Tethered chains in poor solvent conditions: An experimental study involving Langmuir diblock copolymer monolayers

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We have employed Langmuir monolayers of highly asymmetric polydimethylsiloxane-polystyrene (PDMS-PS) diblock copolymers on dioctyl phthalate (DOP) at temperatures ranging from 22 to \(-35^\circ C\) as a model system for tethered chains in poor solvent conditions. The thicknesses of the tethered PS layers extending into the DOP subphase, measured by neutron reflection, decrease with decreasing temperature \((T)\) over this entire range. However, the variation with \(T\) becomes weak below \(-20^\circ C\). At the lowest \(T\), the layer thicknesses are 55\%–75\% of the values at the theta condition \((T_\theta = 22^\circ C)\). The contraction of the layer with decreasing \(T\) is determined as a function of surface density and molecular weight, and these data are compared to universal scaling forms. The PS segments are depleted from the near surface region over the entire \(T\) range, with the thickness of the depletion layer increasing slightly with decreasing \(T\). The free energy of the surface layer is probed by surface tension measurements. With decreasing \(T\), negative surface pressures are observed at low coverages for both PDMS-PS and PDMS monolayers, indicating metastability toward lateral phase separation. Evidence for a transition from a dispersed phase to a condensed phase with decreasing \(T\) was observed in the reflectivity for very low PDMS-PS coverage. At high coverage where the submerged blocks are strongly interacting at 22 °C, only a modest decrease in surface pressure is observed over the experimental range of \(T\) despite the strong contraction. This latter result is discussed in terms of the relative contributions of enthalpic and entropic effects to the surface pressure. © 1999 American Institute of Physics. [S0021-9606(99)51501-8]

I. INTRODUCTION

Polymer chains which are fixed (or tethered) by one end to a surface or interface have been extensively investigated in recent years.\(^1\)–\(^4\) On the practical side, they are a useful means of modifying surfaces to control adhesion,\(^5\) protein adsorption,\(^6\) or the attraction between colloidal particles.\(^7\) In addition, they are an interesting system for examining the physics of polymers in confined geometries, and the balance of enthalpic and entropic contributions to the free energy. Such layers can be formed or employed in a variety of solution conditions and geometries. This article concerns planar layers of tethered chains in solvents whose solvating power is poorer than the theta condition. It is now recognized that with decreasing solvent quality, important changes in segment density distribution can occur both normal and lateral to the tethering surface. This behavior can contribute to the understanding of certain features of biological systems, such as protein folding. Solvent quality can be varied either through the choice of solvent or by changing temperature \((T)\). The present study employs the latter method. The main points of focus are the manner in which the layers contract with decreasing solvent quality, the lateral phase behavior, and the free energy within the tethered layer.

The behavior of tethered chains in poor solvent conditions has been addressed theoretically by scaling,\(^8\)\(^,\)\(^9\) analytic\(^10\) and numerical\(^11\)–\(^13\) self-consistent field (SCF) calculations, the random phase approximation combined with a numerical mean-field analysis,\(^14\) a single-chain-mean-field (SCMF) statistical mechanical approach,\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^15\)\(^,\)\(^16\) and Monte Carlo (MC)\(^17\)–\(^20\) and molecular dynamics (MD) simulations.\(^21\) An important distinction in these studies is whether the tethering points are fixed or have mobility in the plane of the surface, as this plays a critical role in the lateral phase behavior. A further point of distinction for the case of fixed tethering points is whether the tethering points are random or regular.\(^13\)\(^,\)\(^14\)\(^,\)\(^17\)

The case of fixed tethering points was initially treated by scaling\(^8\)\(^,\)\(^9\) and analytic SCF methods.\(^10\) These approaches assumed lateral uniformity within the layer, and addressed variations in the free energy and the segment concentration profile normal to the surface. The principal focus was the nature of the contraction of the layer with decreasing solvent quality, and how the dependence of layer height on solvent...
quality varies with surface density ($\sigma$). Two limits were discussed. The contraction of isolated, noninteracting tethered coils is expected to be analogous to the contraction of free chains in dilute solution. On the other hand, in dense layers, the above approaches showed that interchain interactions shift the contraction to lower temperatures and broaden the temperature range. Numerical SCF and simulation studies have addressed the behavior between these two limits. For real chains, the contraction is expected to be continuous for all surface densities due to their finite molecular weight. The degree of interaction among the tethered chains can be compared for different molecular weights using a reduced surface density $\Sigma = \sigma \pi R_g^2$ where $R_g$ is the dilute solution free chain radius of gyration.

Various theoretical studies have addressed the lateral structure as well as the contraction normal to the surface. For chains with fixed tethering points, Lai and Binder originally showed by MC simulation that a decrease in solvent quality leads to lateral fluctuations in segment density. A similar effect was subsequently observed in MD simulations by Grest and Murat. Yeung et al. studied this effect by combining a numerical mean-field analysis with the random phase approximation. They found that the fluctuations are restricted to the outer edge of the layer for higher molecular weights and surface densities, but exist throughout the thickness of the layer at lower surface densities and molecular weights. This was subsequently confirmed by 2D numerical SCF calculations. Williams used a scaling approach to address the regime of moderate grafting densities (between isolated chains and the strong-stretching limit) in the nonsolvent limit. Kinetic effects were considered for the case of a rapid change in solvent quality. In particular, surface micelles were predicted for a sudden decrease in solvent quality and chains of sufficiently high molecular weight that they are unable to disengage and become isolated prior to aggregation.

For chains with tethered ends which are mobile, as in the present experimental system, a lateral phase transition into polymer-rich and polymer-poor phases is predicted. Detailed isotherms and phase diagrams including regions of metastability have been calculated by Szleifer et al. They examined the tethered layers to swell in a different manner than the tail, being more like dilute free chains. The main body of the profile was reported to desorb on experimental time scales. Aurowy et al., examined PDMS chains end grafted onto silica particles by neutron scattering. The layers were grafted over a wide range of surface density ($\Sigma = 4 - 27$). They examined the tethered layers in methanol (nonsolvent), acetone (poor solvent), in mixtures of methanol and dichloromethane (DCM, good solvent), and over a range of temperature in styrene ($T_{\theta,PDMS} = 30 \, ^\circ C$). In methanol, a very dense, nearly fully collapsed layer was observed with average PDMS volume fraction of 0.84. In acetone, a slightly better but still poor solvent, the same layer had an average PDMS volume fraction of 0.64. For the methanol-DCM mixtures, the situation was complicated by a nonuniform distribution of solvent within the tethered layer. The expansion of the layer was not linear with increasing DCM weight fraction, but rather most of the expansion occurred over a fairly narrow range of composition (65%–80% DCM). The transition was much broader at lower surface density. This latter result is contrary to expectation, and was attributed to preferential solvation. In styrene, they reported a linear variation of layer thickness with $T$ over the entire range of reduced temperature $\tau = [(T - T_\theta)/T_\theta]$ from 0.11 to -0.17. Little detail was obtained about the profile, as a single step model was used in the analysis of the scattering data.

Karim et al. used neutron reflectivity to study PS chains end-grafted onto silicon and immersed in cyclohexane. The detailed form of the profile was examined for temperatures ranging down to 9.5 $^\circ C$ ($\tau = -0.09$). The layer was grafted at a relatively high surface density ($\Sigma \approx 17$). They found good agreement with the analytic SCF profile of Zhulina et al. at $T_\theta$. In particular, the decrease in segment volume fraction ($\phi$) with depth (z) in the body of the profile followed the functional form $\phi(z) = \phi_0[1 - (z/L_0)^2]^5$, with an exponent of 1/2. At 9.5 $^\circ C$, the maximum volume fraction was 0.47, still far from that of the fully collapsed state. The profile exponent $y$ seemed to be leveling off at the lowest $T$ at a value of roughly 1/3. No depletion layer was observed, but rather the dangling chains collapsed onto the surface. The magnitude of the tail of the profile decreased with decreasing $T$. A sigmoidal shape was obtained for the contraction of the tail with $\tau$, which indicates swelling analogous to that for dilute free chains. The main body of the profile was reported to swell in a different manner than the tail, being more like that observed for crosslinked gels.

The lateral structure of tethered chains in poor and nonsolvent conditions has been examined by atomic force microscopy (AFM). Tethered chain systems have been imaged in small molecule liquids and also in air. The results indicate lateral heterogeneity at low and intermediate surface density. Images show a nearly uniform appearance at high surface density. Isolated single chains are observed at very low surface density. It is not clear whether AFM can resolve lateral heterogeneity occurring only in the tip of an otherwise uniform brush, as predicted for high density by Yeung et al. Also, the value of $\tau$ at which lateral aggregation begins to occur when the solvent quality is decreased below the theta condition has not yet been established.

Below we report results for a system in which polymer chains are strongly tethered to a surface, such that they do
not desorb, but yet have mobility in the plane of the surface. This system is composed of Langmuir monolayers of highly asymmetric polydimethylsiloxane–polystyrene (PDMS–PS) diblock copolymers on the surface of an organic liquid. The PDMS block anchors the copolymers to the surface due to the low surface energy of PDMS relative to that of the subphase liquid, while the (fully deuterated) PS block dangles into the subphase liquid. The segmental concentration profile of the d-PS block is examined by neutron reflection. The neutron scattering length density of the PDMS block is nearly matched with that of air, such that this block does not affect the reflectivity. The copolymers are sufficiently asymmetric such that interchain interactions occur nearly entirely through the PS blocks. Using such systems, we reported previously on the structure and free energy of monodispersed tethered chains in good and theta solvent conditions and in solutions of free chains, the surface rheological properties of tethered chains in a good solvent, and the structure of tethered layers with bimodal molecular weight distributions.

In the present report we examine the poor solvent regime using dioctylphthalate (DOP) as the subphase liquid. The theta condition for PS in DOP occurs at 22 °C. The accessible range of temperature with this system is ultimately limited by the freezing of DOP at −50 °C. We have examined the structure of the tethered layer from 22 to −35 °C, corresponding to a range of τ from 0 to −0.25. This range extends much further below than in previous studies. Another distinctive feature of the present system is that the surface density and molecular weight can be varied independently, allowing a rigorous test of scaling relations. Our previous work has shown that the asymptotic strong stretching limit is not achieved in good or theta solvents within the range of surface density accessible to this system (Σ ≈ 1–12). Thus, the present study addresses the intermediate surface density regime between isolated tethered chains and dense brushes. The surface tension of DOP is far lower than that of PS for the entire range of temperatures examined, thus the air surface is repulsive for the dangling d-PS blocks. The strongly repulsive nature of the interface for the dangling block is a further important distinction from previous work. Another study of a Langmuir diblock copolymer monolayer system involving a polyelectrolyte dangling block has been reported recently.

In addition to examining the structure of the layer normal to the surface by neutron reflection, the interactions among the copolymers within the monolayer and the lateral phase behavior are examined through surface tension measurements. The surface pressure (Π = γ₀ − γ, where γ₀ and γ are the surface tensions of the pure solvent and monolayer-covered surface, respectively) is related to the free energy (F) of the monolayer by Π = −(δF/δA)∞,T,P, where A is the surface area and n is the number of copolymer molecules.

We examine the increase in surface tension with decreasing temperature of pure DOP, and for DOP surfaces with PDMS and PDMS–PS monolayers. At lower coverages, negative surface pressures are observed with decreasing temperature, which indicate metastability toward lateral phase separation. At higher Σ only positive pressure is observed, and we examine the variation in surface pressure with decreasing T in order to gain insight into enthalpic and entropic contributions to the free energy in layers of interacting tethered chains. In our previous work involving good and theta solvent conditions, the maximum attainable surface density was limited by a sharp rise in surface pressure caused by the interactions of the submerged blocks. The origin of this sharp rise in pressure has been puzzling, and remains an important focus of the present report.

The article is organized as follows. Following a description of the experimental details, the results are presented in two sections. In Sec. III A, we describe the form of the segmental concentration profile normal to the surface. We report the contraction of the layer with decreasing T for a range of both τ and M. In Sec. III B, we present the surface pressure isotherms for PDMS–PS and PDMS monolayers as a function of T. In Sec. IV, which is divided into the two corresponding sections, the data are discussed in light of previous experimental and theoretical work. The article concludes with a brief summary of the most important conclusions in Sec. V.

II. EXPERIMENT
A. Materials

The two PDMS–PS diblock copolymers used in this study are denoted 20–170 and 28–330, where the labels represent the molecular weights (in kg/mol) of the PDMS and PS blocks, respectively. The PS blocks are fully deuterated. These samples were described in a previous report. A PDMS homopolymer (25 800 g/mol, Mₚ/Mₚ = 1.03) used for isotherm measurements was purchased from Polymer Standards Service (FRG). Dioctyl phthalate was obtained from Aldrich and further purified before use following the method outlined by Balsara et al. Chloroform obtained from Aldrich was used as received for spreading the copolymer monolayers.

B. Procedures

A schematic diagram of the Langmuir trough used in the neutron reflectivity study is shown in Fig. 1. It has internal dimensions of 75 mm×152 mm×4 mm, and was constructed from a solid Teflon block. Beneath the liquid the Teflon was very thin, approximately 0.3 mm, which facilitated heat transfer. To minimize temperature gradients within
the liquid and at the air surface, a Plexiglas cover was placed over the trough. The cover contained 2-mm-thick quartz windows for the neutron beam, and openings for a thermocouple and the surface tensiometer. The latter was mounted on the top of the Plexiglas cover. The trough was bolted to a copper plate and was cooled by three thermoelectric Peltier elements (Melcor). One face of each element was in contact with a thick copper block through which a cooling fluid was circulated. The second face of each Peltier element was in contact with the copper plate attached to the trough. A thin layer of thermally conductive grease was applied between all surfaces in contact to aid heat transfer. The entire setup was enclosed in a canister which was purged with dry argon to remove water vapor. Amorphous quartz windows, 2 mm thick, were mounted in the side walls of the canister to allow for passage of the neutron beam. During the reflectivity measurements, the surface pressure was measured with a NIMA model 9000 tensiometer using filter paper. We note that there was negligible variation in surface pressure during the period in which the reflectivity was collected (~3 h). The canister was placed on an active vibration isolation table to reduce external vibrations. The temperature of the subphase was measured by a thermocouple inside a stainless steel tube which was submerged in the liquid. The lateral and vertical variation in temperature measured at 5 °C (in water) were less than 0.2 and 1 °C, respectively.

For the reflectivity experiments, the copolymer monolayers were spread from dilute solution in chloroform, a mutual good solvent for PDMS and PS, using a Hamilton microsyringe. Just prior to spreading the monolayer, the bare DOP surface was aspirated to remove surface active impurities. Reflectivity measurements were performed on the NG7 reflectometer (NIST). A fixed wavelength of 4.1 Å was used. The treatment of the data was the same as in our previous report for theta conditions. In the analysis of the reflectivity data, the roughness at the air interface was fixed at 3 Å. The neutron scattering length densities of d-PS, PDMS, and DOP are 6.48×10⁻⁶, 0.064×10⁻⁶, and 0.62×10⁻⁶ Å⁻², respectively. The copolymer surface density was determined by integrating the profiles obtained from the reflectivity.

Surface pressure isotherms for PDMS homopolymer were measured as a function of temperature in the same trough. The surface density was determined from the volume of solution deposited onto the surface. To determine surface pressure isotherms for T<22 °C, an initial quantity of a dilute solution of PDMS in chloroform was deposited onto the surface at 22 °C. The chloroform was allowed to evaporate and then the trough was slowly cooled. The surface tension was recorded when the system stabilized at each desired temperature. Following measurement at the lowest temperature, the trough was allowed to warm to 22 °C. An additional quantity of PDMS was then deposited and the process was repeated. A hysteresis in the surface tension was observed for both PDMS and PDMS–PS monolayers as the temperature of the trough increased from the lowest value. However, the surface tension during the cooling cycle was reproducible following a delay period of ~12 h after warming to 22 °C.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Segmental concentration profile

Reflectivity data from the copolymer monolayers over a range of temperature from 22 to −35 °C are shown in Figs. 2(a)–2(d). Data for two surface densities for the 20–170 copolymer are shown in Figs. 2(a) and 2(b), and for the 28–330 copolymer in Figs. 2(c) and 2(d). The data are expressed as R/R₀ vs q, where R₀ is the calculated reflectivity from the bare DOP surface and q=4π sin θλ where θ is the angle of incidence and λ is the wavelength. Data for different temperatures have been shifted on the vertical scale for clarity. With decreasing temperature four general trends are observed in the data: an increase in R/R₀, a shift of the maximum to higher q values, a broadening of the peak, and the emergence of a minimum following the initial peak. No variation in reflectivity is detected over this temperature range for the bare DOP surface as shown in Fig. 2(e).

The curves through the data in Figs. 2(a)–2(d) are best-fits corresponding to the d-PS volume fraction profiles in Figs. 3(a)–3(d). The empirical functional form used in the fitting is composed of a depletion layer, followed by a step of constant ϕ, followed by a smooth decrease in ϕ over the remainder of the profile. The rise to the step and the decrease from the step are both modeled by Gaussian functions. This model profile is the simplest form we were able to find which describes the data over the entire range of σ and T.

A depletion layer is present at all T and σ. We define the magnitude of the depletion layer as the distance from the air surface to the leading edge of the step. Over the experimental temperature range, the depletion layer increases from 47 to 65 Å for the 20–170 copolymer at the higher σ, and from 57 to 81 Å for the 28–330 copolymer at the higher σ. The variation is somewhat smaller for the monolayers at lower σ, increasing from 42 to 52 Å for the 20–170 copolymer, and from 63 to 73 Å for 28–330 copolymer.

We note that the reflectivity data can be fit without a depletion layer if very large roughnesses at the air surface are included in the model profiles. For the higher σ monolayers, such roughness values range from 16 to 21 Å for the 20–170 copolymer and from 19 to 28 Å for the 28–330 copolymer over the experimental T range. These values are much larger than can be accounted for by the surface PDMS block, and appear to be unphysical. These data, together with the dependencies on σ and M at T₂ discussed previously, provide strong support for the conclusion that a depletion layer is the correct interpretation.

The contraction of the layer normal to the surface is smooth for both σ values of each copolymer monolayer. The variation with T of the rms layer height (h_m) and the maximum volume fraction (ϕ_m) are given in Figs. 4(a) and 4(b), normalized by the values at T₂. Over most of the T range, there is a strong dependence on h_m and ϕ_m on T. However, below −20 °C (τ=−0.17) the profiles become only weakly dependent on T. The decrease of h_m/h_m,σ with |τ| depends on both σ and M. For fixed M, there is a greater reduction in h_m, and a greater increase in ϕ_m, for higher σ. At fixed σ, the contraction is stronger for higher M. In Figs. 4(c) and 4(d), the data for the layer height are plotted according to the...
scaling relations predicted for the asymptotic strong stretching limit\textsuperscript{10} and the isolated chain limit,\textsuperscript{23,24,49} respectively. In Fig. 4 the data are plotted according to the scaling relationship $\frac{h_{rms}}{h_{rms,0}} \propto \frac{1}{\phi_0}$, where $\phi_0$ is the volume fraction of segments within the layer at $T_0$. For a tethered layer, $\phi_0$ can be approximated by $\frac{h_{dry}}{h_{rms,0}}$ where $h_{dry}$ is the dry thickness obtained by integrating the segment concentration profiles. This relationship, based on an analogy to lightly crosslinked polymer gels,\textsuperscript{50} adequately described the data of Karim et al.\textsuperscript{30} The comparison of the data with these scaling relations will be discussed further in Sec. IV A.

The profiles obtained below $-20 ^\circ C$ are still quite swollen with solvent compared to the fully collapsed state observed for nonsolvent conditions.\textsuperscript{27–31} The profiles at the lowest $T$ for both surface densities for the 20–170 copolymer are compared in Fig. 5. Finally, no evidence for loss of copolymer from the monolayers with decreasing temperature was observed for the series in Fig. 2. The surface densities, obtained by integration of the fitted profiles, are given in Table I. No variation of surface density with $T$ is observed for the lower surface densities. A small apparent increase (~5%) is observed for the 28–330 copolymer at the higher surface density, which may be due to limited accuracy of the model functional form used in the fitting. The lack of variation of surface density with $T$ is consistent with the strong anchoring of the copolymers to the surface. The anchoring energies per chain, determined from the interfacial tensions, for the 20–170 and 28–330 copolymers on DOP at $22 ^\circ C$ are 200 and 266 kT, respectively.\textsuperscript{40}

B. Surface pressure

The variation of the surface tension with temperature is plotted in Figs. 6(a) and 6(b) for the 20–170 and 28–330...
monolayers, respectively. These data were obtained simultaneous with the reflectivity data of Fig. 2. Similar data for the PDMS monolayer-covered DOP surface are shown in Fig. 6. The variation for the bare DOP surface is also shown in Figs. 6(a)–6(c) for comparison. The surface tension increases with decreasing $T$ for all surfaces, but the increase is greater for the monolayer-covered surfaces than for the bare DOP surface. Consequently, for low surface coverages, the surface tensions of the monolayer-covered surfaces exceed that of the bare DOP surface at the lowest temperatures, resulting in negative surface pressures. Negative pressures are observed for both PDMS–PS and PDMS monolayers, although the absolute magnitudes are much greater for the copolymer monolayers.

A negative surface pressure indicates that the surface is metastable towards lateral phase separation. Indeed, evidence for a transition from a dispersed phase to a condensed phase with decreasing temperature was observed for $\sigma$ slightly lower than the ranges in Figs. 6(a) and 6(b). This evidence was in the form of a dramatic decrease in reflectivity with decreasing $T$. An example of this is shown in Fig. 7. For comparison, the inset in Fig. 7 shows data from Fig. 2(b) obtained for the same copolymer at a slightly higher $\sigma$ (indicated by the greater maximum in $R/R_0$ at 22°C). In the inset the reflectivity increases with decreasing $T$, due to the contraction of the tethered layer. On the other hand, the decrease in reflectivity with decreasing $T$ observed in the main figure apparently indicates a dispersed phase/condensed phase transition. The original reflectivity curve was recovered upon reheating to 22°C. The decrease in reflectivity with decreasing $T$ was entirely absent for the $\sigma$ ranges of Fig. 2, but occurred repeatedly for lower $\sigma$. We would also expect a vanishing pressure to accompany a transition from dispersed to aggregated chains. However, for the present system the pressure in the dispersed state near the transition was too low to detect with the present transducer.

Surface pressure isotherms for the two block copolymers are compared to the isotherm for PDMS homopolymer at 22°C and at −30°C in Figs. 8(a) and 8(b), respectively. Interestingly, at 50°C below the theta temperature, only a modest reduction in pressure is observed relative to that at $T_{\theta}$ for the higher $\sigma$ values.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Segmental concentration profile

In good solvent conditions, interacting tethered chains stretch normal to the surface to reduce unfavorable segment–segment interactions.1–4,39 The degree of stretching is limited by entropically-based chain elasticity. At sufficiently higher $\sigma$, the dimension of the tethered layer scales linearly with $M$. With decreasing temperature/solvent quality, the unfavorable segment–segment interactions become weaker, and the degree of stretching is reduced. At $T_{\theta}$, the dimension of an isolated tethered chain scales with $M^{1/2}$, as for a random walk chain. However, stretching still occurs in strongly interacting tethered layers due to higher order interactions, and the tethered chain dimension still scales linearly with $M$ at
Below $T_\theta$, segment–segment interactions become increasingly favored relative to segment–solvent interactions. Tethered chains contract further in order to minimize interaction with the solvent. In the nonsolvent limit, previous work has shown that end-grafted tethered chains in low molecular weight liquids collapse to nearly melt density. However, the magnitude of $|\tau|$ at which such nonsolvent conditions are reached has not been established experimentally.

For the present system, the surface energy of DOP (30.5 dyn/cm) is much lower than that of the PS segments (40.7 dyn/cm), and therefore the maximum in segment concentration occurs at a depth below the surface, rather than at the surface. Indeed, the depletion layer appears to increase as the temperature decreases below $T_\theta$. The relationship between the segment–surface interaction and the segment concentration at the interface has been examined in detail theoretically and through MD simulations. The present

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**FIG. 4.** Variation of (a) rms layer height $h_{\text{rms}}$ and (b) maximum volume fraction $\phi_{\text{PS,max}}$ of the segment concentration profile with reduced temperature $\tau$ for the 20–170 copolymer (open symbols) and the 28–330 copolymer (filled symbols). In each case, circles (squares) represent lower (higher) surface densities. The profile becomes weakly dependent on $T$ below $-20^\circ$C ($\tau\approx-0.16$). In (b), the error bars are comparable to the size of the symbols. (c) Data for $h_{\text{rms}}$ plotted according to the scaling prediction for the asymptotic limit of strongly stretched chains ($\Sigma\gg1$). (d) Data for $h_{\text{rms}}$ plotted according to the scaling prediction in the limit of isolated chains ($\Sigma<1$). The strong dependence on $\Sigma$ at $T_\theta$ is due to the stretching of chains within the interacting tethered layers. The dependence on $\Sigma$ decreases with decreasing $T$. At the lowest temperatures, the data approach the scaling predicted for the isolated chain limit. However, the inset shows that the dependence on temperature is somewhat weaker than $h_{\text{rms}} \propto |\tau|^{-1/3}$ predicted for isolated free chains in the collapsed regime. (e) Data for $h_{\text{rms}}$ plotted according to a scaling prediction derived by analogy with the swelling of lightly crosslinked gels.
observations of a depletion layer for a chain tethered to a repulsive surface, and the increase in its size with decreasing T, are consistent with the results of these studies. In contrast to the present case of a repulsive surface, a maximum in the segment concentration is predicted at the surface for an attractive segment–surface interaction.

The profiles in Fig. 2 differ considerably from the profiles reported by Karim et al. for PS end-grafted onto silicon and immersed in cyclohexane,29 most notably in the presence of a depletion layer. This is likely due to a different segment–surface interaction in the two cases. In the system of Karim et al., there is a mild attraction between the PS block and the silicon substrate, and correspondingly the maximum in segment concentration occurs at the silicon oxide surface. The higher surface density in their case may also contribute to the lack of a depletion layer. However, based on numerical SCF calculations, the effect of surface density on the depletion layer is expected to be weak over this range.12,53,54

The contraction of the tethered layer with decreasing temperature is continuous over the experimental range of T. This observation is consistent with the data of Auroy et al.28 and Karim et al.29,30 for tethered chain systems at higher T, and also with the contraction of free chains in dilute solution.49,55–58 The contraction of a tethered layer is pre-

TABLE I. Surface densities obtained from integrating the profiles in Fig. 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copolymer</th>
<th>T (°C)</th>
<th>Integral (Å)</th>
<th>Surface density (10^{-4} chains/Å²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20–170</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>1.74</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−10</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>1.66</td>
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<td></td>
<td>−15</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>1.78</td>
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<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–170</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>0.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−15</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–330</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−10</td>
<td>59.9</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−20</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>0.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>0.540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 5. Comparison of the best-fit profiles at the lowest temperatures of this study for the 20–170 copolymer at σ of 1.7×10^{-4} Å^{-2} (T = −35 °C) and 5.8×10^{-5} Å^{-2} (T = −30 °C).

FIG. 6. Variation of surface tension with temperature for (a) 20–170 on DOP at σ of 5.8×10^{-5} Å^{-2} ( ), 1.7×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), 28–330 on DOP at σ of 5.2×10^{-5} Å^{-2} ( ), 1.2×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), and (c) PDMS on DOP at σ of 5.0×10^{-5} Å^{-2} ( ), 1.3×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), 2.0 ×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), 2.8×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), 3.8×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ), 7.6×10^{-4} Å^{-2} ( ). In (c), the error bars are comparable to the size of the symbols. Data are also shown for the bare DOP surfaces ( ) for comparison.
predicted to occur over a broad temperature range for $\Sigma \gg 1$ due to interchain interactions within the tethered layer, but to occur over a much narrower temperature range for $\Sigma \ll 1$. This expected trend is not apparent in Figs. 4(a) and 4(b). The values of $\Sigma$ for the four experimental series at 22 and $-30$ °C are given in Table II. For all series except 20–170 at low $\sigma$, the chains are well into the interacting regime at 22 °C. While the data cover factors of 2.9 (20–170) and 2.4 (28–330) in $\Sigma$ at 22 °C, these ranges are apparently too small to observe a narrowing of the temperature range of the contraction with decreasing $\Sigma$. The contraction is in all cases significantly broader than that for dilute 2000 kg/mol free PS chains in DOP reported by Stepanek et al. The isolated chain limit could not be examined in detail due to lateral phase separation discussed further below. However, the data for the 20–170 copolymer at the lower $\sigma$ approach this limit, as indicated by the fact that no stretching is observed at $T_\theta$ for this monolayer (Fig. 4(d)). For this case, the contraction occurs over the same $T$ range as for the strongly interacting monolayers.

The decrease of $h_{\text{rms}}/h_{\text{rms},0}$ with $|\tau|$ depends upon both $\sigma$ and $M$, as observed in Fig. 4(a). These data can be considered with respect to two limits. First, the data clearly do not follow the dependence predicted for the asymptotic strong stretching limit, as demonstrated in Fig. 4(c). This is expected, since our previous work has shown that this limit is only reached for $\Sigma \gg 11$ at $T_\theta$, beyond the accessible range of $\Sigma$ for this system. Moreover, $\Sigma$ decreases with decreasing $T$ as the dangling PS chains contract (see Table II).

More revealing is a comparison with the other limiting case, that for isolated, noninteracting chains ($\Sigma \ll 1$). In this limit the contraction of the layer is expected to be analogous to that of free chains in dilute solution. For isolated free chains $R_g/R_{\text{crit}}$ is a function of $|\tau|^{1/2}$. For $\tau \ll 0$, $R_g/R_{\text{crit}} \propto (|\tau|^{1/2})^{-1/3}$, which is termed the “collapsed” regime, although the chains may still be quite expanded relative to the fully collapsed, nonsolvent limit. The present data are compared to this limiting behavior in Fig. 4(d). In this figure the rms layer heights are normalized by the rms layer height at $T_\theta$ for $\Sigma \ll 1$. This representation shows that the layers are stretched normal to the surface at $T_\theta$, due to interactions between the chains. However, as the temperature decreases the chains contract and the degree of chain overlap decreases. Correspondingly, the dependence on $\Sigma$ diminishes. At the lowest temperatures, the data approach the universal scaling predicted for collapsed isolated chains in a poor solvent. The remaining small dependence on $\Sigma$ is likely due to the fact that the noninteracting regime is not quite reached at the lowest $T$ for the higher $\Sigma$ monolayers.

The dependence of $h_{\text{rms}}$ on $\tau$ is very weak at the lowest $\tau$ values. This indicates that the systems are in the collapsed regime. The dependence is somewhat weaker than $h_{\text{rms},0} \propto |\tau|^{-1/3}$ predicted for free chains in dilute solution, as shown in the inset to Fig. 4(d). The difference is beyond the experimental error. Error bars indicating the uncertainty in the rms layer height are shown in the inset. Uncertainty in the temperature must also be considered, as the monolayer may experience a slightly different temperature than is measured by the thermocouple immersed in the subphase liquid. However, we estimate this error to be less than 4 °C at the lowest temperatures, which is too small to account for the discrepancy in the inset of Fig. 4(d). Karim et al. also observed a weakening temperature dependence with decreasing $T$ below $T_\theta$, although the effect is less pronounced as their data cover a more limited range of $\tau$.

In Fig. 4(e) the data are compared with the scaling relation $h_{\text{rms}}/h_{\text{rms},0} \propto \tau/\phi_\theta$ which is based on an analogy with the swelling of lightly crosslinked gels. Application of this relation supposes strongly interacting tethered systems, but does not require that the tethered layers be in the strongly stretched asymptotic regime. Following Karim et al. we evaluated $h_{\text{rms}}$ and $h_{\text{dry}}$ directly from the experimental data. Karim et al. observed good agreement with this scaling relation for several molecular weights ranging from 8.5 to 105 kg/mol. Our data do not conform to this scaling relation, as
for the two copolymers in Fig. 4 of this relationship. We note that the curves for the higher believe their comparison does not constitute a rigorous test far more limited than in the present work. Therefore, we were coupled through the grafting process and thus could differ most significantly (10.7). The analogy to a crosslinked gel requires that the tethered layer remain well into the interacting regime over the entire range of $\tau$. This might be the true for their system, considering the higher $S$ and smaller $\tau$ range, whereas it is not valid for all the systems of the present work. However, we also note that in the work of Karim et al., $S$ and $M$ were coupled through the grafting process and thus could not be varied independently. In addition, the range of $\tau$ was far more limited than in the present work. Therefore, we believe their comparison does not constitute a rigorous test of this relationship. We note that the curves for the higher $\Sigma$ of the two copolymers in Fig. 4(e) differ most significantly for $\tau< -0.10$, beyond the $\tau$ range in the study of Karim et al.

The magnitude of the contraction observed in the present work can be compared to that reported by Karim et al., Auroy et al., and also to that reported for dilute free chains. In the study of Karim et al., for $M = 105$ kg/mol chains ($S = 17$ at $T_\theta$) the layer height at $\tau = -0.09$ is roughly 60%–70% of that at $T_\theta$. For the highest surface densities in Fig. 4(a) ($S = 7.6$ and 10.7 at $T_\theta$), we find $h_{rms}/h_{rms \theta} \approx 0.65$–0.75 at $\tau = -0.09$. Thus, the magnitude of the contraction observed in the present data is consistent with that observed by Karim et al., considering that a slightly greater contraction is expected in their case due to the higher $\Sigma$. Auroy et al. observed a contraction of the tethered layer to 65% of that at $T_\theta$ at $\tau = -0.15$ for $M = 166$ kg/mol chains ($S = 27$ at $T_\theta$). In Fig. 4 we find $h_{rms}/h_{rms \theta} \approx 0.55$–0.65 at $\tau = -0.15$ for the two highest surface densities. The magnitude of the contraction is comparable, although greater contraction is expected in their case due to the higher $\Sigma$. A precise comparison is limited by the fact that the tethered layers are composed of different polymers in the two cases. Regarding free chains in dilute solution, quite a range of contraction has been reported for different systems, including $R_g/R_{g, \theta} = 0.67$ at $\tau = -0.07$ for poly($\alpha$-methylstyrene) chains with $M = 1400$ kg/mol in cyclohexane,$^{56}$ $R_g/R_{g, \theta} = 0.38$ at $\tau = -0.10$ for polystyrene chains with $M = 2000$ kg/mol in DOP.$^{56}$ $R_g/R_{g, \theta} = 0.85$ at $\tau = -0.02$ for PS with $M = 8600$ kg/mol in cyclohexane,$^{49}$ and $R_g/R_{g, \theta} = 0.80$ at $\tau = -0.03$ for PS with $M = 4600$ kg/mol in methyl acetate.$^{55}$ Direct comparison of these data with the present data is difficult due to the higher $M$ used in the free chain studies. We also note that the free chain studies were conducted on the low concentration side of the critical point, whereas the present systems are on the high $\sigma$ side of the critical point (discussed below). Nevertheless, a feature in common among all these studies is that at the lowest temperatures the chains are still quite expanded relative to the fully collapsed nonsolvent limit. Due to the very weak temperature dependence in the collapsed regime, it appears to be impractical to reach the nonsolvent limit by cooling below $T_\theta$ for systems in which van der Waals interactions dominate. On the other hand, for poly($N$-isopropylacrylamide) in water, which involves much stronger hydrogen bonding interactions and possesses a lower critical solution temperature, Wu et al. observed $R_g/R_{g, \theta} = 0.15$ when this system was heated to just a few degrees above $T_\theta$.$^{57}$

### B. Surface pressure

#### 1. Phase behavior

**PDMS homopolymer:** Figure 6(c) shows that the surface tension of the PDMS monolayer-covered surface increases more rapidly with decreasing $T$ than that of the bare DOP surface. For low surface density, this results in negative pressure at the lowest temperatures. This is most clearly observed at PDMS concentration of 0.7 mg PDMS/m², as shown in the isotherm in Fig. 8(b). The origin of a negative surface pressure is the attraction among the PDMS molecules on the surface. For a sufficiently poor solvent, this attraction ultimately leads to a phase separation into polymer-rich and polymer-poor regions, as observed for PDMS monolayers on

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**Table II. $\Sigma$ values indicating degree of chain overlap.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copolymer</th>
<th>$\Sigma$ at 22 °C ($\tau = 0$)</th>
<th>$\Sigma$ at −30 °C ($\tau = -0.21$)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20–170</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–170</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–330</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–330</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reference 59.
tributions from the surface blocks may also account for the
surface PDMS blocks to the phase behavior. Moreover, con-

The small discrepancy may be due to contributions of the
form in the inset of Fig. 9. Precise scaling is not observed.

The present data indicate zero surface pressure (binodal) for the 20–170 (C) and 28–330 (●) copoly-
mers. For the higher surface densities, the temperature at which the pressure vanishes was determined by ex-
trapolating the data in Fig. 6. The inset compares the
data to the scaling form predicted by Szleifer et al.
(Refs. 2, 15, and 16). The lack of precise scaling may be
due to contributions of the surface PDMS blocks to the
phase behavior.

PDMS-PS diblock copolymers: The negative surface
pressures observed for the PDMS-PS block copolymer
monolayers in Fig. 8(b) are of greater absolute magnitude
than was observed for PDMS monolayers. Attraction among
the molecules within the monolayer is the origin of negative
surface pressure. However, with the diblock copoly-
mers, attraction can occur among both the surface blocks and
the submerged blocks, which accounts for the greater effect.
As in the case of PDMS, slow cooling apparently allows the
block copolymers to remain dispersed in the metastable re-
gime [no evidence for a lateral phase transition was observed
for the series in Figs. 8(a) and 8(b)]. We have estimated the
values of T at which the surface tensions for the copolymer-
covered surfaces equal those of the bare DOP surface. These
points indicate the binodal in the phase diagram, and are
plotted in Fig. 9. Clearly more data are needed to map the
entire phase diagram has not yet been performed for this
case.

Negative surface pressures for PDMS monolayers resulted at
low surface density. In those calculations Σ was fixed so that
the system was not able to phase separate. A detailed study
of the entire phase diagram has not yet been performed for
this case.

PDMS-PS diblock copolymers: The negative surface
pressures observed for the PDMS-PS block copolymer
monolayers in Fig. 8(b) are of greater absolute magnitude
than was observed for PDMS monolayers. Attraction among
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mers, attraction can occur among both the surface blocks and
the submerged blocks, which accounts for the greater effect.
As in the case of PDMS, slow cooling apparently allows the
block copolymers to remain dispersed in the metastable re-
gime [no evidence for a lateral phase transition was observed
for the series in Figs. 8(a) and 8(b)]. We have estimated the
values of T at which the surface tensions for the copolymer-
covered surfaces equal those of the bare DOP surface. These
points indicate the binodal in the phase diagram, and are
plotted in Fig. 9. Clearly more data are needed to map the
entire phase diagram, but the two data points obtained for
each copolymer indicate that the present σ values are on the
high σ side of the critical point. Detailed isotherms and
phase diagrams have been calculated by Szleifer et al. using
SCMF for both fixed and mobile tethering points.2,15,16 For
the latter case they determined a scaled form of the phase
diagram, including regions of metastability. The present data
for the two copolymers are plotted according to this scaled
form in the inset of Fig. 9. Precise scaling is not observed.
The small discrepancy may be due to contributions of the
surface PDMS blocks to the phase behavior. Moreover, con-
tributions from the surface blocks may also account for the

fact that the monolayers cross into the metastable regime for
T very close to Tθ for the submerged PS blocks, rather than
for T well below Tθ as for free PS chains in DOP with
molecular weights comparable to those of the present
samples.56 The decrease in reflectivity with decreasing T at
low σ, shown in Fig. 7, is a dramatic indication of the meta-
stable nature of the system. The fact that a phase boundary is
crossed as σ is decreased confirms that the present systems
are on the high σ side of the phase diagram.

2. Residual pressure at highest σ and lowest T

Finally, we return to an important question motivating
this study. Can we infer something about the relative contribu-
tions of enthalpic and entropic (chain configuration) ef-
fects in the free energy of interacting tethered layers by ex-
amining the T dependence of the surface pressure below Tθ?
Here we focus on the higher σ monolayers, where positive
pressure is observed at all T. The positive pressure is due
nearly entirely to the interaction of the submerged PS blocks,
since the PDMS blocks are at less than full monolayer cov-
erage (indicated by the relative positions of the isotherms in
Fig. 8). To account for the small contribution of the PDMS
blocks, we define an excess surface pressure (ΔΠ) as the
difference in pressure for the PDMS-PS and PDMS mono-
layers at a given PDMS surface concentration. We observe
that the large decrease in layer height from σ=0 to σ = −0.21 discussed earlier is accompanied by a surprisingly
small decrease in ΔΠ. This is shown in Fig. 10, in which the
present data are shown along with the ΔΠ isotherms for each
copolymer in good and theta solvents obtained previously.39,40 At σ = 0.73×10⁻⁴ Å⁻² for the 28–330 co-
polymer, for example, the fractional decrease in layer height
from good to theta solvent conditions is comparable to that
observed in the present data from σ=0 to σ = −0.21 at σ = 1.2×10⁻⁴ Å⁻².65 Yet as shown by the arrows in Fig.
10(b), the decrease in ΔΠ over this T range is far smaller
than the difference between ΔΠ in good and theta solvent
conditions at σ = 0.73×10⁻⁴ Å⁻². The molecular dynamics
simulations of Grest21 indicate a greater shift in the pressure

water.63 In that case, the surface pressure vanishes at less
than monolayer coverage. In the present case, the gradual
nature of the decrease in the surface “solvent quality” with
decreasing temperature apparently allows the PDMS mono-
layer to remain dispersed at temperatures below the binodal.
Baranowski has examined the surface pressure isotherms of
PDMS monolayers on a poor solvent by numerical SCF.64

%0.73

2.65 Yet as shown by the arrows in Fig.
10(b), the decrease in ΔΠ over this T range is far smaller
than the difference between ΔΠ in good and theta solvent
conditions at σ = 0.73×10⁻⁴ Å⁻². The molecular dynamics
simulations of Grest21 indicate a greater shift in the pressure
diocyl phthalate at temperatures ranging from 22 to −35 °C as a model system for tethered chains in poor solvent conditions. The thickness of the tethered layers decrease continuously with decreasing $T$ for most of the $T$ range, but become only weakly dependent on $T$ below −20 °C. At the lowest $T$, the layers are still swollen compared to the fully collapsed, nonsolvent limit. The contraction is examined as a function of both $\sigma$ and $M$. For the highest $\sigma$, the chains are strongly overlapping at $T_s$ but only weakly overlapping at the lowest temperatures. Therefore, the decrease in layer height does not follow the universal scaling predicted for the asymptotic strong-stretching limit, but rather at the lowest $T$ the behavior approaches the scaling predicted for noninteracting chains. The best-fit segmental concentration profile contains a depletion layer at the air surface, which increases in magnitude with decreasing $T$.

The free energy of the layer and the lateral phase behavior are probed through surface tension measurements. The surface tension of DOP with PDMS–PS and PDMS monolayers increases with decreasing $T$ more strongly than that of the bare DOP surface. Correspondingly, negative surface pressures are observed at low coverages for both cases, indicating metastability toward lateral phase separation. The effect is more pronounced for the block copolymers since attractive interactions can occur among the PDMS blocks on the surface as well as among the PS blocks submerged in the subphase. At low PDMS–PS coverages, a dispersed phase/condensed phase transition with decreasing $T$ was indicated by a dramatic decrease in reflectivity. The fact that a phase boundary is crossed with decreasing $\sigma$ indicates that the present systems are on the high $\sigma$ side of the critical point. At high coverage, only a modest decrease in surface pressure is observed over the present $T$ range, despite a large decrease in layer height. From this result we infer that the pressure in the present Langmuir monolayer system is pathway dependent, and thus that nonequilibrium effects (such as distorted chain configurations) likely account for a significant proportion of the elevated pressures observed in these systems.

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17 G. S. Grest and M. Murat, Macromolecules 26, 3108 (1993); G. S. Grest, ibid. 27, 418 (1994).
43 Use of a commercial product does not imply recommendation or endorse-
ment by NIST, nor does it imply that the product is necessarily the best available.
47 For a surface with heterogeneity on a scale which is large compared with the coherence length of the neutron beam, the reflectivity is an area-weighted average of the intensity reflected from each region. In the present case, the area fraction occupied by the islands of copolymer cannot be determined precisely because the reflectivity from the islands is not known. However, an upper bound of 20% is obtained using the reflectivity from the dispersed state in the inset to Fig. 7. The dimension of the tethered layer normal to the surface is nearly the same in the islands as in the dispersed state, as can be seen from the comparable peak positions for the data at ~30 °C in Fig. 7 and in the inset.
48 S. Wu, Polymer Interface and Adhesion (Marcel Dekker, New York, 1982).
55 Since $R_g$ for a free PS chain in dilute DOP solution is not available at the lower temperatures of this study, we estimated the value of $\Sigma$ at ~30 °C using the contraction of the layer normal to the surface in the limit of $\Sigma<1$, i.e., $\Sigma_{\text{rms}}=\Sigma_{\text{rms}}^{\text{good}}/h_{\text{rms}}$, where $h_{\text{rms}}$ is the limit of $\Sigma_{\text{rms}}$ in the data for the lowest $\sigma$ for each copolymer in Fig. 4(d). Our previous work showed that $h_{\text{rms}}^{\text{good}}/h_{\text{rms}}$ in the limit of $\Sigma<1$ is an excellent approximation to $R_g^{\text{good}}/R_g$, (Ref. 40), and here we assume that the same holds for the ratios in theta and poor solvents.
56 Our previous work has shown that the $h_{\text{rms}}/R_g$ is a linear function of $\Sigma$ over this range (Ref. 40).
57 This upper limit for the magnitude of the temperature gradient through the liquid was determined by varying the vertical position of the thermocouple, which resulted in a variation of 3.4° at the lowest temperature. This is an upper limit since the thermocouple may have been partially exposed to the air above the liquid at its highest vertical position. A different method with finer spatial resolution is required to precisely determine the gradient. In addition to the above, the fact that the surface tension continues to increase nearly linearly down to the lowest temperatures (see Fig. 6) indicates that the surface layer is experiencing nearly the same variation in temperature as that measured by the thermocouple down to the lowest temperatures. From the linearity in the data for DOP, the temperature gradient would appear to be less than 4 °C.
58 This relationship is equivalent to the analytical SCF result derived by Zhulina et al. if $h_{\text{rms},\theta}$ and $h_{\text{rms},\phi}$ are evaluated in the strong stretching limit.
60 R. Baranowski, Ph.D. thesis, Department of Physics, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1997.
61 The ratio of the layer height in good and theta solvents is 0.55 for the 28–330 copolymer at $\sigma=7.3 \times 10^{-3}$ chains/Å$^2$, and 0.59 for the 20–170 copolymer at $\sigma=1.5 \times 10^{-4}$ chains/Å$^2$. These values are comparable to the $h_{\text{rms}}/h_{\text{rms},\phi}$ values at $\tau=-0.21$ in Fig. 4(a).