with respect to migration and/or dynamic matching leads to significant bypassing of $5\text{-Ar}^{X}\text{Ar}^{Y}$ as an intermediate. As a consequence, the observed product ratio depends on selectivity established in preceding steps of the mechanism.

Further analysis (DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-QZVPP) indicates that E/Z-isomerization of the irreversibly generated diazoalkene 4 intermediate is expected to be slow ($\Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195K} =$ 51 kJ mol⁻¹ for 5-Ph,Ph) compared to 1,2-aryl migration. Thus, under regime 2, the ratio reported by the ¹³C-label would correspond to stereoselectivity at the stage of LiOTMS elimination from the lithiated silyl ether 3-Ar^X,Ar^Y, not the migratory aptitude of the β -substituents. Between the limits of regimes 1 and 2, where stereochemical/conformational interconversions in 4/5 are competitive with migration, the net selectivity arises from a number of factors.

To discern which, if either, of these regimes prevails for the benzophenone system, we first systematically probed, *via* computation, the potential energy surfaces of 28 distinct $\beta_{,\beta}$ -diaryl alkylidene carbenes (Ar^XAr^YC==C:), constructed from seven electronically diverse *para*-substituted aryl groups (X, Y = 4-NMe₂, 4-OMe, 4-Me, 4-H, 4-Cl, 4-CF₃, 4-NO₂). Key stationary points were located by restricted KS-DFT, following functional benchmarking against DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-QZVPP calculations. For each of the seven symmetric (X = Y) carbenes we located a single minimum energy structure, one migration transition state, and a $C_{2\nu}$ -symmetric transition state leading to degenerate conformational interconversion.

For the 21 asymmetric carbenes $(X \neq Y)$, we identified two ground state conformers and two migratory transition states $(\Delta^{\dagger}E_{X,\text{mig}}, \Delta^{\ddagger}E_{Y,\text{mig}})$, in addition to a *pseudo* C_{2v} -symmetric transition state for conformational interconversion $(\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{X,\text{conf}})$ $\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{Y,\text{conf}})$. Extensive π -p* and σ -p* interactions between the terminal α -carbon and β -aryl substituents leads to significant geometrical distortions in both conformers of the β,β -diaryl alkylidene carbene system, with one aryl ring adopting a perpendicular orientation^{13,14} with respect to the terminal C= C bond and the other remaining planar. In all 21 of the asymmetric carbenes, the ground state was found to be that in which the most electron rich substituent adopts the Scheme 5. Limiting Regimes for Product Selection in the Colvin Rearrangement of Benzophenones^a



^{*a*}Italicization indicates that a substituent is either primed to migrate in a specific conformer/isomer, e.g., $5 - Ar^X$, Ar^Y , or has undergone migration, e.g., $6 - Ar^X$, Ar^Y .

perpendicular orientation, with increasing electron-richness also leading to a progressive decrease in the ground state C_{ipso} – C_{β} – C_{α} bond angle (e.g., Ph₂C=C:, 87°; PhAr^{4-NMe2}C=C:, 79°). The preference for the most electron rich aryl group being perpendicular to the terminal C=C bond is consistent with it being the better donor for nonclassical $\pi \rightarrow p^*$ conjugation and/or $\sigma \rightarrow p^*$ hyperconjugation (see inset to Figure 3).

Having established the general PES topography of the $\beta_i\beta_i$ diaryl alkylidene carbenes, Figure 4, we computed theoretical migratory aptitudes for seven carbenes derived from mono-*p*substituted benzophenones 1-Ph,Ar^X. Selectivities were then computed for regime 1, where the product ratio depends solely on $[\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{H,mig}} + \Delta E_{\text{X-H}} - \Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{X,mig}}]$. These calculations were then repeated using a range of computational methods, spanning different electronic structure theories (KS-DFT, DLPNO-CCSD(T)), select DFT functionals, basis sets, and statistical mechanics approximations, in order to assess the method sensitivity of our analysis (see Supporting Information for full survey).

All of the methods led to the same conclusion: the more electron-rich aryl group in the $\beta_{,}\beta_{-}$ diaryl alkylidene carbene migrates preferentially. Quantitative comparisons with experimental values proved more challenging since the transition states differ by at most a few kJ mol⁻¹ (log₁₀ $k_{\rm X}/k_{\rm H} = |0.8|$; $\Delta \Delta^{\ddagger}G_{195\rm K} = |3.0|$ kJ mol⁻¹). Nonetheless, the nominally highest-level results, obtained with DLPNO-CCSD(T), as summarized in Figure 5 (see Supporting Information for full



Figure 4. Schematic potential energy surface of a β , β -diaryl alkylidene carbene.



Figure 5. Computed Hammett correlations for mono-*p*-substituted benzophenones (1-Ar^X,Ph; X = 4-NMe₂, 4-OMe, 4-Me, 4-H, 4-Cl, 4-CF₃, 4-NO₂), obtained via three different computational methods. Relative rates were calculated at *T* = 195 K via $k_X/k_H = \exp[(\Delta^{\ddagger}E_H - \Delta^{\ddagger}E_X)/(RT)]$, where $\Delta^{\ddagger}E_i$ denotes the activation barrier for migration of Arⁱ (*i* = X, H), relative to the ground state, in PhAr^XC=C:. In each case, single-point gas-phase energies were computed with DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO, using geometries and solvation energies obtained with one of three different KS-DFT methods XCF/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM(THF,UFF) (XCF = B3LYP+GD3BJ, PBE0+GD3BJ, ω B97XD). Experimental correlations for all 17 benzophenones are overlaid for comparison.

discussion), reproduce both the gradient and subtle curvature of the parent Hammett correlation (Figure 1) with reasonable fidelity. This correspondence indicates that (i) the alkylidene carbene 5 serves as a discrete, product-determining intermediate en route to alkyne 6, (ii) the ¹³C-isotopomer ratios measured experimentally report the relative migratory aptitudes of the two competing aryl substituents in the free carbene 5, (iii) regime 1, i.e., classical Curtin–Hammett conditions, prevail, and (iv) the curvature of the Hammett correlation is an intrinsic feature of the 1,2-migration in the alkylidene carbene, presumably reflecting the progressive stabilization of the ground-state by a nonclassical $\pi \rightarrow p^*$ interaction with more strongly electron-donating substituents.

Independent DLPNO-CCSD(T) calculations of the barriers to conformational interconversion in β -phenyl- β -aryl alkylidene carbenes (Table 1) appear to confirm that other than for very electron-donating substituents (e.g., X = 4-NMe₂) rearrangement proceeds under regime 1 ($k_{conf} > 5k_{mig}$).⁴⁹

Table 1. Computed Relative Rates of Conformational Interconversion versus Migration in β -Phenyl- β -aryl Alkylidene Carbenes^{*a*}



^{*a*}Combined KS-DFT/DLPNO-CCSD(T) methodology, using geometries and solvation energies obtained at the PBE0+GD3BJ/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM(THF,UFF) level of theory and single-point gas-phase energies obtained from DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO. Calculated at T = 195 K in accordance with $k_{\rm conf}/k_{\rm mig} = \exp[(\Delta^{\pm}E_{\rm mig} - \Delta^{\pm}E_{\rm conf})/(RT)]$, Figure 4.

Analysis of Absolute Migratory Rates. Alkylidene carbene intermediates are very short-lived, undergoing rapid partitioning between 1,2-migration to generate an alkyne versus carbene interception by insertion, cycloaddition, etc. Scheme 1. The 1,2-migration itself proceeds via two microscopically distinct competing pathways, and both experiment and computation (Figures 1, 2, and 5) show that more electron-donating β -substituents migrate preferentially, in agreement with prior observations.^{2,13,14,19,20} It is tempting to generalize that alkylidene carbenes with electron-donating β -substituents rearrange faster than those with electron-withdrawing ones. However, this would be incorrectly based on extrapolation from relative migratory aptitudes determined under a regime of intramolecular competition.

In fact the relative rates (migratory aptitudes) provide no direct insight into the practical aspects of employing alkylidene carbene intermediates because both 1,2-migrations converge, in the absence of isotopic desymmetrization, on the same alkyne. Of direct relevance, however, are the absolute migratory aptitudes of both of the β -substituents, for these ultimately control the intrinsic lifetime of the alkylidene carbene and thus the propensity for carbene interception (Scheme 1). Indeed, ambiguities in the literature concerning the apparent influence of the stationary ("bystander") substituent in Fritsch–Buttenberg–Wiechell rearrangements and related processes may arise from misinterpretation or conflation of relative versus absolute migration rates.²

We explored this question theoretically, using a set of 28 β , β -diaryl alkylidene carbenes and computing the absolute activation barriers to 1,2-aryl migration, relative to the global minimum on each PES, for the full matrix of carbenes. As before, we reproduced these calculations using a range of methods (see Supporting Information). Examples of these results, obtained from DLPNO-CCSD(T) calculations, are summarized Table 2 in the form of intrinsic lifetimes (τ_{XY} , ns,

Table 2. Computed Lifetimes (ns) of 28 $\beta_{,\beta}$ -Diaryl Alkylidene Carbenes Ar^XAr^YC=C: at -78°C^a

X or Y	NMe ₂	OMe	Me	Н	Cl	CF_3	NO_2
NMe ₂	1						
OMe	10	2					
Me	36	8	0.1				
Н	89	4	0.2	0.1			
Cl	203	10	0.3	0.3	0.2		
CF_3	482	15	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.1	
NO_2	1554	38	2.2	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.1

"Lifetimes $\tau_{\rm XY} = (k_{\rm X,mig} + k_{\rm Y,mig})^{-1}$ were calculated at T = 195 K in accordance with $k_{\rm mig} = (k_{\rm B}T/h) \exp[(-\Delta^{\pm}E_{\rm rmig})/(RT)]$. Activation barriers were computed by a combined KS-DFT/DLPNO-CCSD(T) methodology, using geometries and solvation energies obtained at the PBE0+GD3BJ/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM(THF,UFF)/Ultrafine level of theory and gas-phase, single-point energies from DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO. Values are computed and illustrative only.

at -78 °C). The data are also presented as a 2D contour plot (Figure 6) in the form of the absolute barrier to aryl migration as a function of both substituents. While the barriers and lifetimes are necessarily highly sensitive to the exact method of calculation, the underlying trends appear robust between different methods. Indeed, DLPNO-CCSD(T) calculations predict the lifetime of MePhC=C: to be 3 ps under ambient conditions, in reasonable agreement with the recent experimental measurements ($\tau = 13.3$ ps) of Phillips, Hadad, and Thamattoor.¹⁵

The data in Table 2 and Figure 6 reveal two initially counterintuitive trends: (i) the intrinsic lifetimes are minimized by using electronically matched substituents, i.e., the barriers to migration are lowest along the diagonal in Figure 6, and (ii) the intrinsic lifetimes are maximized by strongly donating groups. Crucially, these lifetimes reflect the theoretical feasibility of intramolecular or intermolecular interception of the nascent alkylidene carbenes following its release from a precursor (Scheme 1), and the effect of electronic matching on the lifetime is substantial, particularly for strongly perturbing substituents. Thus, while the intrinsic lifetimes of the symmetric carbenes, $Ar_2C=C$; are in the range 0.1–1 ns, some of the asymmetric carbenes are predicted to have lifetimes up to 3–4 orders of magnitude larger (0.1–1 μ s, at -78 °C).



Figure 6. Contour map of activation barriers for 1,2-aryl migration in 28 β , β -diaryl alkylidene carbenes computed using a combined KS-DFT/DLPNO-CCSD(T) methodology, with geometries and solvation energies obtained at the PBE0+GD3BJ/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM(THF,UFF) level of theory and single-point gas-phase energies from DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO. Activation barriers are relative to the ground state and reported in kJ mol⁻¹.

Origins of the Electronic Matching Effect. The underlying basis for the effect is summarized in Figure 7, which is generated by analysis of various components taken from two cross sections of the data in Figure 6. The left-hand series displays the effect of varying the substituent (X) on the migrating group when the bystander is phenyl; in the right-hand series the bystander substituent is varied (Y) when the migrating group is phenyl. Unsurprisingly both series show that electron-rich substituents provide thermodynamic stability to the ground state energy (ΔE) via enhanced $\pi \rightarrow p^*$ and $\sigma \rightarrow p^*$ donor-acceptor interactions (see inset to Figure 3) compared to Ph.

The second row displays the barrier to 1,2-migration $(\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{mig}})$ from the specified conformer. For variation in migrator (X) the loss of $\pi \rightarrow p^*$ stabilization during 1,2-migration results in larger barriers arising with electron-rich substituents. Conversely, for variation in bystander (Y) electron-rich substituents reduce the barrier via inductive transition state stabilization.

In the final row, the net effect of both sets of interactions shows how the overall barrier to alkyne formation, relative to the ground state, varies. In both cases the barrier is minimized by electronically matching the migrating substituent to the bystander. The minimum barrier is found at $\sigma = 0$ in this case, because Ph has been selected as the reference group. As the σ value for the reference group is changed, the point of minimum barrier moves with it, as illustrated by the diagonal line in Figure 6.

CONCLUSIONS

We have used the Colvin rearrangement of carbonyl compounds to systematically explore the rearrangement of alkylidene carbenes.²⁰ In situ labeling by use of [¹³C]-TMS-diazomethane, in conjunction with ¹³C{¹H} NMR spectroscopic analysis of the alkyne products, expedited the quantification of the intramolecular selectivity (migratory aptitude) in the 1,2-migration step. Preliminary experiments reproduced the migratory aptitudes $H \gg Ph \gg$ alkyl



Figure 7. Energetic rationale for substituent matching in $\beta_i\beta_i$ -diaryl alkylidene carbenes. First row: Difference in energy between the *specified conformer* and the ground state (ΔE_{ij} , i = X, H). Second row: activation barrier to migration, relative to the *specified conformer* ($\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{mig},i}$). Third row: activation barrier to migration, relative to the *ground state* ($\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{mig},i} + \Delta E_i$). Fourth row: ($\Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{mig},X} - \Delta^{\ddagger}E_{\text{mig},H}$) + ($\Delta E_X - \Delta E_H$). All energies were obtained by a combined KS-DFT/ DLPNO-CCSD(T) methodology, using geometries and solvation energies obtained at the PBE0+GD3BJ/6-311+G(d,p)/IEFPCM-(THF,UFF) level of theory and single-point gas-phase energies from DLPNO-CCSD(T)/ma-def2-TZVPP/TightPNO. All energies are reported in kJ mol⁻¹.

previously reported for alkylidene carbenes liberated by photolysis. 13,14

Changes to the electronics, sterics, and isotopic identity (H/ D) of the β -substituents did not detectably perturb this trend. Thus, H-migration is not exclusively contingent on quantumtunneling, and the hybridization of the migrating center exerts substantial influence over the migratory aptitude of the β substituent.

High-level electronic structure calculations were conducted to explore both the mechanism and selectivity of the overall process. Calculations, together with *in situ* low temperature ¹³C NMR spectroscopic studies, support the conclusion that the Colvin rearrangement proceeds via the sequence shown in Scheme 2, involving irreversible LiOSiMe₃ elimination, stereospecific dediazoniation, then 1,2-migration in the free alkylidene carbene. Alternative routes (see Supporting Information) to the alkyne by 1,2-migration concerted with N₂ extrusion at the diazoalkene, or reaction via an oxonium ylide formed by THF coordination, could not be located on the ground state PES (KS-DFT).

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Extensive experimental studies of differentially substituted benzophenones provided nuanced insights to the 1,2-migration step. Hammett analysis of the intramolecular competitive rearrangement of alkylidene carbenes generated from monosubstituted benzophenones afforded a smooth but nonlinear correlation, indicative that relative migratory aptitudes increase toward a plateau for the most electron-rich substituents in the series (Figure 1). The curvature and gradient of this correlation remained completely invariant to changes in the reference substituent, apparently discounting any mechanistic discontinuity in the limiting substrates (Figure 2).

Electronic structure calculations (Figure 5) reproduced both the gradient and curvature of the parent correlation. This is again indicative that product selection occurs under a Curtin– Hammett regime, with the *prima facie* implication that alkylidene carbenes generated from diazoalkenes are not subject to significant dynamic effects.⁵⁰ The nonlinearity of the Hammett correlation reflects increasing ground-state stabilization by the β -substituents, via nonclassical $\pi \rightarrow p^*$ conjugation and/or $\sigma \rightarrow p^*$ hyperconjugation (see inset to Figure 3).

A key aspect not fully deconvoluted in prior studies is that the relative migratory aptitudes do not necessarily reflect the overall propensity for 1,2-migration versus other competing processes (Scheme 1). Theoretical exploration of the absolute migratory aptitudes of a systematic matrix of 28 $\beta_{\beta}\beta_{\beta}$ -diaryl alkylidene carbenes uncovered several effects not easily quantified by experimental interrogation. Calculations suggest, for example, that the intrinsic lifetimes are not primarily dependent upon the electron-donating/withdrawing abilities of the substituents per se but upon the electronic disparity between the two substituents (Figure 6). Electron-donating groups, while more effective competitors under conditions of intramolecular competition, do not necessarily lead to faster migration. Indeed, highly polarized β_{β} -diaryl alkylidene carbenes appear to have lifetimes several orders of magnitude greater than symmetric analogues (Table 2). These systems may therefore provide new opportunities for direct spectroscopic detection in solution in the nano- to microsecond regime.

The above findings on electronic matching add to a previous rather fragmentary body of evidence suggesting that the absolute migratory aptitude of a given substituent is not an intrinsic property but mutually dependent on the stationary substituent, or bystander.⁵¹ The synthetic ramifications of the matching effect, nevertheless, are not yet completely clear. For example, it is tempting to assume that longer intrinsic lifetimes established by mismatching will increase the probability of interception of the carbene (Scheme 1). However, this is contingent on the extent to which the mismatching also stabilizes the carbene ground-state to the competing processes. Highly efficient bimolecular trapping processes that are kinetically competitive but limited by diffusion may benefit the most in this respect.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

1 Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/jacs.0c12400.

Additional discussion, experimental procedures, characterization data, details of isotopomer assignments, NMR spectra of ¹³C-labeled alkynes, computational methods, and benchmarking calculations (PDF)

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All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

Funding

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013)/ERC Grant Agreement 340163.

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Dr. Andrew Leach (University of Manchester) and Tom Young (University of Oxford) for detailed advice on electronic structure calculations on carbenes, and Dr. Andrés García Domínguez (University of Edinburgh) for a careful reading of this manuscript.

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(49) We initially considered this trend as possible contributing factor to the curvature in the Hammett plot (Figure 1) but have been unable to establish a firm conclusion in this respect.

(50) Although this conclusion is also supported by theoretical barriers to conformational equilibration, it should be noted that alternative regimes, in which selectivity is governed further upstream in the mechanism (e.g., by stereoselective elimination) and the carbenes themselves are bypassed, cannot be ruled out definitively if for example such upstream processes exhibit analogous selectivities.

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