## Benchmarking Atomistic Simulations against the ThermoML Database: **Neat Liquid Densities and Static Dielectric Constants**

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Useful atomistic simulations in the condensed phase require accurate depictions of solvent. While experimental measurements of fundamental physical properties offer a straightforward approach for evaluating forcefield quality, the bulk of this information has been tied up in non-machine-readable formats. This inaccessibility hinders reproducible benchmarks of forcefield accuracy. Here we examine the feasibility of benchmarking atomistic forcefields against the NIST ThermoML database of physicochemical measurements, which aggregates thousands of experimental measurements in a portable, machine-readable, and self-annotating format. We present a detailed benchmark of the generalized Amber small molecule forcefield (GAFF) using the AM1-BCC charge model against measurements (specifically liquid densities and static dielectric constants at ambient pressure) extracted from ThermoML, and discuss the extent of available data for neat liquids. We show that empirical polarizability models correct systematic biases inherent in predicting dielectric constants with fixedcharged forcefields. [JDC: Will need to be convinced!]

Keywords: molecular mechanics forcefields; forcefield parameterization; forcefield accuracy; forcefield validation; mass density; static dielectric constant

## I. INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in hardware and molecular dynamics software have provided routine access to atomistic simulations at the 100 ns timescale and beyond. Leveraging these advances in combination with GPU clusters, distributed computing, or custom hardware has brought the microsecond and milliseconds within reach. These dramatic advances in sampling, however, have revealed forcefields as a critical barrier for truly predictive simulation.

of numerous benchmarks [1] and enhancements [2–4], with key outcomes including the ability to fold fastfolding proteins, improved fidelity of water thermodyservables. Although small molecule forcefields have also been the subject of benchmarks [5] and improve-27 ments [6], such work has typically focused on small perturbations to specific functional groups. For example, a recent study found that modified hydroxyl nonbonded parameters led to improved prediction of static dielectrics and hydration free energies [6]. There are also outstanding questions of generalizability of param-33 eters. Will changes to a specific chemical moiety be com-

34 patible with seemingly unrelated improvements? Ad-35 dressing these questions requires agreement on shared 36 benchmarks that can be easily replicated with proposed 37 forcefield enhancements.

A key barrier in forcefield development is that many 39 experimental datasets are heterogeneous, paywalled, 40 and unavailable in machine-readable formats (although 41 notable counterexamples exist, e.g. RCSB [7], Free-42 Solv [8] and BMRB [9]). While this inconvenience 43 is relatively minor for benchmarking a single target 44 (e.g. water), it becomes prohibitive for studies span-Protein and water forcefields have been the subject 45 ning chemical space. To ameliorate problems of data 46 archival, the NIST Thermodynamics Research Center 47 has developed a IUPAC standard XML-based format— 48 ThermoML [10]—for storing physicochemical measurenamic properties, and improved prediction of NMR ob- 49 ments, uncertainties, and metadata. Experimental re-50 searchers publishing measurements in several journals 51 (J. Chem. Eng. Data, J. Chem. Therm., Fluid Phase 52 Equil., Therm. Acta, and Int. J. Therm.) are now guided 53 through a data archival process that involves sanity 54 checks and archival at the TRC (http://trc.nist. 55 gov/ThermoML.html).

> Here we examine the ThermoML archive as a poten-57 tial source for neat liquid density and static dielectric 58 constant measurements, with the goal of developing a 59 standard benchmark for validating these properties in 60 fixed-charge forcefields of drug-like molecules. These 61 two observables provide sensitive tests of forcefield ac-62 curacy that are nonetheless straightforward to calculate. 63 Using the ThermoML data, we evaluate the generalized 64 Amber small molecule forcefield (GAFF) [11] with the 65 AM1-BCC charge model [12, 13] and identify systematic 66 biases that might be improved upon.

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Filter	Mass Density	Static Dielectric
0. Single Component	130074	1649
1. Druglike Elements	120410	1649
2. Heavy Atoms	67897	1567
3. Temperature	36827	962
4. Pressure	13598	461
<ol><li>Liquid state</li></ol>	13573	461
6. Aggregate T, P	3573	432
7. Density+Dielectric	245	245

TABLE I. Number of ThermoML measurements matching sequentially applied filters.

#### II. RESULTS

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### Neat Liquid Measurements in ThermoML

We performed a number of sequential queries to sum-70 marize the ThermoML content relevant for benchmarking organic molecule forcefields. Our aim is to explore 72 neat liquid data with functional groups relevant to drug-73 like molecules. We therefore applied the following se-74 quence of filters: has either density or static dielectric 75 measurements, contains a single component, contains 101 76 only druglike elements (H, N, C, O, S, P, F, Cl, Br), has 102 low heavy atom count ( $\leq 10$ ), has ambient temperature [K] (270  $\leq T \leq$  330), has ambient pressure [kPA] <sub>103</sub>  $_{80}$   $m^{-3}$  (a proxy for liquid state). After applying these fil-  $_{105}$  mark of electrostatic models. We therefore compare sim-81 ters, we also round all pressures within this range to ex-82 actly one atmosphere. We also round temperatures to one decimal place. These approximations are motived 84 by common data entry errors; for example, an exper-85 iment performed at water's freezing point at ambient 110 tematically underestimates the dielectric constants for  $_{\text{86}}$  pressure might be entered as either 101.325 kPA or 100  $_{_{111}}$  nonpolar organics, with the predictions of  $\epsilon\approx1.0\pm0.05$  $_{87}$  kPA, with a temperature of either 273 K or 273.15 K. The  $_{112}$  being substantially smaller than the measured  $\epsilon \approx 2$ . Be-88 application of these filters (Table I) leaves 245 conditions 89 for which both density and dielectric data are available. 114 tronic polarization, we added a simple empirical correc-90 The functional groups present are summarized in Table 115 tion for polarization [17] that is based on counting the 91 II.

### Benchmarking GAFF against ThermoML: Mass Density

Mass density has been widely used for parameter-94 izing and testing forcefields, particularly the Lennard Jones parameters [15, 16]. We therefore used the present ThermoML compilation as a benchmark of the GAFF 117 A similar polarization correction was used in the develagreement of 4 % on a different benchmark set.

Functional Group	Counts
1,2-aminoalcohol	4
1,2-diol	3
alkene	3
aromatic compound	1
carbonic acid diester	2
carboxylic acid ester	4
dialkyl ether	7
heterocyclic compound	3
ketone	2
lactone	1
primary alcohol	19
primary aliphatic amine (alkylamine)	2
primary amine	2
secondary alcohol	4
secondary aliphatic amine (dialkylamine)	2
secondary aliphatic/aromatic amine (alkylarylamine)	1
secondary amine	3
sulfone	1
sulfoxide	1
tertiary aliphatic amine (trialkylamine)	3
tertiary amine	3

TABLE II. Functional group counts present in the dataset. The number of unique compounds is 44. Functional group classification was performed using checkmol version 0.5 [14].

#### C. Benchmarking GAFF / AM1-BCC against ThermoML: Static Dielectric

As a measure of the electronic medium, the static di- $(100 \le P \le 102)$ , and has density greater than 300 kg  $_{104}$  electric constant of neat liquids provides a critical bench-106 ulations against the measurements in our ThermoML 107 compilation. Overall, we find the dielectric constants to be qualitatively reasonable, but with clear deviations 109 from experiment. In particular, GAFF / AM1-BCC syscause this deviation likely stems from the lack of elec-116 elements in a molecule:

$$\frac{\alpha}{\mathring{\mathbf{A}}} = 1.53n_C + 0.17n_H + 0.57n_O + 1.05n_N + 2.99n_S + 2.48n_P + 0.22n_F + 2.16n_{Cl} + 3.29n_{Br} + 5.45n_I + 0.32$$

$$\tag{1}$$

From the polarizability, one can correct the static dielectric using the following equation (from ref. [18]):

$$\epsilon_{corrected} = \epsilon_{MD} + 4\pi N \frac{\alpha}{\langle V \rangle}$$

AM1-BCC forcefield (Fig. 1). Overall, the densi- 118 opment of the TIP4P-EW water model [18]; however, ties show reasonable accuracy (RMS percent error: 3 % 119 the need is much greater for the nonpolar organics, as  $\pm$  0.1%), consistent with previous studies [5] reporting 120 the missing polarizability is the dominant contribution 121 to the static dielectric constant. In the case of water,

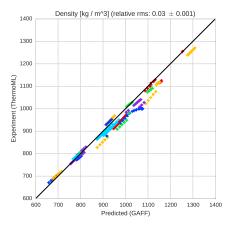


FIG. 1. Comparison of liquid densities between experiment and simulation. Liquid density measurements extracted from ThermoML are compared against densities predicted using the GAFF / AM1-BCC small molecule fixed-charge forcefield. Color groupings represent identical chemical species. Simulation error bars represent one standard error of the mean, with the number of effective (uncorrelated) samples estimated using pymbar. Experimental error bars indicate the standard deviation between independently reported measurements, when available, or author-reported standard deviations in ThermoML entries; for some measurements, neither uncertainty estimate is available. See Section B for further discussion of error.

the Sales polarizability model predicts a dielectric correction of 0.52, while 0.79 was used for the TIP4P-EW model. For comparison, we also applied the same empirical correction to the VirtualChemistry dataset [5, 19] and saw similarly improved agreement with experiment for both the GAFF and OPLS forcefields (Fig. 8).

## III. DISCUSSION

## A. Examining discrepancies by functional group

SEE FIG. 3

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## B. Fitting Forcefields to Dielectric Constants

Recent forcefield development has seen a resurgence of papers fitting dielectric constants as primary data [6, 21]. However, a number of authors have pointed out potential challenges in constructing self-consistent fixed-charge forcefields [22, 23].

Interestingly, a recent work by Dill [22] pointed out that, for CCl<sub>4</sub>, reasonable choices of point charges are incapable of recapitulating the observed dielectric of 40  $\epsilon=2.2$ , instead producing dielectric constants in the range of  $1.0 \le \epsilon \le 1.05$ . This behavior is quite general: a fixed charge monopole force field predicts  $\epsilon\approx 1$  for sev-

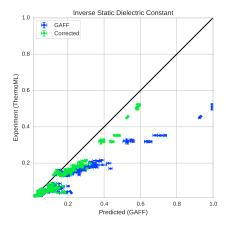


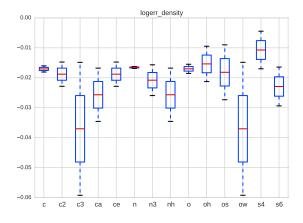
FIG. 2. Measured (ThermoML) versus predicted (GAFF / AM1-BCC) inverse static dielectrics (a). Simulation error bars represent one standard error of the mean estimated via block averaging with block sizes of 200 ps [20]. Experimental error bars indicate the larger of standard deviation between independently reported measurements and the authors reported standard deviations; for some measurements, neither uncertainty estimate is available. See section B for further discussion of error. The inverse dielectric  $\frac{1}{\epsilon}$  is plotted instead of  $\epsilon$  because  $\frac{1}{\epsilon}$  is directly proportional to energy in continuum dielectric models: e.g.  $U(r) = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon} \frac{q_1q_2}{r} \propto \frac{1}{\epsilon}$ .

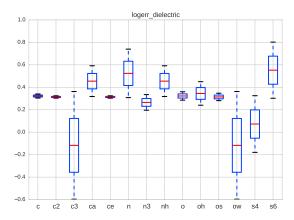
 $_{143}$  eral nonpolar or symmetric molecules, but the measured dielectric constants are instead  $\epsilon \approx 2$  (Fig. 4). While this behavior is well-known and results from missing physics of polarizability, we suspect it may have several unanticipated consequences.

Suppose, for example, that one attempts to fit forcefield parameters to match the static dielectric constants
of CCl<sub>4</sub>, CHCl<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, and CH<sub>3</sub>Cl. In moving from
the tetrahedrally-symmetric CCl<sub>4</sub> to CHCl<sub>3</sub>, it suddenly
becomes possible to achieve the observed dielectric constant of 4.8 by an appropriate choice of point charges.
However, the model for CHCl<sub>3</sub> uses fixed point charges
to account for *both* the permanent dipole moment and
the electronic polarizability, whereas the CCl<sub>4</sub> model
contains no treatment of polarizability. We hypothesize
that this inconsistency in parameterization may lead to
strange mismatches, where symmetric molecules (e.g.
benzene, CCl<sub>4</sub>) have qualitatively different properties
than closely related asymmetric molecules (e.g. toluene,
CHCl<sub>3</sub>).

As a possible real-world example, we imagine that the missing polarizability could be important in accu- rate transfer free energies involving low-dielectric soluents. Using the Onsager model for the transfer free energy of a dipole (Eqn. 2) gives an error of  $\Delta\Delta G=168$   $\Delta G(\epsilon=2.2)-\Delta G(\epsilon=1)$  of 2 kcal / mol for the transfer of water (a=1.93 Å  $\mu=2.2$ D) into a low dielectric medium such as tetrachloromethane or benzene.

$$\Delta G = -\frac{\mu^2}{a^3} \frac{\epsilon - 1}{2\epsilon + 1} \tag{2}$$





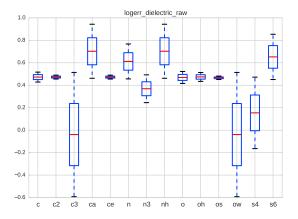


FIG. 3. TODO: MAKE A DECENT ANALYSIS THAT BREAKS THINGS DOWN ERRORS BY FUNCTIONAL GROUP!

172 tion to long-range electrostatic interactions, static di- 197 nerships with several journals—new experimental mea-177 low-dielectric media is sufficiently alarming to motivate 202 measurements. In the future, we hope to examine addi-178 further study of polarizable forcefields. In particular, 203 tional measurement classes, including both mixture and 179 continuum methods [24–26], induced dipole methods 204 two-phase data.

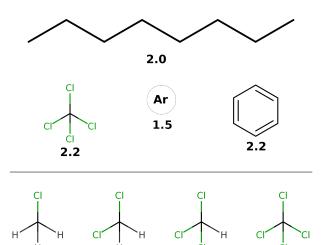


FIG. 4. (a). Measured static dielectric constants of various nonpolar or symmetric molecules [? ]; fixed-charge forcefields give  $\epsilon \approx 1$  for each species. (b). A congeneric series of chloromethanes show dielectric constants between 2 and 13.

4.8

2.2

9.0

12.9

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180 [27, 28], and drude methods [29, 30] have been maturing rapidly. Finding the optimal balance of accuracy and performance remains an open question; however, 183 the use of experimentally-parameterized direct polar-184 ization methods [31] may provide polarizability physics 185 at a cost not much greater than fixed charge forcefields.

## C. ThermoML as a Data Source

The present work has focused on the neat liquid density and dielectric measurements present in ThermoML [10, 32, 33] as a target for molecular dynamics force-190 field validation. While densities and dielectric constants have been widely used in forcefield work, several aspects of ThermoML make it a unique resource for the 193 forcefield community. First, the aggregation, support, and dissemination of ThermoML is supported by NIST, 195 whose mission makes these tasks a long-term priority. Given their ease of measurement and direct connec- 196 Second, ThermoML is actively growing, through partelectric constants should be considered primary data 198 surements published in these journals are critically exfor forcefield parameterization efforts. Although this 199 amined by the TRC and included in the archive. Finally, will require the use of forcefields with explicit polar- 200 the files in ThermoML are machine readable via a forizability, the inconsistency of fixed-charge models in 201 mal XML schema, allowing facile access to thousands of

#### IV. METHODS

## A. ThermoML Processing

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ThermoML XML files were obtained from the 255 the NIST TRC. To explore their content, we cre- 260 ated a python (version 2.7.9) tool (ThermoPyl: 210 https://github.com/choderalab/ThermoPyL) 211 that munges the XML content into a spreadsheet- 212 like format accessible via the Pandas (version 2.13 0.15.2) library. First, we obtained the XML schema 214 (http://media.iupac.org/namespaces/ 215 ThermoML/ThermoML.xsd) defining the layout of the 216 data. This schema was converted into a Python object 217 via PyXB 1.2.4 (http://pyxb.sourceforge.net/). 266 267 Tinally, this schema and Pandas was used to extract the 219 data and apply the data filters described above.

#### B. Simulation

Boxes of 1000 molecules were constructed using PackMol [34]. AM1-BCC [12, 13] charges were generated using OpenEye Toolkit 2014-6-6 [35], using the oequacpac.OEAssignPartialCharges module with the OECharges\_AM1BCCSym. The selected content was then processed using antechamber in Amber Tools 14 [36]. The resulting AMBER files were converted to OpenMM [37] ffxml forcefield XML files. Simulation code used libraries gaff2xml 0.6, TrustButVerulation ify 0.1, OpenMM 6.2 [37], and MDTraj 1.2 [38]. [TODO: Provide a script to install all of these versions via conda.]

Molecular dynamics simulations were performed us-234 ing OpenMM 6.2 [37] using a Langevin integrator (with  $_{235}$  collision rate 1 ps<sup>-1</sup>) and a 1 fs timestep; interestingly, 236 we found that a 2 fs timestep led to insufficient accuracy 237 in equilibrium densities (Table III). [JDC: Cite Langevin 238 integrator used in OpenMM.] Pressure coupling at 1 at-239 mosphere was achieved with a Monte Carlo barostat uti-240 lizing molecular scaling and automated step size adjust-241 ment during equilibration, applied every 25 steps. Par-242 ticle mesh Ewald [39] was used with a long-range cutoff 243 of 0.95 nm and an long-range isotropic dispersion cor-<sup>244</sup> rection. [JDC: Can we report the automatically-selected 245 PME parameters? | Simulations were continued until density standard errors were less than  $2 \times 10^{-4}$  g / mL, 247 as estimated using the equilibration detection module in 248 pymbar 2.1 [40]. Trajectory analysis was performed us-249 ing OpenMM [37] and MDTraj [38]. Density data was 250 output every 250 fs, while trajectory data was stored ev-251 ery 10 ps.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

ThermoML is a potentially useful resource for the forcefield community

- We have curated a subset of ThermoML for neat liquids with druglike atoms, with thousands of densities and hundreds of dielectrics
- Empirical polarization models correct a systematic bias in comparing fixed-charge forcefields to static dielectric constants

#### VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE III. To probe the systematic error from finite time-step integration, we examined the timestep dependence of butyl acrylate density. The number of effective samples was estimated using pymbar's statistical inefficiency routine [40]. To approximate the timestep bias, we compare the density expectation ( $\langle \rho \rangle$ ) to values calculated with a 0.5fs timestep. We find a 2fs timestep leads to systematic biases in the density on the order of 0.2%, while 1fs reduces the systematic bias to less than 0.1%—we therefore selected a 1fs timestep for the present work, where we aimed to achieve three digits of accuracy in density predictions.

#### Appendix A: Supplementary Information

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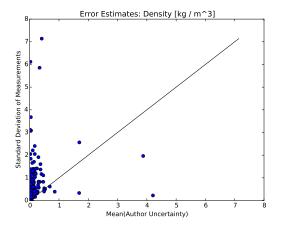
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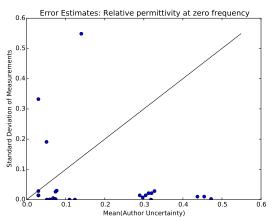
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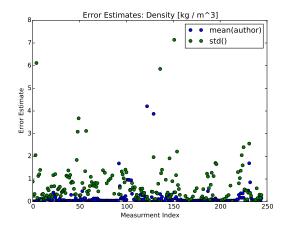
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- Table: Timestep-dependence of density
- Figure: Error analysis for ThermoML dataset
- Table (CSV File): ThermoML Dataset used in present analysis.

# Appendix B: Assessment of experimental error in ThermoML measurements







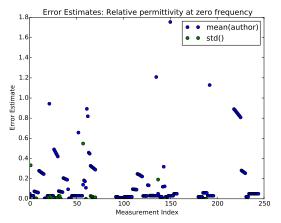


FIG. 5. Assessment of experimental error in ThermoML data. To assess the experimental error in our benchmark set, we consider two orthogonal error measurements. The first is the mean of the uncertainties reported by the measurement au-

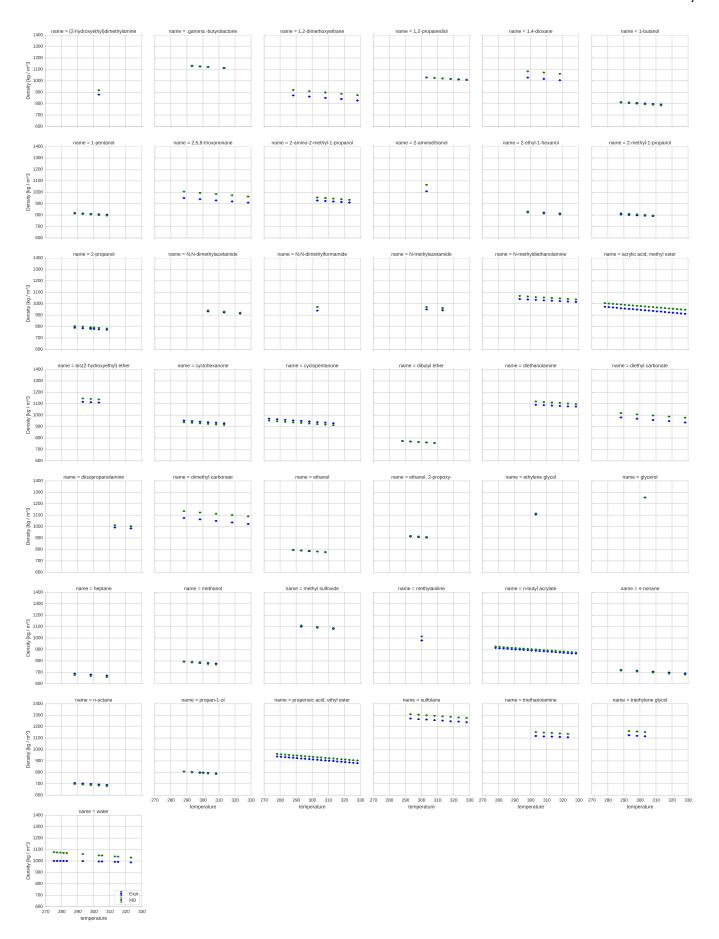


FIG. 6. Comparison of simulated and experimental densities for all compounds. Measured (blue) and simulated (green) densities are shown in units of  $kg/m^3$ .

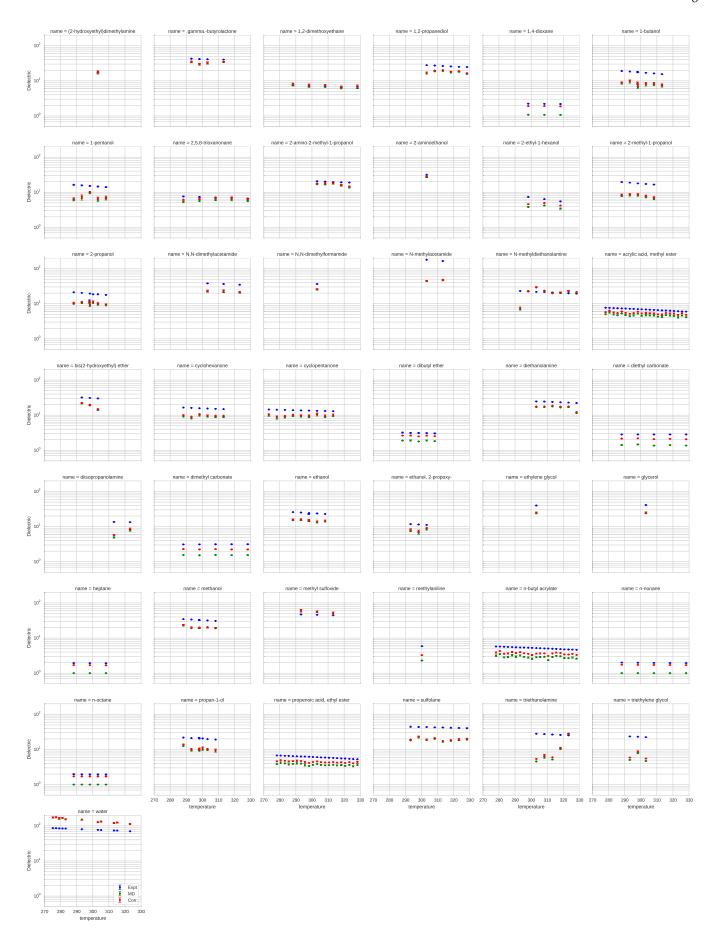
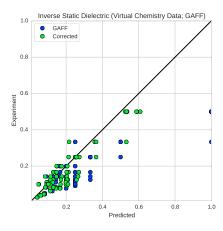


FIG. 7. Comparison of simulated and experimental static dielectric constants for all compounds. Measured (blue), simulated (green), and polarizability-corrected simulated (red) static dielectric constants are shown for all compounds. Note that dielectric constants, rather than inverse dielectric constants, are plotted here.



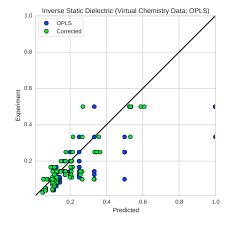


FIG. 8. Comparison of measured and simulated dielectric constants from the virtualchemistry dataset with and without polarizability correction. Measured (blue), MD (green), and MD + polarizability-corrected (red) dielectrics for the Virtual Chemistry dataset [5, 19].

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