NLO QCD corrections to $Z\bar{b}b$ production with massive bottom quarks at the Fermilab Tevatron

F. Febres Cordero

Department of Physics and Astronomy,
UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1547, USA

L. Reina

Physics Department, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4350, USA

D. Wackeroth

Department of Physics, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260-1500, USA

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Abstract

We calculate the Next-to-Leading Order (NLO) QCD corrections to $Z\bar{b}b$ production in hadronic collisions including full bottom-quark mass effects. We present results for the total cross section and the invariant mass distribution of the bottom-quark jet pair at the Fermilab Tevatron $p\bar{p}$ collider. We perform a detailed comparison with a calculation that considers massless bottom quarks, as implemented in the Monte Carlo program MCFM. We find that neglecting bottom-quark mass effects overestimates the total NLO QCD cross section for $Z\bar{b}b$ production at the Tevatron by about 7%, independent of the choice of the renormalization and factorization scales. Moreover, bottom-quark mass effects can impact the shape of the bottom-quark pair invariant mass distribution, in particular in the low invariant mass region.
I. INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of high-energy collider experiments is the elucidation of the mechanism of Electroweak Symmetry Breaking (EWSB) as well as the exploration of energy scales beyond the weak scale, where physics beyond the Standard Model (SM) is expected. The hadronic production of weak gauge bosons in association with a bottom-quark pair plays a crucial role in some of the current studies of EWSB and beyond the SM physics at the Fermilab Tevatron $p\bar{p}$ collider [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. $Wb\bar{b}$ and $Zb\bar{b}$ production processes represent the major irreducible backgrounds to the main search modes for a light SM-like Higgs boson at the Tevatron, i.e. $WH$ and $ZH$ with $H \rightarrow b\bar{b}$. $Wb\bar{b}$ also accounts for one of the most important backgrounds to single-top production, $p\bar{p} \rightarrow t\bar{t}, t\bar{b}$ with $t(\bar{t}) \rightarrow Wb(\bar{b})$, which tests the fundamental structure of the $Wtb$ vertex at the Tevatron [7, 8, 9, 10]. Finally, $Zb\bar{b}$ is a background to searches for Higgs bosons in models with enhanced bottom-quark Yukawa couplings, such as the Minimal Supersymmetric Standard Model (MSSM) with large tan $\beta$, where $Hb\bar{b}$ with $H \rightarrow \mu^+\mu^-, \tau^+\tau^-$ is an interesting discovery channel [11].

The hadronic cross sections for $W/ZH$ associated production have been calculated including up to Next-to-Next-to-Leading Order (NNLO) QCD corrections [12, 13, 14] and $O(\alpha)$ electroweak corrections [15]. Single-top production has been calculated at Next-to-Leading (NLO) in QCD [16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24], and including one-loop electroweak (SM and MSSM) corrections [25], while the cross section for $Hb\bar{b}$ associated production is known including NLO QCD corrections and full bottom-quark mass effects [26, 27, 28, 29].

To fully exploit the Tevatron’s potential to detect the SM Higgs boson or to impose limits on its mass, it is crucial that the dominant background processes are also under good theoretical control. In the present experimental analyses [1], the effects of NLO QCD corrections on the total cross section and the dijet invariant mass distribution of the $W/Z b\bar{b}$ background processes have been taken into account by using the Monte Carlo program MCFM [30]. In MCFM, the NLO QCD predictions of both total and differential cross sections for these processes have been calculated in the zero bottom-quark mass ($m_b = 0$) approximation [31, 32, 33], using the analytical results of Refs. [34, 35]. From a study of the Leading Order (LO) cross section, finite bottom-quark mass effects are expected to affect

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1 For updated results, see the CDF and DØ websites at [http://www-cdf.fnal.gov/physics/exotic/exotic.html](http://www-cdf.fnal.gov/physics/exotic/exotic.html) and [http://www-d0.fnal.gov/Run2Physics/WWW/results/higgs.htm](http://www-d0.fnal.gov/Run2Physics/WWW/results/higgs.htm)
both the total and differential $W/Zb\bar{b}$ cross sections, mostly in the region of small $b\bar{b}$-pair invariant masses \cite{33}. Indeed, since this kinematic region of small $b\bar{b}$-pair invariant masses contributes considerably to $W/Z + n \ j$ production ($n = 1, 2$), where at least one of the jets is a $b$-jet, bottom-quark mass effects cannot be neglected as discussed in Refs. \cite{36, 37} (for $n = 2$) and in Ref. \cite{38} (for $n = 1$). Given the variety of experimental analyses involved in the search for $W/ZH$ associated production, single-top and $Hb\bar{b}$ production, it is important to assess precisely the impact of a finite bottom-quark mass over the entire kinematical reach of the process, including the complete NLO QCD corrections.

In Ref. \cite{39} we have performed a study of NLO QCD cross sections and invariant mass distributions of the bottom quark pair in $Wb\bar{b}$ production at the Tevatron, including full bottom-quark mass effects. We found that bottom-quark mass effects amount to about 8\% of the total NLO cross section at the Tevatron and are mostly visible in the region of low $b\bar{b}$-pair invariant mass.

In this paper, we compute the NLO QCD corrections to $Zb\bar{b}$ hadronic production, including the full bottom-quark mass effects. We consider all partonic processes that contribute at $\mathcal{O}(\alpha \alpha_s^3)$, i.e. NLO QCD corrections to $q\bar{q} \to Zb\bar{b}$ and $gg \to Zb\bar{b}$ and the tree-level process $q(\bar{q})g \to Zb\bar{b}q(\bar{q})$. We present numerical results for the total cross section and the invariant mass distribution of the $b\bar{b}$ pair for the Tevatron $p\bar{p}$ collider, including kinematic cuts and a jet-finding algorithm. In particular, we apply the $k_T$ jet algorithm and require two tagged $b$-jets in the final state. Using the MCFM package \cite{30}, we compare our results with the corresponding results obtained in the $m_b = 0$ limit. Numerical results for both $Zb\bar{b}$ and $Wb\bar{b}$ production at the Large Hadron Collider will be presented in a separate publication \cite{40}.

The outline of the paper is as follows: in Section \textbf{II} we briefly discuss the technical details of our calculation, while we present numerical results and a discussion of the bottom-quark mass effects in Section \textbf{III}. Section \textbf{IV} contains our conclusions.
FIG. 1: Tree-level Feynman diagrams for $q\bar{q} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$. The circled crosses indicate all possible insertions of the final-state $Z$ boson leg, each insertion corresponding to a different diagram.

FIG. 2: Tree-level Feynman diagrams for $gg \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$. The circled crosses indicate all possible insertions of the final-state $Z$ boson leg, each insertion corresponding to a different diagram.

II. CALCULATION

A. Basics

The total cross section for $p\bar{p}(pp) \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$ at $O(\alpha^3)$ can be written as follows:

$$
\sigma_{NLO}^{p\bar{p}(pp) \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}} = \sum_{ij} \frac{1}{1 + \delta_{ij}} \int dx_1 dx_2 \left[ F_i^p(x_1, \mu) F_j^{\bar{p}}(x_2, \mu) \hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{NLO} (x_1, x_2, \mu) + (x_1 \leftrightarrow x_2) \right],
$$

where $F_{i}^{p(\bar{p})}$ denote the parton distribution functions (PDFs) for parton $i$ in a proton (antiproton), defined at a generic factorization scale $\mu_f = \mu$. The sum runs over all relevant subprocesses contributing to the hadronic cross section initiated by partons $i$ and $j$. The partonic cross section for the subprocess $ij \rightarrow Zb\bar{b} (+k)$ is denoted by $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{NLO}$ and is renormalized at an arbitrary scale $\mu_r = \mu$. If not specified otherwise, we assume the factorization and renormalization scales to be equal, $\mu_f = \mu_r = \mu$. The factor in front of the integral is a symmetry factor that accounts for the presence of identical particles in the initial state of a given subprocess ($\delta_{ij}$ is the Kronecker delta). The partonic center-of-mass energy squared,
The NLO QCD partonic cross section reads:

\[
\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{NLO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu) = \hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{LO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu) + \delta\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{NLO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu),
\]

(2)

where \(\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{LO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu)\) denotes the \(O(\alpha_s^2)\) LO partonic cross section and \(\delta\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{NLO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu)\) describes the \(O(\alpha_s)\) corrections to \(\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{LO}}(x_1, x_2, \mu)\). The LO \(p\bar{p}(pp)\rightarrow Zb\bar{b}\) process receives contributions from \(q\bar{q}\) and \(gg\) initiated processes, as shown in Fig.1 and Fig.2 respectively. The NLO QCD corrections, \(\delta\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{NLO}}\), receive contributions from \(q\bar{q}\), \(gg\), \(qg\) and \(\bar{q}g\) initiated processes and can be decomposed in the following way:

\[
\delta\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{NLO}} = \int d(PS_3) \sum |A_{\text{virt}}(ij \rightarrow Zb\bar{b})|^2 + \int d(PS_4) \sum |A_{\text{real}}(ij \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}+k)|^2 
\equiv \hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{virt}} + \hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{real}},
\]

(3)

where the term integrated over the phase space measure \(d(PS_3)\) corresponds to the virtual one-loop corrections with three particles in the final state, while the one integrated over the phase space measure \(d(PS_4)\) corresponds to the real tree-level corrections with one additional emitted parton. The sum \(\sum\) indicates that the corresponding amplitudes squared, \(|A_{\text{virt(real)}}(ij \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}(+k))|^2\), have been averaged over the initial-state degrees of freedom and summed over the final-state ones. The phase space integration has been performed using Monte Carlo (MC) techniques using the adaptive multi-dimensional integration routine VEGAS [41].

We have improved on the massless calculation of Refs. [32, 33] by considering a fully massive \(b\)-quark both at the level of the scattering amplitude and in the integration over the phase space of the final-state particles. We keep the \(Z\) boson on-shell, though the extension to include its leptonic decays does not present in principle any special complications. Because of the complexity of this calculation, all results have been cross-checked with at least two independent sets of codes. The analytic calculation of the scattering amplitudes has been implemented using, at different stages, FORM [42], TRACER [43], Mathematica and Maple. Final numerical results have been obtained with codes built in C and FORTRAN, and we have used the FF [44] and Madgraph [45, 46, 47] packages for cross-checks.

The \(O(\alpha_s)\) corrections to \(Zb\bar{b}\) production are similar in structure to the NLO QCD corrections to \(Wb\bar{b}\) production [39] and to Higgs production in association with top quarks \((Ht\bar{t})\) [48, 49]. We therefore only summarize below the most important features of the
calculation and refer to the $Wb\bar{b}$ and $Ht\bar{t}$ papers cited above and to Ref. [50] for more details. The $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ corrections to $q\bar{q} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$ can be derived from the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ corrections to $q\bar{q}' \rightarrow Wb\bar{b}$ production [39] (with $W \leftrightarrow Z$) and to $q\bar{q} \rightarrow Ht\bar{t}$ [48] (with $t \leftrightarrow b$ and $H \leftrightarrow Z$), while the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ corrections to the $gg$ initiated $Zb\bar{b}$ production process can be obtained from the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ corrections to $gg \rightarrow Ht\bar{t}$ [49] (with $t \leftrightarrow b$ and $H \leftrightarrow Z$). The $qg, \bar{q}g$ initiated processes appear in both $Wb\bar{b}$ and $Ht\bar{t}$ NLO QCD calculations with $W \leftrightarrow Z$ and $H \leftrightarrow Z, t \leftrightarrow b$, respectively. Note that, when applying the results of $Wb\bar{b}$ and $Ht\bar{t}$ production of Ref. [39] and Refs. [48, 49], one also needs to replace respectively the $Wf \bar{f}'$ and fermion Yukawa couplings by the $V - A$ coupling of fermions to the $Z$ boson:

\begin{equation}
Z_{\mu}^f = \frac{-ie}{2\sin\theta_W \cos\theta_W} \gamma^\mu (g^f_V - g^f_A \gamma_5) ,
\end{equation}

where $\theta_W$ is the weak mixing angle and the vector, $g^f_V$, and axial-vector, $g^f_A$, couplings for the $Zf \bar{f}$ vertex are given by:

\begin{equation}
g^f_V = T^f_3 - 2\sin^2 \theta_W Q_f , \quad g^f_A = T^f_3 ,
\end{equation}

with $T^f_3$ denoting the third component of the weak isospin and $Q_f$ the electric charge of the fermion $f$. Moreover, as we are considering an on-shell $Z$ boson, we have summed over its polarizations as follows:

\begin{equation}
\sum \epsilon^\mu(p_Z)\epsilon^{\nu\ast}(p_Z) = -g^{\mu\nu} + \frac{p^\mu_Z p^\nu_Z}{M_Z^2} ,
\end{equation}

where $M_Z$ is the mass of the $Z$ boson.

### B. The virtual cross section $\hat{\sigma}^{\text{virt}}_{ij}$

The $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ virtual corrections to the partonic tree-level $q\bar{q} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$ and $gg \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$ production processes consist of self-energy, vertex, box and pentagon diagrams, as shown, for the $Ht\bar{t}$-like part, in Figs. 2-4 of Ref. [48] and Figs. 2-5 of Ref. [49], respectively (for a full set of diagrams see also Ref. [50]). The contributions to $\hat{\sigma}^{\text{virt}}_{ij}$ in Eq. (3) can be written as:

\begin{equation}
\sum |A_{\text{virt}}(ij \rightarrow Zb\bar{b})|^2 = \sum_D \sum \left( A^\dagger_0 A^\dagger_D + A_D^\dagger A^\dagger_0 \right) = \sum_D 2 \text{Re} \left( A^\dagger_0 A^\dagger_D \right) ,
\end{equation}
where $A_0$ is the tree level amplitude and $A_D$ denotes the amplitude for the one-loop diagram $D$, with $D$ running over all self-energy, vertex, box and pentagon diagrams corresponding to the $ij$-initiated subprocess.

The calculation of each virtual diagram ($A_D$) is performed in the same way as outlined in Refs. [48, 49], i.e. $A_D$ is calculated as a linear combination of Dirac structures with coefficients that depend on both scalar and tensor one-loop Feynman integrals with up to five denominators. We solve the one-loop integrals in the coefficients either at the level of the amplitude or at the level of the amplitude squared (see Eq. (7)). These two independent approaches allow us to thoroughly cross-check the calculation of each individual diagram. Indeed, the tensor structures present in the one-loop integrals of the amplitude are typically different from the ones present in the amplitude squared, as one can perform non-trivial reductions of the latter by canceling dot-products of the integration momentum in the numerator with denominators in the Feynman integrals. In this way, the final analytical expression of a given diagram ends up being represented in terms of different building blocks. A possible incorrect relation between the building blocks would then naturally produce a discrepancy between the two approaches.

Tensor and scalar one-loop integrals are treated as follows. Using the Passarino-Veltman (PV) method [51, 52], the tensor integrals are expressed as a linear combination of tensor structures and coefficients, where the tensor structures depend on the external momenta and the metric tensor, while the coefficients depend on scalar integrals, kinematics invariants and the dimension of the integral. Numerical stability issues may arise at this level as a consequence of the proportionality of the tensor integral coefficients to powers of inverse Gram Determinants (GDs), as discussed in detail in Ref. [49], although for $Zb\bar{b}$ production the problem is considerably more serious.

These numerical instabilities can be considered as “spurious” or “unphysical” divergences, since it is well known that only two-particle invariants can give rise to a physical singularity. Indeed, these spurious divergences cancel when large sets of diagrams are combined [53], such as, for example, when one combines gauge invariant sets of color amplitudes (i.e. amplitudes with a common color factor). As we have expressed our calculation in terms of invariants, and we employ a standard basis of scalar integrals, the full cancellation only occurs between numerator and denominator at the numerical level, often between fairly large expressions.

For this reason we have chosen to organize the diagrams, at certain stages, into gauge in-
variant color amplitudes, that is, into coefficients of the same color structure (see Ref. [50]). This allows a better handling of the spurious singularities and a natural way to make internal cross-checks and cross-checks with new techniques. When we consider these gauge invariant sets of color amplitudes and full analytical reductions of all tensor integrals, we find cancellation of some powers of GDs, which improves the numerical stability of our code, so that when integrating over the $Z_{\ell b}$ phase space, using MC techniques, we obtain statistical errors below 0.1% for total cross sections.

The fully reduced numerical codes are often more demanding computationally, and because of that we have built master codes that use them only when close to regions of phase space where certain problematic GDs become small. All this is found particularly useful when considering higher rank $D$-PV functions (we have up to $D_4$-PV functions in our calculation) as well as $E$-PV functions. This technique would probably break down if one were to extend it to processes with even more legs, and the use of helicity amplitudes would in this case be preferable.

In the case of pentagon diagrams, a powerful and convenient check consists of reducing consistently all $E$-PV functions by canceling systematically, at the level of the amplitude squared in Eq. (7), all possible vector products containing the loop momentum in the numerator with some denominators. This is possible as, in the pentagon topology of our process, each leg has an outgoing momentum which is on-shell, corresponding basically to one of the external initial or final particles of the subprocess. One then ends with expressions for each pentagon diagram containing purely scalar pentagon integrals, or tensor integrals with fewer than five denominators, improving considerably the numerical stability. We compared analytically these reductions to the non-reduced expressions by using the full reduction of all tensor integrals to scalar integrals, and found agreement.

We also checked parts of our result by using unitarity techniques [35], specifically the quadruple-cut technique [35]. As shown by Britto, Cachazo and Feng (BCF), from any set of Feynman diagrams (or more generally from any tensor integral [54]) one can extract the coefficient of a given scalar box integral by cutting the four corresponding propagators (see Fig. 3), i.e. by replacing $i/(p^2 - m^2 + i\epsilon) \rightarrow 2\pi\delta^{(+)}(p^2 - m^2)$ for each cutted propagator of momentum $p$ and mass $m$. This effectively freezes the momentum integration, and replaces it by a set of algebraic equations which determine the loop momentum entirely. We solved this set of equations by using a BCF ansatz [53], and then compared the result to the corre-
FIG. 3: Quadruple cut check of the calculation of a box diagram involving a top-quark loop. It corresponds to two Feynman diagrams given by the two possible orientations of the fermion line. The corresponding box coefficient extracted from our analytic expression, and found agreement (for more details and specific solutions for the topology in Fig. 3 see Ref. [50]). This is a rather non-trivial check for the set of $E$-PV and $D$-PV functions we have employed at different stages, since they all contribute to the coefficients of the scalar $D$-functions occurring in the one-loop $Zb\bar{b}$ amplitude. For instance, it has been particularly useful in the case of box diagrams like the one shown in Fig. 3 since this diagram and related ones contain up to $D4$-PV functions that cannot be reduced even at the level of the amplitude squared. Since they involve up to four powers of inverse GDs, they are particularly subject to numerical instabilities and it is important to have their analytic expressions as compact as possible.

After the tensor integral reduction is performed, the fundamental building blocks are one-loop scalar integrals with up to five denominators. They may be finite or contain both ultraviolet (UV) and infrared (IR) divergences. The finite scalar integrals are evaluated using the method described in Ref. [52] and cross-checked with the numerical package FF [44]. The UV and IR singular scalar integrals are calculated analytically by using dimensional regularization in $d=4-2\varepsilon$ dimensions. The most difficult integrals arise from IR divergent pentagon diagrams with several external and internal massive particles. We calculate them as linear combinations of box integrals using the method of Refs. [55, 56] and of Ref. [52]. Details of the box scalar integrals (see also Ref. [57]) and the pentagon reduction, as well as the set of IR-divergent three and two-point functions used in this calculation, are given in Ref. [50].

The UV singularities of the virtual cross section are removed by introducing a suitable set of counterterms (see Refs. [48, 49, 50] for details), while the residual renormalization
scale dependence is checked from first principles using renormalization group arguments as in Eq. (4) of Ref. [49]. Note that we use the on-shell subtraction scheme when fixing the wave function renormalization constant of the external bottom quark field ($\delta Z_2^{(b)}$) and the mass renormalization constant ($\delta m_b$). The IR singularities of the virtual cross section are canceled by analogous singularities in the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)$ real cross section.

In our calculation we treat $\gamma_5$ according to the naive dimensional regularization approach, i.e. we enforce the fact that $\gamma_5$ anticommutes with all other $\gamma$ matrices in $d = 4 - 2\epsilon$ dimensions. This is known to give rise to inconsistencies when, at the same time, the $d$-dimensional trace of four $\gamma$ matrices and one $\gamma_5$ is forced to be non-zero (as in $d = 4$, where $Tr(\gamma^\mu \gamma^\nu \gamma^\rho \gamma^\sigma \gamma_5) = 4i\epsilon^{\mu\nu\rho\sigma}$). In our calculation, both UV and IR divergences are handled in such a way that we never have to enforce simultaneously these two properties of the Dirac algebra in $d$ dimensions. For instance, the UV divergences are extracted and canceled at the amplitude level, after which the $d \to 4$ limit is taken and the renormalized amplitude is squared using $d = 4$. Thus, all fermion traces appearing at this point are computed in four dimensions and therefore have no ambiguities.

We note that the tree-level amplitude $A_0$ in Eq. (7) has generically to be considered as a $d$-dimensional tree-level amplitude. This matters when the $A_D$ amplitudes in Eq. (7) are UV or IR divergent. Actually, as it has been shown in Refs. [48, 49], both UV and IR divergences are always proportional to the tree level amplitudes and they can be formally canceled without having to explicitly specify the dimensionality of the tree level amplitude itself. After UV and IR singularities have been canceled, the remaining phase space integration is computed in $d = 4$ dimensions using standard MC techniques.

C. The real cross section $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{real}}$

The NLO QCD real cross section $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{real}}$ in Eq. (3) corresponds to the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ corrections to $ij \to Zb\bar{b}$ due to the emission of an additional real parton, i.e. to the process $ij \to Zb\bar{b} + g$, and the tree-level process $q(\bar{q})g \to Zb\bar{b} + q(\bar{q})$. $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{\text{real}}$ contains IR singularities which cancel the analogous singularities present in the $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ virtual corrections and in the NLO PDFs (see Refs. [48, 49, 50] for details). These singularities can be either soft, when the emitted extra parton is a gluon and its energy becomes very small, or collinear, when the final-state parton is emitted collinear to one of the partons in the initial state. There is no collinear singularity
arising from the radiation off the final-state bottom quarks, since they are considered to be massive.

We have calculated the cross sections for the processes

\[ i(q_1) + j(q_2) \rightarrow b(p_b) + \bar{b}(p_{\bar{b}}) + Z(p_Z) + g(k) \]

and

\[ (q, \bar{q})(q_1) + g(q_2) \rightarrow b(p_b) + \bar{b}(p_{\bar{b}}) + Z(p_Z) + (q, \bar{q})(k), \]

with \( q_1 + q_2 = p_b + p_{\bar{b}} + p_Z + k \), using the two-cutoff Phase Space Slicing (PSS) method. This implementation of the PSS method was originally developed to study QCD corrections to dihadron production \[59\] and has since then been applied to a variety of processes (a nice review can be found in Ref. \[60\]). We follow closely the application of the PSS method to \( Ht\bar{t} \) production as presented in Refs. \[48, 49\] to which we refer for more extensive references and full details. Although we are considering \( Zb\bar{b} \) production, the kinematics are equivalent, and the color structure and IR behavior are the same, so necessarily their soft and collinear kernels are the same. In the following we briefly summarize our implementation of the two-cutoff PSS method.

Using the PSS method, the IR singularities can be conveniently isolated by slicing the phase space of the final-state particles into different regions defined by suitable cutoffs. To isolate the soft and collinear singularities we impose soft (\( \delta_s \)) and collinear (\( \delta_c \)) cutoffs on the phase space of the emitted parton as follows. By introducing an arbitrary small soft cutoff \( \delta_s \), we separate the overall integration of the \( q\bar{q}, gg \rightarrow b\bar{b}Z + g \) phase space into two regions according to whether the energy of the final state gluon \( (k^0 = E_g) \) is soft, i.e. \( E_g \leq \delta_s\sqrt{s}/2 \), or hard, i.e. \( E_g > \delta_s\sqrt{s}/2 \). In order to isolate the collinear singularities we further divide the hard region of the \( q\bar{q}, gg \rightarrow b\bar{b}Z + g \) phase space into a hard/collinear and a hard/non-collinear region, by introducing a second small collinear cutoff \( \delta_c \). The hard/non-collinear region is defined by the condition that both

\[
\frac{2q_1 \cdot k}{E_g\sqrt{s}} > \delta_c \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{2q_2 \cdot k}{E_g\sqrt{s}} > \delta_c \quad (8)
\]

are true. We apply the same collinear cutoff to the tree-level process \( q(\bar{q})g \rightarrow Zb\bar{b} + q(\bar{q}) \). The hard non-collinear parts of the real cross sections, \( \hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{\text{hard/non-coll}} \), are finite and can be computed numerically. The partonic real cross sections can then be written as follows:

\[
\hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{\text{real}} = \hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{\text{soft}} + \hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{\text{hard/coll}} + \hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{\text{hard/non-coll}}, \quad (9)
\]
where $\hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{soft}$ and $\hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{hard/coll}$ is obtained by integrating analytically over the soft and collinear regions of the phase space of the emitted parton, respectively, and contains all the IR divergences of $\hat{\sigma}_{q\bar{q},gg}^{real}$. The dependence on these arbitrary cutoffs, $\delta_s, \delta_c$, is not physical, and cancels at the level of the real cross section, i.e. in $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{real}$. This cancellation constitutes an important check of the calculation.

We conclude this section by showing explicitly that the total hadronic cross section at NLO QCD does not depend on the arbitrary cutoffs introduced by the PSS method, i.e. on $\delta_s$ and $\delta_c$. The cancellation of the PSS cutoff dependence is realized in $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{real}$ by matching contributions that are calculated either analytically ($\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{soft}$ and $\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{hard/coll}$), in the IR-unsafe region below the cutoffs, or numerically, in the IR-safe region above the cutoffs ($\hat{\sigma}_{ij}^{hard/non-coll}$). While the analytical calculation in the IR-unsafe region reproduces the form of the cross section in the soft or collinear limits and is therefore only accurate for small values of the cutoffs, the numerical integration in the IR-safe region becomes unstable for very small values of the cutoffs. Therefore, obtaining a convincing cutoff independence involves a delicate balance between the previous antagonistic requirements and ultimately dictates the choice of values that are neither too large nor too small for the cutoffs. In Figs. 4 and 5, using the setup described in Section III, we demonstrate the independence of $\sigma_{NLO}(p\bar{p} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b})$ on $\delta_s$ and $\delta_c$ separately, by varying only one of the two cutoffs over an extended range, while the other is kept fixed. In Fig. 4, $\delta_s$ is varied between $10^{-5}$ and $10^{-2}$ with $\delta_c = 10^{-5}$, while in Fig. 5, $\delta_c$ is varied between $10^{-7}$ and $10^{-4}$ with $\delta_s = 10^{-3}$. In both plots, we show in the upper window the overall cutoff dependence cancellation between the hadronic cross sections $\sum_{ij}(\sigma_{ij}^{soft} + \sigma_{ij}^{hard/coll})$ and $\sum_{ij} \sigma_{ij}^{hard/non-coll}$ in $\sum_{ij} \sigma_{ij}^{real}$, including all channels, $gg$, $q\bar{q}$ and $qg$. Note that we also take into account contributions from the LO and the virtual cross sections which are cutoff independent. In the lower window of the same plots we show the full $\sigma_{NLO}$, including all channels, on a scale that magnifies the details of the cutoff-dependence cancellation. The statistical errors from the MC phase space integration are also shown. Both Figs. 4 and 5 show a clear plateau over a wide range of $\delta_s$ and $\delta_c$ and the NLO cross section is proven to be cutoff independent. The numerical results presented in Section III have been obtained by using the two-cutoff PSS method with $\delta_s = 10^{-3}$ and $\delta_c = 10^{-5}$.
FIG. 4: Dependence of $\sigma^{NLO}(p\bar{p} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b})$ on the soft cutoff $\delta_s$ of the two-cutoff PSS method for $\mu = 2m_b + M_Z$, and $\delta_c = 10^{-5}$. The upper plot shows the cancellation of the $\delta_s$-dependence between $\sigma^{soft} + \sigma^{hard/coll}$ and $\sigma^{hard/non-coll}$. The lower plot shows, on an enlarged scale, the dependence of the full $\sigma^{NLO} = \sigma^{NLO}_{gg} + \sigma^{NLO}_{q\bar{q}} + \sigma^{NLO}_{qg}$ on $\delta_s$ with the corresponding statistical errors of the MC integration.

III. NUMERICAL RESULTS

The results for $Zb\bar{b}$ observables presented in this paper are obtained for the Tevatron $p\bar{p}$ collider at $s_H = 1.96$ TeV. If not stated otherwise, we assume a non-zero bottom-quark mass, fixed at $m_b = 4.62$ GeV. The mass of the top quark, entering in the virtual corrections, is set to $m_t = 170.9$ GeV. The $Z$-boson mass is taken to be $M_Z = 91.1876$ GeV [61] and the $W$-boson mass is calculated from $M_W = M_Z \cos \theta_w$ with $\sin^2 \theta_w = 0.223$. We work in the electroweak $G_\mu$ input scheme and replace the fine structure constant $\alpha(0) = e^2/(4\pi)$ by $\alpha(G_\mu) = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{\pi} G_\mu M_W^2 \sin^2 \theta_w$ with the Fermi constant $G_\mu = 1.16639 \cdot 10^{-5}$ GeV$^{-2}$. The LO results use the one-loop evolution of $\alpha_s$ and the CTEQ6L1 set of PDFs [62], with $\alpha_s^{LO}(M_Z) = 0.130$, while the NLO results use the two-loop evolution of $\alpha_s$ and the CTEQ6M set of PDFs, with $\alpha_s^{NLO}(M_Z) = 0.118$. In the calculation of the parton luminosity we assume
FIG. 5: Dependence of $\sigma^{\text{NLO}}(p\bar{p} \to Zb\bar{b})$ on the collinear cutoff $\delta_c$ of the two-cutoff PSS method, for $\mu = 2m_b + M_Z$, and $\delta_s = 10^{-3}$. The upper plot shows the cancellation of the $\delta_s$-dependence between $\sigma^\text{soft} + \sigma^\text{hard/coll}$, and $\sigma^\text{hard/non-coll}$. The lower plot shows, on an enlarged scale, the dependence of the full $\sigma^{\text{NLO}} = \sigma^{\text{NLO}}_{gg} + \sigma^{\text{NLO}}_{q\bar{q}} + \sigma^{\text{NLO}}_{qg}$ on $\delta_c$ with the corresponding statistical errors of the MC integration.

five light flavors in the initial state. Including the $b$-quark PDF has a negligible effect ($< 0.1\%$) on the $Zb\bar{b}$ cross section and is included to consistently compare with MCFM. We implement the $k_T$ jet algorithm [63, 64, 65, 66] with a pseudo-cone size $R = 0.7$ and we recombine the parton momenta within a jet using the so called covariant $E$-scheme [64]. We checked that our implementation of the $k_T$ jet algorithm coincides with the one in MCFM. We require all events to have a $b\bar{b}$ jet pair in the final state, with a transverse momentum larger than 15 GeV ($p_T^{b\bar{b}} > 15$ GeV) and a pseudorapidity that satisfies $|\eta^{b\bar{b}}| < 2$. We impose the same $p_T$ and $|\eta|$ cuts also on the extra jet that may arise due to hard non-collinear real emission of a parton, i.e. in the processes $Z\bar{b}b + g$ or $Zb\bar{b} + q(\bar{q})$. This hard non-collinear extra parton is treated either inclusively or exclusively. In the inclusive case we include both two- and three-jet events, while in the exclusive case we require exactly two jets in the event. Two-jet events consist of a bottom-quark jet pair that may also include a final-state
light parton (gluon or quark) due to the applied recombination procedure. Results in the massless bottom-quark approximation have been obtained using the MCFM code [30].

In Table I we present results for the total LO and NLO QCD $p\bar{p} \rightarrow Zb\bar{b}$ cross sections, obtained with the scale $\mu_r = \mu_f = M_Z + 2m_b$, for both our fully massive calculation and in the massless approximation. As can be seen, the NLO QCD corrections increase considerably

| Cross Section                  | $m_b \neq 0$ (pb) [ratio] | $m_b = 0$ (pb) [ratio] |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| $\sigma^{LO}$                 | 2.21[-]                   | 2.37[-]                |
| $\sigma^{NLO}$ inclusive      | 3.40[1.54]                | 3.64[1.54]             |
| $\sigma^{NLO}$ exclusive      | 2.80[1.27]                | 3.01[1.27]             |

TABLE I: LO and NLO total $Zb\bar{b}$ cross sections at the Tevatron for massive and massless bottom quarks, using $\mu_r = \mu_f = M_Z + 2m_b$. The numbers in square brackets are the ratios of the NLO and LO cross sections, the so called K-factors. Statistical errors of the MC integration amount to about 0.1%.

The total cross section, with NLO vs. LO ratios (K-factors) that, in both the massive and massless bottom-quark case, amount to $K = 1.54$ and $K = 1.27$ for the inclusive and exclusive case, respectively. In the following we will study the impact of the NLO QCD corrections on $Zb\bar{b}$ observables in more detail. Specifically we will show examples of kinematic distributions where a global rescaling (or K-factor) does not properly describe the effect of these corrections. In Figs. 6 and 7 we illustrate the renormalization and factorization scale dependence of the LO and NLO QCD total cross sections, both in the inclusive and exclusive case. Figure 6 shows the overall scale dependence of both LO, NLO inclusive and NLO exclusive total cross sections, when both $\mu_r$ and $\mu_f$ are varied independently between $\mu_0/2$ and $4\mu_0$ (with $\mu_0 = m_b + M_Z/2$), including full bottom-quark mass effects. We notice that the NLO QCD cross sections have a reduced scale dependence over the range of scales shown, and the exclusive NLO QCD cross section is more stable than the inclusive one. This effect is mainly driven by the tree level subprocess $q(\bar{q})g \rightarrow Zb\bar{b} + q(\bar{q})$ contributing to the real corrections. This is illustrated by the right hand side (RHS) plots of Figs. 7(a) and 7(b), where we show separately the $\mu$-dependence of the total cross sections to the $qq$, $qq + \bar{q}g$ and $gg$ initiated processes, for $\mu_r = \mu_f$, both for the inclusive and for the exclusive case. It is clear that the low scale behavior of the inclusive cross section is considerably
FIG. 6: Dependence of the LO (black solid band), NLO inclusive (blue dashed band), and NLO exclusive (red dotted band) $Zb\bar{b}$ total cross sections on the renormalization/factorization scales, including full bottom-quark mass effects. The bands are obtained by independently varying both $\mu_r$ and $\mu_f$ between $\mu_0/2$ and $4\mu_0$ (with $\mu_0 = m_b + M_Z/2$).

affected by the $qg + \bar{q}g$ contribution, which show a monotonic dependence on $\mu$ (i.e. with no plateau) characteristic of tree level processes. In the left hand side (LHS) plots of Figs. 7(a) and 7(b) we also compare the scale dependence of our results to the scale dependence of the corresponding results obtained with $m_b = 0$ (using MCFM), both at LO and at NLO. Using a non-zero value of $m_b$ is expected to have a small impact on the scale dependence of the results\(^2\), since the only modification to the renormalization scale dependence originates from the bottom-quark mass and field renormalization, as discussed in Section IIB of Ref. [27], where we compare the minimal and on-shell subtraction schemes. Indeed, as can be seen in Figs. 7(a) 7(b) the scale dependence of the LO and NLO curves is very similar for both the case of a massive and massless bottom quark. While the LO cross section still has a 45% uncertainty due to scale dependence, this uncertainty is reduced at NLO to about 20% for the inclusive and to about 11% for the exclusive cross sections. The uncertainties have been estimated as the positive/negative deviation with respect to the mid-point of the bands plotted in Fig. 6 where each band range is defined by the minimum and maximum

\(^2\) Note that we always use $m_b = 4.62$ GeV in the determination of the scales in terms of $\mu_0 = m_b + M_Z/2$ even in the results obtained with $m_b = 0$. 

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FIG. 7: Dependence of the LO and NLO inclusive and exclusive $Z\bar{b}b$ total cross section on the renormalization/factorization scale, when $\mu_r = \mu_f = \mu$. The LHS plots compare both LO and NLO total cross sections for the case in which the bottom quark is treated as massless (MCFM) or massive (our calculation). The RHS plots show separately, for the massive case only, the scale dependence of the $qq, gg$ and $qg + \bar{q}g$ contributions, as well as their sum.
FIG. 8: Dependence on the renormalization/factorization scale of the rescaled difference between our NLO calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) of the $Zb\bar{b}$ total cross section and MCFM (with $m_b = 0$) for the inclusive and exclusive cases (with $\mu_r = \mu_f$). The error bars indicate the statistical uncertainty of the MC integration.

value in the band. We notice incidentally that the difference in the total cross section due to finite bottom-quark mass effects is less significant than the theoretical uncertainty due to the residual scale dependence in the inclusive case, but is comparable in size in the exclusive case. Indeed, the finite bottom-quark mass effects amount to a reduction of the total cross sections by about 7% compared to the massless case at both LO and NLO QCD.

In Fig. 8 we show the rescaled difference between the NLO total cross sections obtained from our calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) and with MCFM (with $m_b = 0$) defined as follows:

$$\Delta \sigma = \sigma_{NLO}^{m_b \neq 0} - \sigma_{NLO}^{m_b = 0} \frac{\sigma_{LO}^{m_b \neq 0}}{\sigma_{LO}^{m_b = 0}}.$$  \hspace{1cm} (10)

As can be seen, within the statistical errors of the MC integration, the finite bottom-quark mass effects on the total cross sections at NLO are well described by the corresponding effects at LO.

Finally, in Figs. 9 to 11 we study the distribution $d\sigma/dm_{b\bar{b}}$, where $m_{b\bar{b}}$ is the invariant mass of the $b\bar{b}$ jet pair. The impact of NLO QCD corrections on this distribution is illustrated in Figs. 9(a) and 9(b) for the inclusive and exclusive case, respectively. We see that the NLO QCD corrections affect the differential cross section quite substantially. In each figure the
FIG. 9: The distribution $d\sigma/dm_{b\bar{b}}$ at LO and NLO QCD. The RHS plots show the ratio of the LO and NLO distributions.

RHS plot gives the ratio of the NLO and LO distributions. We stress the fact that the NLO $m_{b\bar{b}}$ distributions cannot be obtained from the LO ones by just rescaling, which is clear from the RHS plots of Fig. 9.

Figs. 10(a) and 10(b) compare the NLO $d\sigma/dm_{b\bar{b}}$ distributions obtained from the massive
FIG. 10: The inclusive and exclusive NLO QCD distributions $d\sigma/dm_{b\bar{b}}$ derived from our calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) and from MCFM (with $m_b = 0$). The RHS plots show the ratio of the two distributions, $d\sigma(m_b \neq 0)/d\sigma(m_b = 0)$. 

(a) Inclusive case

(b) Exclusive case
and massless bottom-quark calculations. The results with $m_b = 0$ have been obtained using MCFM. As expected, most of the difference between the massless and massive bottom-quark cross sections is coming from the region of low $m_{b\bar{b}}$ invariant mass, both for the inclusive and exclusive case, where the cross sections for $m_b \neq 0$ are consistently below the ones with $m_b = 0$. This is emphasized in the RHS plots, where we show the ratio of the two distributions, $d\sigma(m_b \neq 0)/d\sigma(m_b = 0)$. For completeness, we also show in Fig. 11 the comparison between massive ($m_b \neq 0$) and massless ($m_b = 0$) calculations at LO in QCD. The LO $m_{b\bar{b}}$ distribution for massive bottom-quarks has been obtained both from our calculation and from MCFM, which implements the $m_b \neq 0$ option at tree level, and both results agree perfectly. In general, mass effects are similar at LO and NLO. To illustrate this in more detail we show in Fig. 12 the rescaled difference between the $m_{b\bar{b}}$ distributions obtained with our NLO calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) and with MCFM (with $m_b = 0$) defined as follows:

$$\Delta \frac{d\sigma}{dm_{b\bar{b}}} = \frac{d\sigma^{\text{NLO}}}{dm_{b\bar{b}}}(m_b \neq 0) - \frac{d\sigma^{\text{NLO}}}{dm_{b\bar{b}}}(m_b = 0) \frac{d\sigma^{\text{LO}}}{dm_{b\bar{b}}}(m_b \neq 0) / \frac{d\sigma^{\text{LO}}}{dm_{b\bar{b}}}(m_b = 0).$$

(11)

We notice that, in the $Zb\bar{b}$ case, finite bottom-quark mass effects are relevant up to values of the $m_{b\bar{b}}$ invariant mass around 50 GeV. Although not included in the present analysis, our calculation is still valid when both $b$ quarks are in the forward direction. In this region, collinear singularities can arise, which are regularized by the finite $b$-quark mass. The resummation of the corresponding large logarithms is then appropriate and is left to future improvements.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

We have calculated the NLO QCD corrections to hadronic $Zb\bar{b}$ production including full bottom-quark mass effects. We have presented numerical results for the total cross section and the invariant mass distribution of the bottom-quark pair at the Tevatron for both massless (with MCFM) and massive bottom quarks. We apply the $k_T$ jet algorithm, require two $b$-tagged jets and impose kinematical cuts that are inspired by the DØ and CDF searches for the SM Higgs boson in $ZH$ production. The NLO QCD $Zb\bar{b}$ cross section shows a considerably reduced renormalization and factorization scale dependence, i.e. about 20% for the inclusive and about 11% for the exclusive cross sections as opposed to 45% scale uncertainty of the LO cross section. The bottom-quark mass effects amount to about 7%
FIG. 11: The LO distribution $d\sigma/dm_{bb}$ derived from our calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) and from MCFM (with $m_b = 0$). The RHS plot shows the ratio of the two distributions, $d\sigma(m_b \neq 0)/d\sigma(m_b = 0)$.

FIG. 12: The $m_{bb}$ distribution of the rescaled difference between our NLO calculation (with $m_b \neq 0$) and MCFM (with $m_b = 0$) for the inclusive (upper plot) and exclusive case (lower plot).
of the total NLO QCD cross section and can impact the shape of the $m_{b\bar{b}}$ distributions, in particular in regions of low $m_{b\bar{b}}$. This is relevant to SM Higgs searches in $ZH$ associated production with $H \to b\bar{b}$ and to searches for MSSM Higgs bosons in $Hb\bar{b}$ production with $H \to \mu^+\mu^-, \tau^+\tau^-$. We also plan to apply the formalism developed in this paper to the calculation of both $Zt\bar{t}$ \cite{67, 68} and $\gamma t\bar{t}$ production at NLO in QCD. Both processes are of interest to the study of electroweak properties of the top quark \cite{69, 70}, while $Zt\bar{t}$ also constitutes a relevant background to new physics searches.

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