

Core-Level X-Ray Spectroscopy of Infinite-Layer Nickelate: LDA + DMFT Study

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Motivated by recent core-level x-ray photoemission spectroscopy, x-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS), and resonant inelastic x-ray scattering (RIXS) experiments for the newly discovered superconducting infinite-layer nickelate, we investigate the core-level spectra of the parent compounds NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂ using the combination of local density approximation and dynamical mean-field theory (LDA + DMFT). Adjusting a charge-transfer energy to match the experimental spectra, we determine the optimal model parameters and discuss the nature of the NdNiO₂ ground state. We find that self-doping from the Nd 5*d* states in the vicinity of the Fermi energy prohibits opening of a Mott-Hubbard gap in NdNiO₂. The present Ni *L*₃ XAS and RIXS calculation for LaNiO₂ cannot explain the difference from NdNiO₂ spectra.

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I. INTRODUCTION

High- T_c superconductivity of cuprates has been a focal point of 3*d* transition-metal oxide (TMO) physics over the past 30 years [1–3]; nevertheless, the underlying mechanism remains elusive. Superconductivity [4] reported recently in layered nickelate Nd_{0.8}Sr_{0.2}NiO₂ ($T_c = 9\text{--}15\text{ K}$) with a similar crystal structure may provide new clues. The fundamental question is whether the electronic structure of NdNiO₂ (and LaNiO₂) is similar to that of high- T_c cuprates. Naively, one might presume that Ni in the undoped systems is monovalent and, thus, hosts the d^9 ($S = 1/2$) ground state similar to cuprates. However, theoretical studies [5–9] suggest a self-doping from Nd (or La) 5*d* orbitals. Additionally, holes doped to a low-valence Ni¹⁺ compound may reside in Ni 3*d* orbitals, unlike in cuprates [2,3,10] or NiO with Ni²⁺ [11], where they occupy the O 2*p* states.

The Ni 2*p*_{3/2} core-level x-ray photoemission spectroscopy (XPS) [12], x-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS), and resonant inelastic x-ray scattering (RIXS) [9,13] are employed to probe the electronic structure of infinite-layer nickelates. A shoulder observed in the main line of the Ni 2*p*_{3/2} XPS spectra in NdNiO₂ [12] is attributed to Ni-Ni

charge-transfer (CT) response to the creation of the core hole, a process traditionally called nonlocal screening (NLS) [14]. Generally, NLS provides valuable information about the electronic structure of TMOs [15–18]. For high- T_c cuprates, the NLS in Cu 2*p*_{3/2} XPS is extensively used to determine key parameters, such as the CT energy Δ_{dp} , and more recently to analyze electronic reconstructions due to doping [19–23].

Further information can be obtained with charge-conserving spectroscopies XAS and RIXS. The Ni *L*₃-edge XAS and RIXS spectra are measured in both NdNiO₂ [9,13] and LaNiO₂ [9]. Interestingly, a side peak (852.0 eV) is observed in *L*₃-XAS of LaNiO₂, while it is absent in NdNiO₂. A low-energy RIXS feature ($E_{\text{loss}} = 0.6\text{ eV}$) associated with the XAS side peak is observed in LaNiO₂. The difference between the Ni *L*₃ XAS and RIXS spectra of NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂ poses an open question.

In this paper, we use the local-density approximation (LDA) + dynamical mean-field theory (DMFT) [24–26] to calculate XPS, XAS, and RIXS spectra [16,27–30] of undoped infinite-layer nickelates. By comparison with the available experimental data, we identify the most appropriate CT energy and use it for classification within the Zaanen-Sawatzky-Allen scheme [10].

Material-specific DMFT calculations for NdNiO₂ or LaNiO₂ were performed by several authors, leading to contradictory conclusions, which can be sorted into two groups: (i) Multiorbital (Hund’s metal) physics is crucial [31–34], and (ii) (single-orbital) Mott-Hubbard physics is relevant with little influence of charge-transfer effects or with a small self-doping by Nd 5*d* electrons [35–37]. The

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differences, recently addressed by Karp, Hampel, and Millis [38], can be traced to the model parameters, which are not uniquely defined, such as the interaction strength, orbital basis, and, in particular, the double-counting correction. To settle the debate, an experimental input is needed to provide a benchmark for selecting the model parameters.

II. COMPUTATIONAL METHOD

The XPS, XAS, and RIXS simulations start with a standard LDA + DMFT calculation [16,25–28,39]. First, LDA bands for the experimental crystal structure of NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂ [4,40] are calculated using the Wien2K package [41,42] and projected onto Wannier basis spanning the Ni 3*d*, O 2*p*, and Nd (La) 5*d* orbitals [43,44]. The model is augmented with a local electron-electron interaction within the Ni 3*d* shell, parametrized by Coulomb's $U = 5.0$ eV and Hund's $J = 1.0$ eV [31,32,45]. The strong-coupling continuous-time quantum Monte Carlo impurity solver [46–49] is employed with the DMFT cycle to obtain the Ni 3*d* self-energy $\Sigma(i\omega_n)$, which is analytically continued [50] to real frequency after having reached the self-consistency. The calculations are performed at temperature $T = 290$ K.

The XPS, XAS, and RIXS spectra are calculated from the Anderson impurity model augmented with the 2*p* core states and the real-frequency hybridization function discretized into 40–50 levels (per spin and orbital). To this end, we use the configuration-interaction solver; for details, see Refs. [16,29] for XPS and Refs. [27,28,51] for XAS and RIXS simulation.

Determination of Ni 3*d* site energies in the model studied by DMFT involves subtracting the so-called double-counting correction μ_{dc} from the respective LDA values (ϵ_d^{LDA}), a procedure accounting for the effect of the *dd* interaction present in the LDA description. It is clear that μ_{dc} is of the order of Hartree energy Un_d , but a generally accepted universal expression is not available [26,52,53]. While a similar uncertainty exists also for interaction parameters U and J , impact of their variation on physical properties is usually minor (see Supplemental Material [54] for NdNiO₂-specific discussion). Variation of μ_{dc} , on the other hand, may have a profound effect. Therefore, we choose to adjust μ_{dc} by comparison to the experimental data. Although μ_{dc} is the parameter entering the calculation, in the discussion we use its linear function $\Delta_{dp} = (\epsilon_d^{\text{LDA}} - \mu_{dc}) + 9U_{dd} - \epsilon_p^{\text{LDA}}$, which sets the scale for the energy necessary to transfer an electron from O 2*p* to Ni 3*d* orbital. Here, $U_{dd} = U - \frac{4}{9}J$ is the average interorbital interaction, and 9 is the Ni 3*d* occupation in the Ni⁺ formal valence (similar to the definition of the charge-transfer energy in the cluster model [28,29,55]).

III. ELECTRONIC STRUCTURE

Figure 1 shows the orbitally resolved spectral densities (projected density of states) of NdNiO₂ obtained by LDA and LDA + DMFT for $\Delta_{dp} = 4.9$ eV, which we later

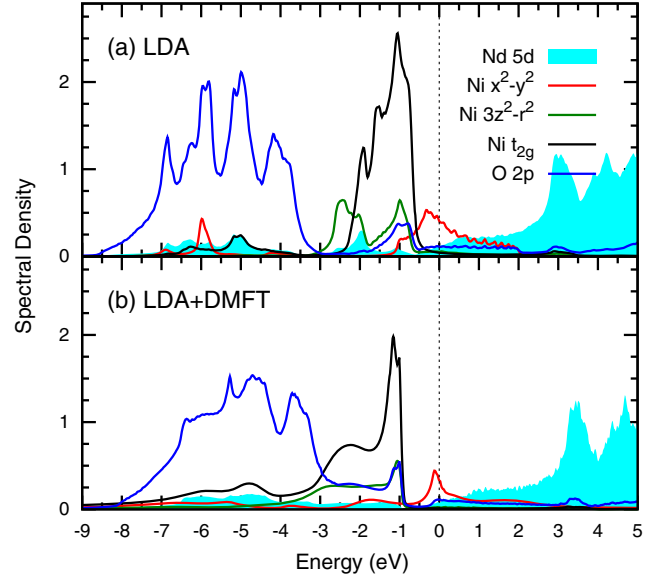


FIG. 1. The one-particle spectral densities of NdNiO₂ obtained by (a) LDA and (b) LDA+DMFT (for $\Delta_{dp} = 4.9$ eV).

identify as the optimal parameter choice. Both the LDA and LDA + DMFT yield a metallic state with the Ni $x^2 - y^2$ orbital character dominating around the Fermi level. This general picture is valid in the entire range of studied $\Delta_{dp} = 2.9$ –6.9 eV. In Fig. 2, we show the dependence of Ni $x^2 - y^2$ and $3z^2 - r^2$ spectra on Δ_{dp} . Increasing Δ_{dp} corresponds to an upward shift of the bare Ni 3*d* site energies, which is indirectly reflected in the shift of the $3z^2 - r^2$ band. The $x^2 - y^2$ peak at the Fermi level, rather

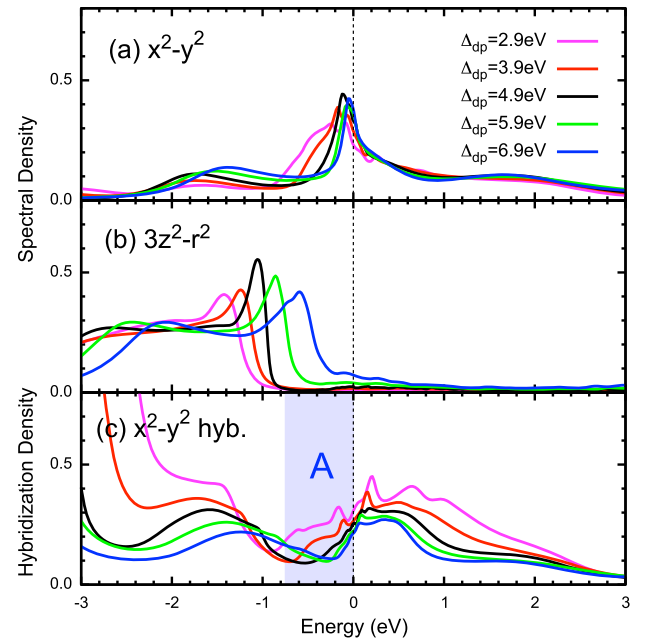


FIG. 2. The DMFT spectral densities for (a) Ni $x^2 - y^2$ and (b) Ni $3z^2 - r^2$ orbitals along with (c) the Ni $x^2 - y^2$ hybridization function computed for different Δ_{dp} values.

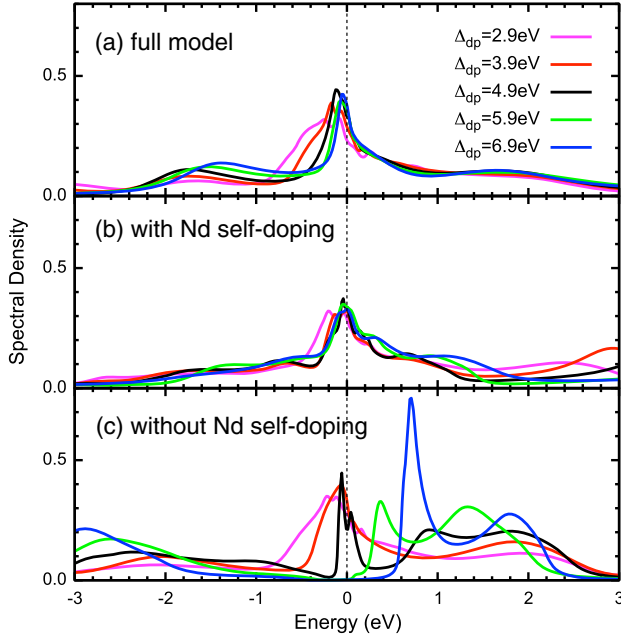


FIG. 3. The $x^2 - y^2$ spectral densities computed in (a) the full model [the same as in Fig. 2(a)], (b) model (i) with a self-doping from Nd d bands, and (c) model (ii) without a self-doping from Nd d bands.

than being shifted, exhibits an increased mass renormalization (reduced width). The amplitude of the $x^2 - y^2$ hybridization function [16,27] around the Fermi level is reduced with increasing Δ_{dp} ; in particular, the sizable decrease just below the Fermi level (blue region) has an important implication for the XPS spectra as discussed later. The evolution of $x^2 - y^2$ and $3z^2 - r^2$ occupancies in Fig. 4 shows that, up to $\Delta_{dp} \approx 7$ eV, the $3z^2 - r^2$ is completely filled (the deviation from 2.0 is due to hybridization with empty bands). The physics is, thus, effectively of a single-orbital Hubbard model, and the Ni ion takes a monovalent (Ni^{1+} , d^9) character.

Different from cuprates, the stoichiometric parent compound is metallic. In order to analyze the role of Nd $5d$ bands, we study two modified models: (i) hybridization between NiO_2 planes and the Nd orbitals is switched off, and (ii) Nd orbitals are removed from the model. In the former case (i) self-doping of the NiO_2 planes from Nd orbitals is possible, while in the latter case (ii) the stoichiometry of the NiO_2 planes cannot change. The evolution of the $x^2 - y^2$ spectral density with Δ_{dp} for (i) and (ii) is shown in Fig. 3. Like the full model, the low-energy spectrum of model (i) remains metallic over the whole studied range of Δ_{dp} . Removing the Nd orbitals (ii) results in progressive mass renormalization with increasing Δ_{dp} and eventually opening of a gap above $\Delta_{dp} = 5.9$ eV. This can be understood as a result of effective weakening of the Ni-O hybridization, i.e., a bandwidth-driven Mott transition. The NiO_2 layers in NdNiO_2 can, thus, be viewed as a

strongly correlated system in the vicinity of Mott transition, where the insulating state is precluded by the presence of Nd $5d$ bands [56].

IV. COMPARISON TO EXPERIMENTAL X-RAY SPECTROSCOPIES

A. Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XPS

Next, we investigate the impact of the variation of Δ_{dp} on the core-level spectra. Figure 5 shows the calculated Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XPS spectra of NdNiO_2 together with the experimental data [12]. The Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XPS spectrum consists of two components: the main line (852–857 eV) and the CT satellite (861 eV) [16,55]. The core hole created by x rays represents an attractive potential, which induces CT from surrounding atoms to the empty $3d$ orbital on the excited Ni site. The main line corresponds to the CT screened final states, while the CT satellite corresponds to unscreened ones [14,16,23]. Fu *et al.* [12] observe a shoulder B (approximately 856.5 eV) in the main line. Unlike A , the peak B is absent in the cluster-model spectra [14,29] and, thus, can be ascribed to NLS [12]. The sensitivity of the relative intensity of A and B to Δ_{dp} can be used to locate its value to the interval 4.9–5.9 eV. The observed behavior of the NLS feature B reflects the amplitude of the hybridization function just below the Fermi level [16], the shaded area in Fig. 2(c).

The NLS (B) is known to dominate over the local screening (A) in cuprates, as shown in Fig. 5 for Cu $2p_{3/2}$ XPS in La_2CuO_4 [19]. For small $\Delta_{dp} = 2.9$ eV, a typical value for high- T_c cuprates [10,14,19,23,57], the spectra of NdNiO_2 resemble that of La_2CuO_4 . Thus, our analysis shows that Δ_{dp} in NdNiO_2 is by 2–3 eV larger than in cuprates. The relative size Δ_{dp} and the Hubbard U would place NdNiO_2 somewhere between the Mott-Hubbard ($\Delta_{dp} > U$) and CT ($\Delta_{dp} < U$) systems in the Zaanen-Sawatzky-Allen classification of TMOs [10,37,58,59]. The calculated occupations for doped $\text{Nd}_{0.775}\text{Sr}_{0.225}\text{NiO}_2$, shown in Fig. 4 and in

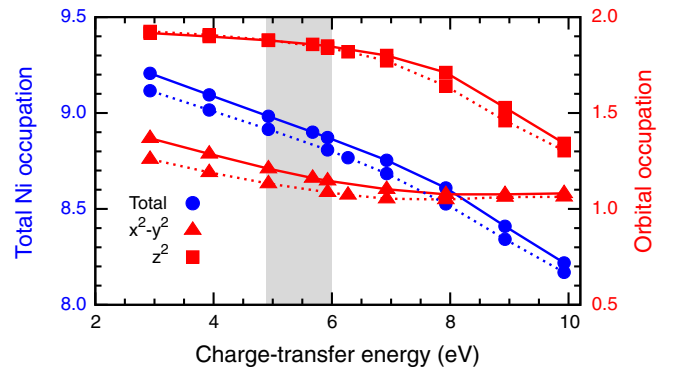


FIG. 4. The DMFT occupation of $x^2 - y^2$ (red, square) and $3z^2 - r^2$ (red, triangle) orbitals and the entire Ni $3d$ shell (blue, circle) as a function of Δ_{dp} . The full line is obtained for NdNiO_2 , and the dashed line for $\text{Nd}_{0.775}\text{Sr}_{0.225}\text{NiO}_2$.

Supplemental Material [54], reveal that for optimal Δ_{dp} doped holes are almost equally shared by Ni, Nd, and O sites. This is a remarkable difference to monovalent cuprates or divalent NiO. In these systems of strong charge-transfer character, the doped holes reside predominantly in O $2p$ orbitals, irrespective of a substantial $3d$ spectral weight just below the Fermi level [60]. Moreover, for the optimal Δ_{dp} values inferred above, the doped holes in NdNiO₂ do not enter the Ni $3z^2 - r^2$ orbitals (Fig. 4). The single-band Hubbard description is, thus, valid not only for the parent NdNiO₂ but also for the superconducting one Nd_{0.8}Sr_{0.2}NiO₂, as suggested by Refs. [35–37].

Proximity of NiO₂ layers to a Mott state (precluded by self-doping from Nd) suggests that a superexchange interaction still plays a role despite the metallic state. Using the optimal Δ_{dp} , we arrive [54] at the nearest Ni-Ni antiferromagnetic exchange in the range 40–60 meV. Given the oversimplification of representing spin response of a metal in terms of local moments interactions, this value is consistent with 69 meV inferred from the RIXS experiment on a related compound La₄Ni₃O₈ [61].

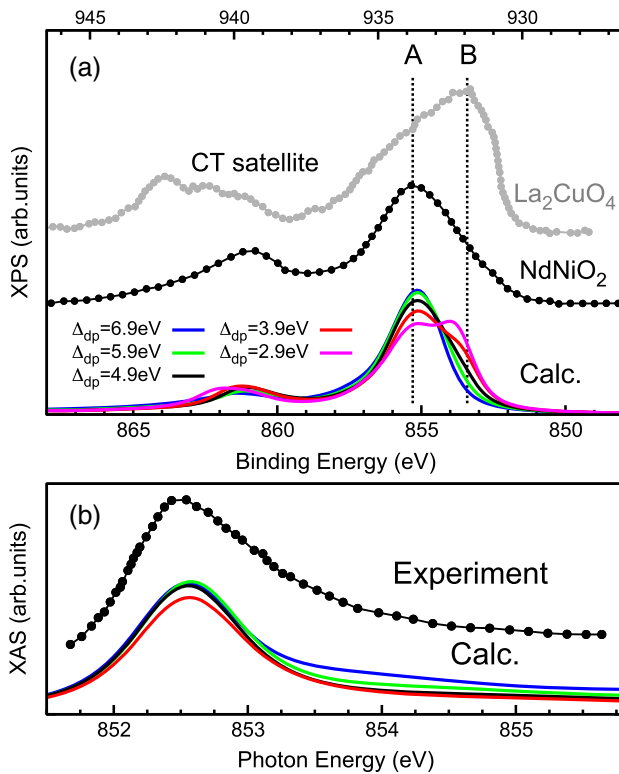


FIG. 5. (a) Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XPS spectra and (b) Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XAS spectra of NdNiO₂ calculated by the LDA + DMFT method for different Δ_{dp} values. The experimental data [9,12] are shown together. For comparison, experimental Cu $2p_{3/2}$ XPS data of La₂CuO₄ are shown (gray) [19]. The spectral broadening is taken into account using a Lorentzian 300 meV (HWHM) and a Gaussian 250 meV (HWHM) for XAS and a Lorentzian 500 meV and a Gaussian 400 meV for XPS. The XPS spectra with different broadening widths can be found in Supplemental Material [54].

The calculated LaNiO₂ spectra in Fig. 6(a) show similar behavior to NdNiO₂.

B. Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XAS and RIXS

As expected for Ni¹⁺ systems with a d^9 configuration, the experimental Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XAS of NdNiO₂ shows a sharp peak corresponding to the electron excitation from the $2p_{3/2}$ to an empty $x^2 - y^2$ orbital [Fig. 5(b)]. The XAS main peak is accompanied by a broad tail attributed to the hybridization with metallic bands. The theoretical results in Fig. 5(b) reproduce the experimental data reasonably well; however, the weak dependence on Δ_{dp} does not allow one to draw conclusions about its value.

The RIXS spectra, on the other hand, exhibit fine changes with the Δ_{dp} values; see Fig. 7. The spectra at all Δ_{dp} values contain a strong Raman-like (RL) feature (at constant E_{loss} irrespective of the incident photon energies E_{in}) at $E_{\text{loss}} \sim 1$ eV and a fluorescencelike (FL) feature (E_{loss} linearly increases with E_{in}). The RL feature arises from $t_{2g} \rightarrow x^2 - y^2$ excitation, and its width (in E_{loss}) reflects a rapid decay of this local “exciton.” With increasing Δ_{dp} , the RL feature shifts to lower energies, due to the upward shift to the t_{2g} bands [similar to $3z^2 - r^2$ shown in Fig. 2(b)], while the $x^2 - y^2$ peaks remain pinned in the vicinity of the Fermi level. The main variation of the RIXS spectra with increasing Δ_{dp} concerns the behavior of the FL part, the onset of which is pushed to higher E_{loss} . For

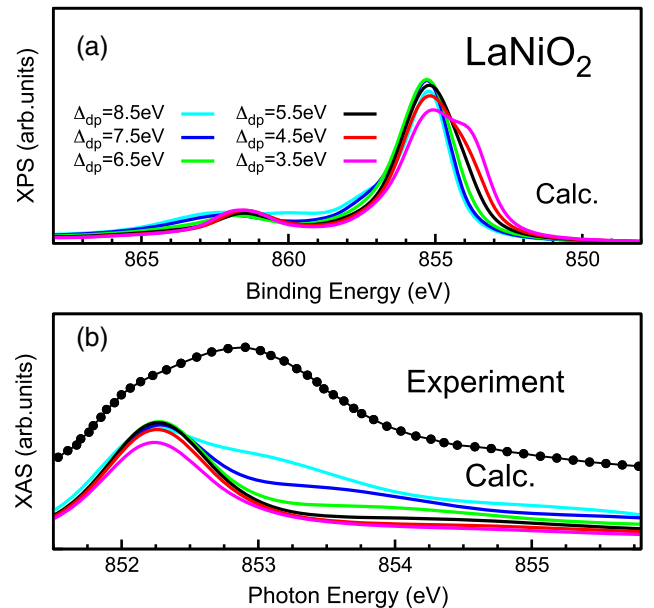


FIG. 6. (a) Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XPS spectra and (b) Ni $2p_{3/2}$ XAS spectra of LaNiO₂ calculated by the LDA + DMFT method for different Δ_{dp} values. The spectral broadening is taken into account using a Lorentzian 300 meV (HWHM) and a Gaussian 250 meV (HWHM) for XAS and a Lorentzian 500 meV and a Gaussian 400 meV for XPS.

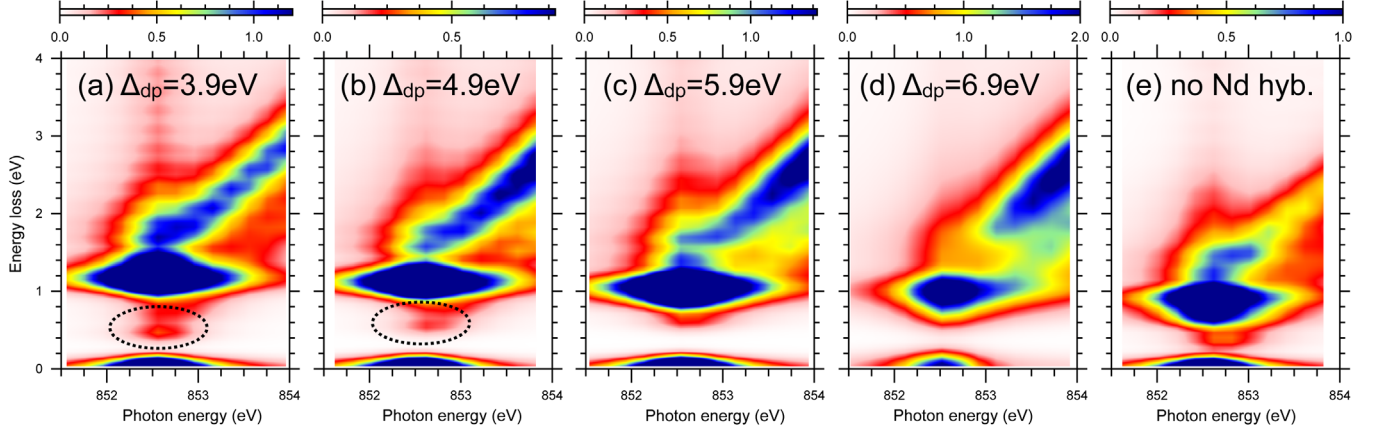


FIG. 7. The Ni L_3 RIXS spectra of NdNiO₂ calculated for (a) $\Delta_{dp} = 3.9$ eV, (b) $\Delta_{dp} = 4.9$ eV, (c) $\Delta_{dp} = 5.9$ eV, and (d) $\Delta_{dp} = 6.9$ eV. (e) The Ni L_3 RIXS spectra calculated for the model without the hybridization between Nd $5d$ and the NiO₂ plane ($\Delta_{dp} = 4.9$ eV). The spectral broadening is considered using a Gaussian of 100 meV (HWHM).

$\Delta_{dp} = 4.9$ eV, deduced from the XPS data, the FL feature sets in below the RL feature at around $E_{\text{loss}} \sim 0.6$ eV. The coexisting RL and FL features above well capture the experimental data by Hepting *et al.* [9] and Rossi *et al.* [13]. Artificial suppression of hybridization to Nd $5d$ states [Fig. 7(e)] leads to a reduced intensity of the FL feature and only a moderate modification of the low-energy spectra supporting the conclusion about the electron-reservoir role of Nd $5d$ states.

Finally, we discuss XAS and RIXS spectra in LaNiO₂ (the experimental XPS data are not available at the moment). The experimental XAS spectra of LaNiO₂ [9] are clearly distinct from NdNiO₂. A side peak at 852.0 eV is attributed to Ni-La hybridization effect by Hepting *et al.* [9] based on a simplified impurity model simulation. The LDA + DMFT calculations (including Ni-La hybridization) do not support this conclusion, as they do not match

the experimental XAS spectra. While large Δ_{dp} gives rise to a high-energy XAS shoulder (Fig. 6), it does not improve the agreement of the RIXS spectra, shown in Fig. 8. We have to conclude that the present LDA + DMFT description of LaNiO₂ does not match the experiment for any choice of Δ_{dp} .

We propose that the problem lies on the experimental side; i.e., the measured spectra do not represent a perfect LaNiO₂ crystal. We argue by the success of the present method for a broad spectrum of transition-metal oxides [16] including NdNiO₂ as well as the absence of an obvious source of difference between NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂. On the experimental side, we point out recent studies [62,63] reporting superconductivity in Sr-doped LaNiO₂, suggesting that NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂ are not that different after all. Spectroscopic experiments on these new LaNiO₂ samples are needed to resolve the present discrepancy.

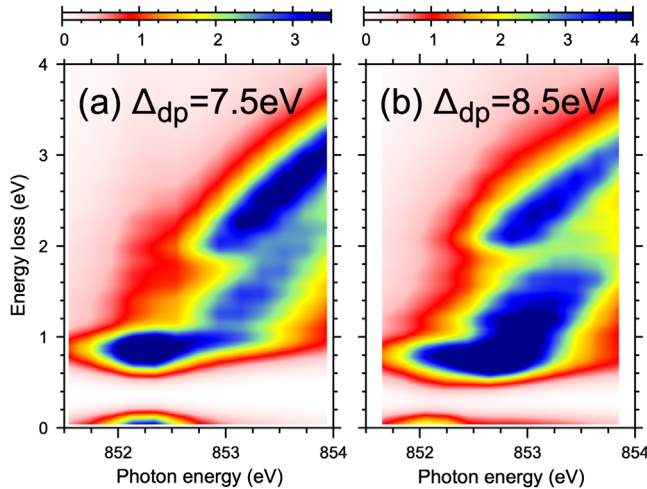


FIG. 8. The Ni L_3 RIXS spectra of LaNiO₂ calculated for (a) $\Delta_{dp} = 7.5$ eV and (b) $\Delta_{dp} = 8.5$ eV. The spectral broadening is considered using a Gaussian of 100 meV (HWHM).

V. CONCLUSIONS

We have presented a comprehensive analysis of Ni $2p_{3/2}$ core-level XPS, XAS, and RIXS in infinite-layer nickelates (NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂) with the LDA + DMFT approach. Comparison to the experimental spectra allowed us to determine the CT parameter (double-counting correction) and make the following conclusions about the electronic structure. Undoped NdNiO₂ is nearly monovalent (Ni¹⁺, d^9) with a small self-doping from the Nd $5d$ band. Only the Ni $x^2 - y^2$ orbitals are partially filled, and multiorbital physics does not play an important role for the stoichiometric as well as slightly hole-doped compound. Unlike in cuprates, the Ni-O hybridization does not play an important role in connection with doping—doped holes reside predominantly on the Ni sites. The physics of NdNiO₂ described effectively by a single-band Hubbard model [35–37] is consistent with the available core-level spectroscopies. While the present calculations provide a

good description of the experimental core-level spectra of NdNiO₂, we cannot explain the qualitative difference between the reported NdNiO₂ and LaNiO₂ XAS and RIXS spectra.

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Correction: The captions to Figs. 6 and 7 were inadvertently switched during the production cycle and have been set right.

Second Correction: The text citations to Figs. 6 and 7 in Sec. IV B were inadvertently switched and have been remedied.