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THE CYCLICALITY OF THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF EMPLOYMENT

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ABSTRACT

The flow opportunity cost of moving from unemployment to employment consists of foregone public benefits and the foregone value of non-working time in units of consumption. We construct a time series of the opportunity cost of employment using detailed microdata and administrative or national accounts data to estimate benefits, hours per worker, consumption by labor force status, taxes, and preference parameters. Our estimated opportunity cost is procyclical and volatile over the business cycle. The estimated cyclicalities implies far less unemployment volatility in many leading models of the labor market than that observed in the data, irrespective of the level of the opportunity cost.

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1 Introduction

Understanding the causes of labor market fluctuations ranks among the most important and difficult issues in economics. In recent decades, economists have turned attention to models of equilibrium unemployment. These models feature optimization decisions by workers and firms along with frictions which prevent all workers from supplying their desired amount of labor.

The flow value of the opportunity cost of employment, which we denote by z , plays a crucial role in many such models. The importance of this variable has generated debate about its level, but the literature has almost uniformly adopted the assumption that the opportunity cost is constant over the business cycle. Fluctuations in the opportunity cost correspond loosely to shifts in desired labor supply and, therefore, can affect the volatility of unemployment and wages. While this insight goes back at least as far as Pissarides (1985), to date the cyclical properties of the opportunity cost in the data remain unknown.

The main contribution of this paper is to develop and implement an empirical framework to measure z in the data. We find that, irrespective of its level, z is procyclical and quite volatile over the business cycle. The estimated cyclicity of z poses a significant challenge to models that rely on a fixed z to solve the unemployment volatility puzzle as highlighted by Shimer (2005). This is because a procyclical z undoes the endogenous wage rigidity generated by these models.

We begin in Section 2 by deriving an expression for the opportunity cost z . We start our analysis within a framework that borrows elements from the search and matching model developed in Mortensen and Pissarides (1994) (hereafter MP model). We show, however, that the same measure of z also arises naturally in many other environments. For example, the same expression for z plays an important role in models that allow for ex-ante heterogeneity across workers, models that use alternative wage bargaining protocols, and models with directed instead of random search. In this wide class of models, equilibrium unemployment is a function of the behavior of z relative to the after-tax marginal product of employment (which we denote by p^τ).

We write the opportunity cost of employment as the sum of two terms, $z = b + \xi$. The first component, which we denote by b , is the value of public benefits that an unemployed forgoes upon employment. Our expression for b departs from the literature in three significant ways. First, we argue that b should depend on effective rather than statutory benefit rates. Second, we consider both unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, which are directly related to unemployment status, and non-UI benefits such as supplemental nutritional assistance (SNAP), welfare assistance (AFDC/TANF), and health care (Medicaid). The latter belong in the opportunity cost to the extent that receipt of these benefits changes with unemployment status. Third, we take into account UI benefits expiration, incorporate taxes, and model and measure the utility costs associated with taking up UI benefits (for instance, job search costs and other filing and time costs). These utility costs allow the model to match the fact that roughly one-third of eligible unemployed do not actually take up benefits.

The second term, which we denote by ξ , is the foregone value of non-working time expressed in units of consumption. With concave preferences over consumption and an explicit value of non-working time, this component resembles the marginal rate of substitution between non-working time and consumption in the real business cycle (RBC) model, with the difference being that the value of non-working time is calculated along the extensive margin. In the RBC model, an intraperiod first-order condition equates the marginal rate of substitution between non-working time and consumption to the after-tax marginal product of labor. While the search and matching literature has appealed to this equality to motivate setting the *level* of z close to that of the marginal product, the same logic suggests that the ξ component of z would move *cyclically* with the marginal product just as in the RBC model.

To measure z in the data, we require time series of benefits per unemployed, UI eligibility and take-up rates, consumption expenditures by labor force status, hours per worker, and taxes.¹ In Section 3 we describe our procedure for measuring each of these variables over the period 1961 to 2012. Combining household and individual-level data from the Current

¹Our approach complements recent research that uses surveys to ask respondents directly about their reservation wage (Hall and Mueller, 2013; Krueger and Mueller, 2013). Relative to survey estimates, our approach allows us to construct a long time series for z , which is crucial for studying cyclical patterns.

Population Survey (CPS) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) with program administrative data, we estimate the value of UI, SNAP, AFDC/TANF, and Medicaid benefits that belongs in b . The consumption of employed and unemployed do not have direct counterparts in existing data sources. We generate time series of consumptions using estimates of relative consumption by labor force status from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), population shares by labor force status, and NIPA consumption of non-durables and services per capita. We measure hours per worker from the CPS. Finally, we use IRS Public Use Files to estimate tax rates on labor income and UI benefits and NIPA data to measure effective taxes on consumption.

Our measurement of the ξ component of the opportunity cost also depends on preference parameters, which we calibrate in Section 4 for various common utility functions. We discipline preference parameters by requiring that the steady state of the model match empirical estimates of hours per worker and the consumption decline upon unemployment. We present specifications that result in levels of z ranging from 0.47 to 0.96 relative to an after-tax marginal product of employment equal to $p^\tau = 1$. We assess the plausibility of these specifications with regard to estimates of the total endowment of utility-enhancing time, the curvature of the utility function, and fixed time or utility costs associated with working.

Combining the opportunity cost associated with benefits b with the opportunity cost associated with consumption and work differences ξ , Section 5 shows that our time series of $z = b + \xi$ is procyclical and volatile. The procyclicality of z reflects the outcome of two opposing forces. Our estimated b is countercyclical, rising around every recession since 1961. However, because we incorporate effective rather than statutory rates and because we account for costs associated with take-up and for expiration, the level of b is smaller than what the literature has traditionally calibrated. We find that b is only 6 percent of the sample average of the after-tax marginal product of employment p^τ . In contrast, ξ is highly procyclical, reflecting the procyclical movements of consumption and hours per worker. Intuitively, the household values most the contribution of the employed (through higher wage income) relative to that of

the unemployed (through higher non-working time) when consumption is low and non-working time is high. Because the level of b is small, the procyclical ξ component accounts for the majority of the fluctuations in z .

The elasticity of the cyclical component of z with respect to the cyclical component of the marginal product of employment p is an informative summary statistic when assessing the performance of a large class of models. Across specifications, this elasticity exceeds 0.8 and is typically close to 1. Importantly, z comoves roughly proportionally with p over the business cycle irrespective of whether the level of z is high or low. The positive and large elasticity appears robust to a number of alternative modeling choices and data moments, including replacing the hours per worker series with hours per worker for hourly workers, salaried workers, or an hours series adjusted for compositional changes over the business cycle, changing the estimated decline in consumption upon unemployment, using an alternative model of UI take-up, and introducing fixed time and utility costs associated with working.

In Section 6 we extend the framework to allow for heterogeneity across workers with different educational attainments. While this exercise reveals interesting variation in the level and composition of z across skill groups, each of the skill-specific z 's is procyclical. The same economic forces that cause fluctuations in the aggregate z over the business cycle also influence the skill-specific z 's. Quantitatively, the lowest skill groups exhibit a more elastic z over the business cycle than the highest skill groups.

Section 7 turns to the implications of our estimated z for models of unemployment fluctuations. As emphasized in influential work by Shimer (2005), the standard MP model with wages set according to Nash bargaining fails to account quantitatively for the observed volatility of unemployment. Some of the leading solutions to this unemployment volatility puzzle rely on a fixed z to reduce the procyclicality of wages. The cyclicity of z dampens unemployment fluctuations in these models. The logic of this result is quite general and does not depend on the set of primitive shocks driving the business cycle. Relative to the fixed z case, a procyclical z increases the surplus from accepting a job *at a given wage* during a recession, which puts

downward pressure on equilibrium wages and ameliorates the increase in unemployment. The extent to which actual wages vary cyclically remains an open and important question. Our results suggest that any such wage rigidity cannot be justified by mechanisms that appeal to aspects of the opportunity cost.

We illustrate the consequences of a procyclical z in the context of two leading proposed solutions to the unemployment volatility puzzle which rely on endogenous wage rigidity. Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) show that a large and constant z allows the MP model to generate realistic unemployment fluctuations. Intuitively, a level of z close to the tax-adjusted p makes the total surplus from an employment relationship small on average. Then even modest increases in p generate large percent increases in the surplus, incentivizing firms to significantly increase their job creation.² However, if z and p move proportionally, then the surplus from a new hire remains relatively stable over the business cycle. As a result, fluctuations in unemployment are essentially neutral with respect to the level of z .

Hall and Milgrom (2008) generate volatile unemployment fluctuations by replacing the assumption of Nash bargaining over match surplus with an alternating-offer wage setting mechanism. With Nash bargaining, the threat point of an unemployed depends on the wage other jobs would offer in case of bargaining termination. In the alternating-offer bargaining game, the threat point depends instead mostly on the flow value z if bargaining continues. With constant z , wages respond weakly to increases in p . Allowing instead z to comove with p as in the data undoes this endogenous wage rigidity, thereby reducing the volatility of unemployment.

Finally, we show that z plays an important role in equilibrium models outside of the MP class. We discuss models with directed search, indivisible labor, and incomplete markets. The same expression for z enters into the opportunity cost of employment in each of these models and, therefore, plays an important role in determining unemployment fluctuations.

²A number of papers have followed this reasoning to set a relatively high level of z . Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) use a value of $z = 0.955$. Examples of papers before Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) include Mortensen and Pissarides (1999), Mortensen and Pissarides (2001), Hall (2005), and Shimer (2005), which set z at 0.42, 0.51, 0.40, and 0.40. Examples of papers after Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) include Mortensen and Nagypal (2007), Costain and Reiter (2008), Hall and Milgrom (2008), and Bils, Chang, and Kim (2012), which set z at 0.73, 0.745, 0.71, and 0.82. See Hornstein, Krusell, and Violante (2005) for a useful summary of this literature.

2 The Opportunity Cost of Employment

We develop an expression for the opportunity cost of employment z within a widely studied framework that borrows elements from the search and matching model and the real business cycle model with concave preferences and an explicit value of non-working time. In Section 7.1, we show that z is a key object for understanding equilibrium unemployment within the standard MP/RBC model. However, as we discuss below, the same z arises in alternative models that relax many of the baseline assumptions embedded in the MP/RBC model.

2.1 Household Problem

Time is discrete and the horizon is infinite, $t = 0, 1, 2, \dots$. We denote the vector of exogenous aggregate shocks by \mathbf{Z}_t . All values are expressed in terms of a numeraire good with a price of one.

A representative household consists of a continuum of ex-ante identical individuals of measure one. At the beginning of each period t , there are e_t employed who produce output and $u_t = 1 - e_t$ unemployed who search for jobs. After production occurs, unemployed find a job in the next period with probability f_t and employed separate and become unemployed with probability s_t . Therefore, employment evolves according to the law of motion:

$$e_{t+1} = (1 - s_t)e_t + f_t u_t. \quad (1)$$

Household members treat f_t and s_t as exogenous processes.

The household takes as given employment e_t at the beginning of each period and the outcome of any process that determines the wage w_t and hours per worker N_t . Household members pool perfectly their risks and, therefore, the marginal utility of consumption is equalized between the employed and the unemployed. The household owns the economy's capital stock K_t and rents it to firms in a perfect capital market at a rate R_t . Capital K_t accumulates as $K_{t+1} = (1 - \delta)K_t + I_t$, where δ denotes the depreciation rate.

The household chooses consumption of the employed and the unemployed, C_t^e and C_t^u , purchases of investment goods I_t , and the share of eligible unemployed to take up UI benefits,

ζ_t , to maximize the expected discounted utility flows of its members:

$$W^h(e_0, \omega_0, K_0, \mathbf{Z}_0) = \max \mathbb{E}_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t [e_t U(C_t^e, N_t) + (1 - e_t) U(C_t^u, 0) - (1 - e_t) \omega_t \psi(\zeta_t)], \quad (2)$$

where $U(C_t^e, N_t)$ is the flow utility of an employed member, $U(C_t^u, 0)$ is the flow utility of an unemployed member excluding costs associated with taking up benefits, ω_t is the share of unemployed who are eligible for UI benefits, and $\psi(\zeta_t)$ denotes the household's costs per eligible unemployed from taking up UI benefits.

The budget constraint of the household is given by:

$$(1 + \tau_t^C) (e_t C_t^e + (1 - e_t) C_t^u) + I_t + \Pi_t = (1 - \tau_t^w) w_t e_t N_t + (1 - e_t) B_t + R_t K_t, \quad (3)$$

where B_t denotes after-tax benefits received per unemployed, τ_t^C is the tax rate on consumption, and τ_t^w is the tax rate on labor income. We denote by Π_t the sum of lump sum taxes and transfers and the consumption of individuals out of the labor force net of dividends from ownership of the firms.

2.1.1 Benefits

Benefits B_t received from the government may include after-tax UI benefits as well as other transfers such as supplemental nutritional assistance, welfare assistance, and health care. B_t includes only the part of the benefit that an unemployed loses upon moving to employment.³ We split B_t into two components. Non-UI benefits per unemployed, $B_{n,t}$, do not involve take-up costs in our model because the decision and timing of take-up does not generally coincide with the timing of an unemployment spell. Additionally, non-UI benefits do not generally generate tax liabilities. UI benefits per unemployed, $B_{u,t}$, have a relevant take-up margin and have been taxed at a federal level since 1979. We write after-tax benefits per unemployed as:

$$B_t = (1 + \tau_t^C) B_{n,t} + (1 - \tau_t^B) B_{u,t}, \quad (4)$$

where τ_t^B is the tax rate on UI benefits. We multiply non-UI benefits by $1 + \tau_t^C$ because most of $B_{n,t}$, including nutrition assistance and Medicaid, is not subject to consumption taxes.

³Benefits that do not depend on labor force status do not affect the value of unemployment relative to employment and are included in the variable Π_t .

Therefore, a unit of these benefits is worth $1 + \tau_t^C$ units of (taxable) consumption.

We introduce utility costs of UI take-up into the objective function of the household in order to account for a take-up rate ζ_t that in the data is significantly below one, volatile, and comoves with the benefit level.⁴ The fact that some of those eligible forgo their UI entitlement indicates either an informational friction or a take-up cost. The correlation between take-up and benefits suggests that informational frictions cannot fully explain the low take-up rate. We interpret these utility costs as foregone time and effort associated with searching for a job and providing information to the UI agency. We consider an alternative model of take-up without utility costs in our robustness exercises.

The household's total cost per eligible unemployed ψ_t depends on the fraction of those eligible that take up UI benefits ζ_t . To see how such a dependence may arise, let $\psi^m(i)$ denote the cost of UI take-up by the $i \in [0, 1]$ eligible unemployed. We order the heterogeneous costs as $d\psi^m/di > 0$. If a fraction ζ_t of eligible unemployed chooses to take up benefits, then the total utility cost of taking up benefits per eligible unemployed is:

$$\psi(\zeta_t) = \int_0^{\zeta_t} \psi^m(i) di. \quad (5)$$

The cost function $\psi(\zeta_t)$ is increasing and convex because as ζ_t increases the marginal recipient has a higher utility cost. A convex cost function $\psi(\zeta_t)$ guarantees an interior solution for ζ_t . In the empirical analysis below, we find evidence of convexity in the data.

Pre-tax benefits per unemployed from UI, $B_{u,t}$, are the product of the fraction of unemployed who are eligible for benefits ω_t , the fraction of eligible unemployed who take up benefits ζ_t , and benefits per recipient unemployed \tilde{B}_t , $B_{u,t} = \omega_t \zeta_t \tilde{B}_t = \phi_t \tilde{B}_t$, where $\phi_t = \omega_t \zeta_t$ is the fraction of unemployed receiving UI. The fraction of eligible unemployed ω_t is a state variable that depends on past eligibility, expiration policies, and the composition of the newly unemployed. In the U.S., UI eligibility depends on sufficient earnings during previous employment (monetary eligibility), the reason for employment separation (non-monetary eligibility), and the number

⁴Blank and Card (1991) find that roughly one-third of unemployed eligible for UI do not claim benefits and provide state-level evidence that the take-up rate responds to benefit levels (see also Anderson and Meyer, 1997). We find significant fluctuations in the take-up rate over the business cycle and that these fluctuations are systematically related to fluctuations in the utility value of benefits.

of weeks of UI already claimed (expiration eligibility). We model expiration eligibility with a simple process under which eligible unemployed who do not find a job in period t maintain their eligibility in period $t + 1$ with an exogenous probability ω_{t+1}^u . We combine monetary and non-monetary eligibility into a single term ω_{t+1}^e which gives the exogenous probability that a newly unemployed in period t is eligible for UI in the next period. The stock of eligible unemployed in period $t + 1$ is $u_{t+1}^E = \omega_{t+1}^u(1 - f_t)u_t^E + \omega_{t+1}^e s_t e_t$. Therefore, the fraction of eligible unemployed $\omega_{t+1} = u_{t+1}^E / u_{t+1}$ follows the law of motion:

$$\omega_{t+1} = \left(\omega_{t+1}^u (1 - f_t) \frac{u_t}{u_{t+1}} \right) \omega_t + \omega_{t+1}^e s_t \frac{e_t}{u_{t+1}}. \quad (6)$$

2.1.2 First-Order Conditions

Denoting by $\lambda_t / (1 + \tau_t^C)$ the multiplier on the budget constraint, the first-order conditions for household optimization are:

$$\lambda_t = \frac{\partial U_t^e}{\partial C_t^e} = \frac{\partial U_t^u}{\partial C_t^u}, \quad (7)$$

$$\frac{\lambda_t}{1 + \tau_t^C} = \mathbb{E}_t \beta \left(\frac{\lambda_{t+1}}{1 + \tau_{t+1}^C} \right) (R_{t+1} + 1 - \delta), \quad (8)$$

$$\psi'(\zeta_t) = \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^B}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) \lambda_t \tilde{B}_t. \quad (9)$$

Equation (7) is the risk-sharing condition, requiring that the household allocates consumption to different members to equate their marginal utilities. Equation (8) is the Euler equation for capital. Equation (9) is the first-order condition for the optimal take-up rate ζ_t . Eligible unemployed claim benefits up to the point where the marginal cost $\psi'(\zeta_t)$ equals the utility value of after-tax benefits $(1 - \tau_t^B) / (1 + \tau_t^C) \lambda_t \tilde{B}_t$. From equation (5), the marginal cost for the household $\psi'(\zeta_t)$ equals the utility cost of the marginal recipient $\psi^m(\zeta_t)$. If $\psi''(\zeta_t) > 0$, then a higher utility value of after-tax benefits incentivizes eligible unemployed with higher utility costs to take up benefits and ζ_t increases.

2.2 Derivation of the Opportunity Cost of Employment

A key object in models of equilibrium unemployment is the marginal value that the household attaches to an additional employed, $J_t^h = \partial W^h(e_t, \omega_t, K_t, \mathbf{Z}_t) / \partial e_t$. This value reflects the

willingness of the household to supply labor along the extensive margin. We express the marginal value in consumption units by dividing it by the marginal utility of consumption λ_t :

$$\frac{J_t^h}{\lambda_t} = \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^w}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) w_t N_t - \underbrace{\left[b_t + (C_t^e - C_t^u) - \frac{U_t^e - U_t^u}{\lambda_t} \right]}_{z_t = b_t + \xi_t} + (1 - s_t - f_t) \mathbb{E}_t \left(\frac{\beta \lambda_{t+1}}{\lambda_t} \right) \frac{J_{t+1}^h}{\lambda_{t+1}}. \quad (10)$$

Appendix A.1 presents details underlying the derivation of equation (10) and other results in this section.

The marginal value of an employed in terms of consumption consists of a flow value plus the expected discounted marginal value in the next period. The expected discounted marginal value appears in equation (10) because employment is a state variable and, therefore, an employment relationship created in period t is expected to also yield value in future periods.

The flow component of J_t^h consists of a flow gain from increased after-tax wage income, $w_t N_t (1 - \tau_t^w) / (1 + \tau_t^C)$, and a flow loss, z_t , associated with moving an individual from unemployment to employment. Following Hall and Milgrom (2008), we define the (flow) opportunity cost of employment, z_t , as the bracketed term in equation (10). We split z_t into two components, with b_t denoting the component related to foregone benefits and $\xi_t = z_t - b_t$ denoting the component related to the foregone value of non-working time.

Before discussing each component of z in further detail, we pause to make two comments. First, the z defined in equation (10) is an average across unemployed individuals. Heterogeneity in benefit eligibility and take-up costs generates dispersion in the opportunity cost of individual unemployed. We follow Mortensen and Nagypal (2007) and justify the aggregation by assuming that employers cannot discriminate ex-ante in choosing a potential worker with whom to bargain. Therefore, even if unemployed have heterogeneous opportunity costs, the vacancy creation decision of firms depends on the average opportunity cost over the set of unemployed. This makes the average z the relevant object for labor market fluctuations.

Second, our measurement of z proceeds directly from the bracketed term in equation (10) without imposing any additional structure. That is, our approach imposes the minimum structure necessary to derive z as a function of observable variables in the data (for example,

consumption, hours, benefits, and take-up rates). Measurement of z then does not require specifying what model generates these variables. We take this minimalist approach because z is an important object in many models of the labor market.

2.2.1 Opportunity Cost of Employment: Benefits

The opportunity cost of employment related to benefits is given by:

$$b_t = B_{n,t} + B_{u,t} \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^B}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha} \right) \left[1 - \mathbb{E}_t \left(\frac{\beta \lambda_{t+1} \left(\frac{1 - \tau_{t+1}^B}{1 + \tau_{t+1}^C} \right) \tilde{B}_{t+1} \zeta_{t+1}}{\lambda_t \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^B}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) \tilde{B}_t \zeta_t} \right) \left(\frac{\omega_{t+1}^e}{\omega_t} - \omega_{t+1}^u \right) \Gamma_{t+1} \right], \quad (11)$$

where $\alpha = \psi'(\zeta_t)\zeta_t/\psi(\zeta_t) > 1$ and $\Gamma_{t+1} = \left(\frac{s_t(1-f_t)}{1-e_{t+1}} \right) \left(1 - \beta \frac{1+\tau_t^C}{1+\tau_{t+1}^C} \frac{\lambda_{t+1}}{\lambda_t} \omega_{t+1}^u (1-f_t) \frac{u_t}{u_{t+1}} \right)^{-1} > 0$. The first term in equation (11) for b_t is simply non-UI benefits per unemployed, $B_{n,t}$. The second term consists of pre-tax UI benefits per unemployed $B_{u,t}$, multiplied by the tax wedge $(1 - \tau_t^B) / (1 + \tau_t^C)$, an adjustment for the disutility of take-up $(1 - 1/\alpha)$, and an adjustment for benefits expiration (the bracketed term).

The term $(1 - 1/\alpha)$ captures the fact that the utility value from receiving UI benefits is lower than the monetary value of UI benefits. The average utility value per recipient equals the benefit per recipient less the average utility cost per recipient, $(1 - \tau_t^B) \lambda_t \tilde{B}_t / (1 + \tau_t^C) - \psi(\zeta_t)/\zeta_t$. Using the first-order condition (9), the average utility value is equivalently given by the difference between the marginal and the average cost, $\psi'(\zeta_t) - \psi(\zeta_t)/\zeta_t$. This difference depends on the elasticity of the cost function $\alpha = \psi'(\zeta_t)\zeta_t/\psi(\zeta_t)$. With a convex $\psi(\zeta_t)$ function, we have $\alpha > 1$. If this elasticity is close to one, average cost per recipient is roughly constant and there is a small utility value from receiving benefits as the household always incurs a cost per recipient that approximately equals the benefit per recipient. The greater is this elasticity, the lower is the average relative to the marginal cost per recipient and the larger is the utility value that the household receives from benefits.

The term in brackets captures an adjustment for the expiration of UI benefits. This term is less than one when the probability that newly separated workers receive benefits, ω_{t+1}^e , exceeds the probability that previously eligible workers continue to receive benefits, $\omega_{t+1}^u \omega_t$. Intuitively, increasing employment in the current period entitles workers to future benefits which lowers

the opportunity cost. The term Γ_{t+1} partly captures the dynamics of this effect over time, since increasing employment in the current period affects the whole path of future eligibility.

2.2.2 Opportunity Cost of Employment: Value of Non-Working Time

The second component of the opportunity cost of employment, ξ , results from consumption and work differences between employed and unemployed. It is useful to write it as:

$$\xi_t = \frac{[U(C_t^u, 0) - \lambda_t C_t^u] - [U(C_t^e, N_t) - \lambda_t C_t^e]}{\lambda_t}. \quad (12)$$

The first term in the numerator, $U_t^u - \lambda_t C_t^u$, is the total utility of the unemployed less the utility of the unemployed from consumption. It has the interpretation of the utility the unemployed derive solely from non-working time. Similarly, the term $U_t^e - \lambda_t C_t^e$ represents the utility of the employed from non-working time. The difference between the two terms represents the additional utility the household obtains from non-working time when moving an individual from employment to unemployment. The denominator of ξ_t is the common marginal utility of consumption. Therefore, ξ_t represents the value of non-working time in units of consumption.

The expression for ξ_t resembles the marginal rate of substitution between non-working time and consumption in the RBC model, with the difference being that the additional value of non-working time is calculated along the extensive margin. As in the RBC model, ξ_t is procyclical. First, when λ_t rises in recessions, the value of earning income that can be used for consumption rises relative to the value of non-working time. Second, N_t gives the difference in non-working time between the unemployed and the employed. When N_t falls in recessions, the contribution of the unemployed relative to the employed to household utility declines. In sum, the household values most the contribution of the employed (who generate higher wage income) relative to that of the unemployed (who have higher non-working time) during recessions, when consumption is lower and the difference in non-working time between employed and unemployed is smaller.

2.2.3 Comparison to the MP Literature

The MP literature typically assumes a constant $z_t = z$. If the value of benefits does not fluctuate, $b_t = b$, then z_t is constant if ξ_t is constant. We describe two sets of restrictions on

utility which generate a constant ξ :

1. No disutility from hours worked and utility functions that do not depend on employment status (for example, Shimer, 2005):

$$U_t^s = U(C_t^s), s \in \{e, u\} \implies C_t^e = C_t^u, U_t^e = U_t^u \implies \xi_t = 0 \implies z_t = b.$$

2. Linearity in consumption, separability, and constant hours per worker N (for example, Hagedorn and Manovskii, 2008):

$$U_t^e = C_t^e - v(N), U_t^u = C_t^u \implies \xi_t = v(N) \implies z_t = b + v(N).$$

In general, the component ξ_t will vary over time if N_t enters as an argument into the utility function and either (i) N_t varies over time or (ii) utility is not linear in consumption.

2.3 Comparison to Other Models

Our baseline model adopts assumptions from the household block of the standard MP/RBC model. The broad popularity of this model as well as its analytical elegance make it the natural starting point for analyzing z .⁵ However, the same z defined in equation (10) arises in other contexts. To make this point clear, we highlight five assumptions of the benchmark model which we later relax or change:

1. **Ex-ante homogeneous workers.** Section 6 applies our measurement exercise to heterogeneous groups defined along observable characteristics.
2. **Wage setting mechanism.** Sections 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate how z affects equilibrium unemployment under Nash bargaining and alternating-offer wage bargaining respectively.
3. **Random search.** Section 7.3 shows that z plays an equivalent role in a model with directed search and wage posting.

⁵Our model follows much of the literature in abstracting from the labor force participation margin. This abstraction omits potentially important flows into and out of participation and affects our measurement insofar as people move directly from non-participation to employment. Allowing for endogenous labor force participation would not, however, affect our expression for z . For example, allowing non-employed workers to choose between unemployment and non-participation would add a first-order condition to the model requiring indifference between the two states. The marginal value of adding an employed would still be given by equation (10).

4. **Employment as a state variable.** Section 7.4 derives the same z in the indivisible labor model of Hansen (1985) and Rogerson (1988) in which households can freely adjust employment at any point of time.
5. **Perfect insurance markets for idiosyncratic employment risks.** Section 7.5 derives a closely related measure of the opportunity cost in a model with incomplete asset markets.

3 Data and Measurement

To generate a time series of z , we require time series of variables such as benefits per unemployed, eligibility and take-up rates, consumption expenditure of the employed and the unemployed, hours per worker, and taxes. We construct such a dataset using U.S. data at quarterly frequency between 1961(1) and 2012(4), drawing on microdata from the CPS, SIPP, CE, PSID, IRS Public Use Files, published series from the NIPA, BLS, and various other government agencies, and historical data collected from print issues of the Economic Report of the President. Appendix B.1 provides greater detail on the source data.

3.1 Benefits

We depart from the literature in measuring b in three significant ways. First, following the aggregation logic outlined above, we measure the average benefit across all unemployed, rather than statutory benefit rates. This matters because, on average, only about 40 percent of unemployed actually receive UI. Second, the social safety net includes a number of other programs such as supplemental nutritional assistance payments (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), welfare assistance (TANF, formerly AFDC), and health care (Medicaid). Income from all of these programs belongs in $B_{n,t}$ to the extent that unemployment status correlates with receipt of these benefits. Third, for UI benefits we differentiate between monetary benefits per unemployed $B_{u,t}$ and the part of these benefits associated with the opportunity cost of employment. As equation (11) shows, the latter deviate from $B_{u,t}$ because of taxes, utility costs associated with taking up benefits, and expiration policies.

Our empirical approach to measuring the monetary value of benefits combines micro survey data with program administrative data. Let $B_{k,t}$ denote benefits per unemployed in each program $k \in \{\text{UI, SNAP, AFDC/TANF, Medicaid}\}$.⁶ We measure $B_{k,t}$ as:

$$B_{k,t} = \left(\frac{(\text{survey dollars tied to unemployment status})_{k,t}}{(\text{total survey dollars})_{k,t}} \right) \left(\frac{(\text{total administrative dollars})_{k,t}}{(\text{number of unemployed})_t} \right). \quad (13)$$

We use the micro data to estimate the term in the first parentheses in equation (13), the fraction of total program spending in the survey that depends on unemployment status, and call this ratio $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$. We then multiply $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$ by the ratio of dollars from program administrative data to the number of unemployed (the term in the second parentheses). We adjust the survey estimate of dollars tied to unemployment status by the ratio of administrative to survey dollars to correct for the fact that program benefits in surveys are underreported (Meyer, Mok, and Sullivan, 2009).

We now explain and implement our procedure to estimate $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$. Define $y_{k,i,t}$ as income from category k received by household or person i . We use the microdata to estimate the change in $y_{k,i,t}$ following an employment status change. To solve the time aggregation problem that arises because an individual may spend part of the reporting period employed and part unemployed, we model directly the instantaneous income of type k for an individual with labor force status $s \in \{e, u\}$. This is given by:

$$y_{k,i,t}^s = \phi_k \mathbf{X}_i + y_{k,t}^e + \beta_{k,t} \mathbb{I}\{s_{i,t} = u\} + \epsilon_{k,i,t}, \quad (14)$$

where \mathbf{X}_i denotes a vector of individual characteristics, $y_{k,t}^e$ the income of a hypothetical employed, and $\mathbb{I}\{s_{i,t} = u\}$ is an indicator function taking the value of one if the individual is unemployed at time t . According to this process, income from program k increases discretely by $\beta_{k,t}$ during an unemployment spell. Integrating over the reporting period and taking first differences to eliminate the individual fixed effect yields:

$$\Delta y_{k,i,t} = \beta_{k,t}^0 + \beta_{k,t} \Delta D_{i,t}^u + \Delta \beta_{k,t} D_{i,t-1}^u + \Delta \epsilon_{k,i,t}, \quad (15)$$

⁶We also investigated the importance of housing subsidies. We found their importance quantitatively trivial and, therefore, omit them from the analysis.

where $\beta_{k,t}^0 = \Delta y_{k,t}^e$ and the variable $D_{i,t}^u$ measures the fraction of the reporting period that an individual spends as unemployed.

By definition, $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$ is:

$$B_{k,t}^{\text{share}} = \frac{(\text{survey dollars tied to unemployment status})_{k,t}}{(\text{total survey dollars})_{k,t}} = \beta_{k,t} \frac{\sum_i \omega_{i,t} D_{i,t}^u}{\sum_i \omega_{i,t} y_{k,i,t}}, \quad (16)$$

where $\omega_{i,t}$ is the survey sampling weight for individual i in period t . Substituting equation (16) into equation (15) gives a direct estimate of $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$ from the regression:

$$\Delta y_{k,i,t} = \beta_{k,t}^0 + B_{k,t}^{\text{share}} \Delta \tilde{D}_{i,t} + \Delta \beta_{k,t} D_{i,t-1}^u + \Delta \epsilon_{k,i,t}, \quad (17)$$

where $\Delta \tilde{D}_{i,t} = \Delta D_{i,t}^u \sum_i \omega_{i,t} y_{k,i,t} / \sum_i \omega_{i,t} D_{i,t}^u$.

We implement equation (17) using both the March CPS with households matched across consecutive years starting in 1989 and the SIPP starting in 1996. Appendix B.1 describes the surveys and our sample construction. In each survey, we construct a measure of unemployment at the individual level that mimics the BLS U-3 definition. The U-3 definition of unemployment counts an individual as working if he had a job during the week containing the 12th of the month (the survey reference week) and as in the labor force if he worked during the reference week, spent the week on temporary layoff, or had any search in the previous four weeks.⁷

We aggregate unemployment and income up to the level at which the benefits program is administered. In particular, in the regressions with UI income as the dependent variable, the unit of observation is the individual and we cluster standard errors at the household level. In regressions for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, the unit of observation is the family average of unemployment and the family total of income. Finally, for each benefit category we exclude observations with imputed benefit amounts in that category.

⁷In the March Supplement, we count an individual as in the labor force during the previous year only for those weeks where the individual reports working, being on temporary layoff, or actually searching. In the SIPP, we count an individual as employed if he worked in any week of the month, rather than only if he worked during the BLS survey reference week. Accordingly, we define the fraction of time an individual is unemployed as:

$$D_{i,t}^{u,\text{CPS}} = \left[\frac{\text{weeks searching or on temporary layoff in year } t}{\text{weeks in the labor force in year } t} \right]_i,$$

$$D_{i,t}^{u,\text{SIPP}} = \frac{1}{4} \sum_{m=1}^4 \mathbb{I} \left\{ [\text{non-employed, at least 1 week of search or layoff}]_{i,t-m} \right\}.$$

Table 1: Share of Government Program Benefits Belonging to B

	UI	SNAP	TANF	Medicaid
CPS (1989-2013)				
B^{share}	0.909	0.064	0.065	0.021
Standard error	(0.020)	(0.005)	(0.011)	(0.003)
Observations	483,686	273,731	318,611	268,689
SIPP (1996-2013)				
B^{share}	0.923	0.048	0.033	
Standard error	(0.015)	(0.002)	(0.005)	
Observations	1,560,244	1,000,913	1,027,544	
Mean of B^{share} (CPS and SIPP)	0.916	0.056	0.049	0.021

The table reports summary statistics based on OLS regressions of equation (17), where B^{share} is defined in equation (16). The regressions exclude observations with imputed income in the category and are weighted using sampling weights in each year, with the weights normalized such that all years receive equal weight. Standard errors are based on heteroskedastic robust (CPS, non-UI), heteroskedastic robust and clustered by family (CPS, UI), or heteroskedastic robust and clustered by household (SIPP) variance matrix.

Table 1 reports results based on OLS regressions of equation (17) that constrain $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$ to be constant over time.⁸ For UI, the average B^{share} is 0.916. If only unemployed persons received UI, then this share would equal one. In fact, in many states individuals with part-time unemployment can retain eligibility for UI and some individuals report claiming UI without exerting any search effort. Our estimate of the share of UI income accruing to non-unemployed is 8.4 percent. This estimate accords well with audits conducted by the Department of Labor which find that roughly 10 percent of UI payments go to ineligible recipients.

Only roughly five percent of SNAP and TANF and two percent of Medicaid spending appear in $B_{n,t}$. We find these estimates reasonable. Roughly two-thirds of Medicaid payments accrue to persons who are over 65, blind, or disabled (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2011, Table II.4). Moreover, even prior to implementation of the Affordable Care Act, all states had income limits for coverage of children of at least 100 percent of the poverty line and half

⁸We find that the correlation between the cyclical component of an estimated time-varying $B_{k,t}^{\text{share}}$ and the cyclical component of the unemployment rate is on average (across programs k and surveys) equal to 0.07.

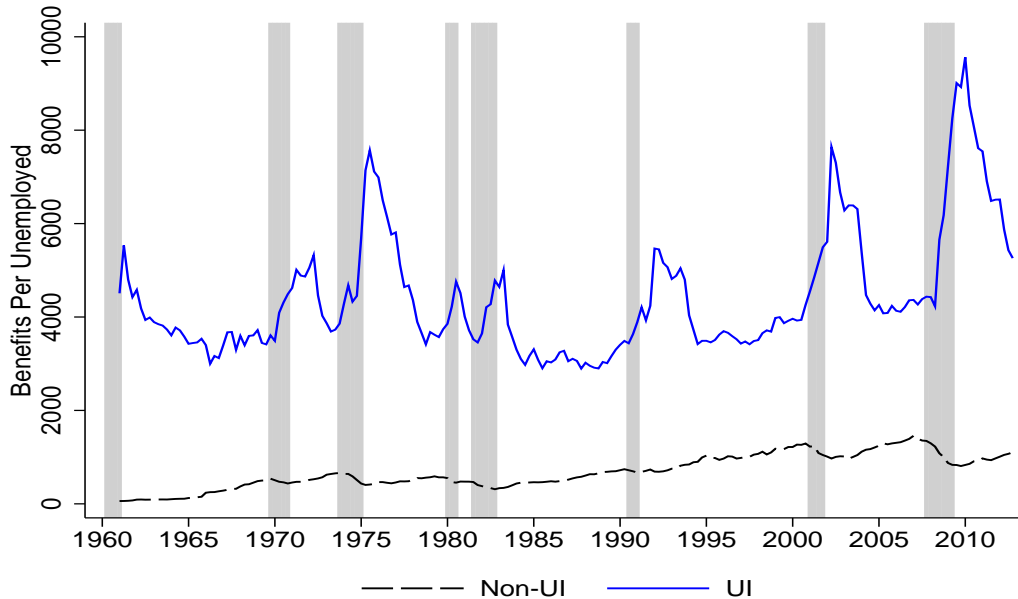


Figure 1: Time Series of Benefits Per Unemployed

of states provided at least partial coverage to working adults with incomes at the poverty line (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2013). For SNAP, tabulations from the monthly quality control files provided by Mathematica indicate that no more than one-quarter of SNAP benefits go to households with at least one member unemployed. Given statutory phase-out rates and deductions, 5 percent appears as a reasonable estimate.

To summarize, to measure $B_{n,t}$ and $B_{u,t}$ we first use micro survey data to estimate the share of each program’s total spending associated with unemployment, B_k^{share} . We then apply this share to the total spending observed in administrative data. As a result, $B_{n,t}$ and $B_{u,t}$ inherit directly the cyclical properties of the program administrative data. Although the B_k^{share} ’s for the non-UI programs are small, the standard errors strongly indicate that they are not zero. We plot the resulting time series of $B_{n,t}$ and $B_{u,t}$ in constant 2009 dollars in Figure 1.

3.2 Eligibility, Take-Up Rate, and UI Recipients

We now discuss the construction of the non-tax part of the remainder of b in equation (11). Consistently with our unemployment variable (BLS series LNS13000000), the number of employed comes from the monthly CPS (BLS series LNS12000000). With a constant labor force,

the number of newly unemployed workers equals the product of the previous period’s separation rate s_{t-1} and stock of employed workers e_{t-1} . We therefore define the separation rate s_t at quarterly frequency as the ratio of the number of workers unemployed for fewer than 15 weeks in quarter $t + 1$ (using the sum of BLS series LNS13008397 and LNS13025701) to the number of employed workers in t . The separation rate and the unemployment rate allow us to calculate the job-finding rate f_t from the law of motion for unemployment $u_{t+1} = u_t(1 - f_t) + s_t(1 - u_t)$.⁹

We next construct estimates of UI benefits per recipient \tilde{B}_t , the fraction of unemployed receiving UI benefits ϕ_t , the fraction of eligible unemployed ω_t , and the fraction of eligible who take up benefits ζ_t . The Department of Labor provides data on the number of UI recipients in all tiers (state regular benefits, extended benefits, and federal emergency benefits) beginning in 1986. We extend this series back to 1961 using data from Statistical Appendix B of the Economic Report of the President. Dividing the NIPA total of UI benefits paid (Table 2.6, line 21) by the number of UI recipients gives a time series of UI benefits per recipient \tilde{B}_t . The fraction of unemployed receiving benefits is $\phi_t = B_{u,t}/\tilde{B}_t$, where $B_{u,t}$ is our estimate of UI benefits per unemployed from Section 3.1.

We estimate ω_t using its law of motion in equation (6) and data on u_t , s_t , f_t , ω_t^e , and ω_t^u . We measure the probability that a newly unemployed is eligible for UI, ω_t^e , using the fact that workers who quit their jobs and new labor force entrants are ineligible for UI. From the CPS basic monthly microdata, we construct the number of unemployed for less than five weeks who report “job loser” as their reason for unemployment. We add to this total the product of the number of re-entrants who have worked in the past 12 months and the 6 month lag of the fraction of job losers among those moving from employment to unemployment. Dividing by the number of total unemployed for less than five weeks then gives an estimate of the fraction of the newly unemployed that satisfy non-monetary eligibility. We tie cyclical movements of ω_t^e

⁹We recognize the point of Shimer (2012) that this procedure understates the amount of gross flows between unemployment and employment because some workers will separate and find a new job within the period. However, a discrete time calibration must accept this shortcoming if both the law of motion for unemployment holds and the share of newly unemployed matches the share in the data. For our purposes, matching the share of newly unemployed matters more than matching the level of gross flows. Estimating s_t and f_t at a monthly frequency, which should substantially mitigate the bias from within-period flows, and then averaging at the quarterly level makes little difference for our results.

to cyclical movements in this fraction.¹⁰ We center ω_t^e around 0.75 to target a mean take-up rate ζ_t of roughly 0.65.

We set ω_t^u , the probability that an unemployed remains eligible, such that the expected potential duration of eligibility equals the national maximum of weeks eligible, adjusted for the fact that not every unemployed individual has the maximal potential duration (see Appendix B.1 for further details). Evaluating equation (6) using the time series of u_t , s_t , f_t , ω_t^e , and ω_t^u gives our time series of eligibility ω_t . The take-up rate equals $\zeta_t = \phi_t/\omega_t$.

3.3 Consumption

Measurement of the ξ component of the opportunity cost requires time series of consumptions of the employed C_t^e and the unemployed C_t^u . Let $s \in \{e, u, n, r\}$ denote persons 16 years or older who are employed, unemployed, out of the labor force but of working age (16-64), and older than 65 years old, respectively. Let π_t^s be the fraction of the population belonging in each group. Time series of π_t^s come directly from published tabulations by the BLS.

Denote by C_t^s consumption expenditures on non-durables and non-housing services per member of group s . We have the adding-up identity:

$$\pi_t^e C_t^e + \pi_t^u C_t^u + \pi_t^n C_t^n + \pi_t^r C_t^r = C_t^{\text{NIPA}}, \quad (18)$$

where C_t^{NIPA} is NIPA consumption of non-durable and non-housing services per person 16 years or older. Defining $\gamma_t^s = C_t^s/C_t^e$ as the ratio of consumption in status s to consumption when employed, we solve equation (18) for the consumption of an employed:

$$C_t^e = \frac{C_t^{\text{NIPA}}}{\sum_s \pi_t^s \gamma_t^s}. \quad (19)$$

Equation (19) together with estimates of the consumption ratios γ_t^s provide the basis for deriving the time series of consumptions for the employed and unemployed and for calibrating the utility functions in Section 4.

¹⁰We do not have information on monetary eligibility at cyclical frequencies. We conjecture that monetary eligibility is procyclical, as newly unemployed transition from weaker labor markets during recessions. In that case, ignoring monetary eligibility leads us to understate the volatility of the take-up rate and ultimately of z . Prior to 1968, we impute the share of newly unemployed that satisfy non-monetary eligibility using the fitted values from a regression of the share on leads and lags of the unemployment rate and of the fraction of job losers among all durations of unemployed.

We now turn to our estimates of γ_t^s . Let $C_{i,k,t}^s$ denote the instantaneous expenditure on consumption category k of an individual i in group s at time t . When employed, individual i has expenditure $C_{i,k,t}^e = \exp\{\phi_{k,t}\mathbf{X}_{i,t} + \epsilon_{k,i,t}\}\tilde{C}_{k,t}$, where $\mathbf{X}_{i,t}$ denotes a vector of demographic characteristics, $\phi_{k,t}$ a vector of parameters, $\epsilon_{k,i,t}$ a mean zero idiosyncratic component uncorrelated with employment status, and $\tilde{C}_{k,t}$ a base level of consumption. For every $s \in \{e, u, n, r\}$, we use the definition of $\gamma_{k,t}^s$ and obtain:

$$C_{k,i,t}^s = \gamma_{k,t}^s \exp\{\phi_{k,t}\mathbf{X}_{i,t} + \epsilon_{k,i,t}\}\tilde{C}_{k,t}. \quad (20)$$

For a working age individual with potential status e , u , or n , we integrate over the reporting period and take logs to obtain:

$$\ln C_{k,i,t} = \gamma_{k,t}^0 + \phi_{k,t}\mathbf{X}_{i,t} + (\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^u - 1)D_{i,t}^u + (\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^n - 1)D_{i,t}^n + \epsilon_{k,i,t}, \quad (21)$$

where $\gamma_{k,t}^0 = \ln \tilde{C}_{k,t}$ and the variables $D_{i,t}^u$ and $D_{i,t}^n$ measure the fraction of time an individual spends as unemployed and out of the labor force, respectively.¹¹ In equation (21), $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s - 1$ denotes the difference between the log consumption of an individual in group s and the log consumption of an employed. Therefore, to recover the actual consumption ratios $\gamma_{k,t}^s$ from the log point differences we use the formula $\gamma_{k,t}^s = \exp(\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s - 1)$.

We begin by estimating equation (21) using the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE). The CE asks respondents for the number of weeks worked over the previous year, but does not ask questions about search activity while not working. We set $D_{i,t}^n = 1$ if the respondent reports zero weeks worked over the previous year and does not give “unable to find job” as the reason for not working. For the rest of the respondents, we define $D_{i,t}^u = 1 - (\text{weeks worked})_{i,t}/52$. We average $D_{i,t}^u$ and $D_{i,t}^n$ at the household level. To minimize inclusion of households with adults transitioning out of the labor force within the reporting year, we restrict the sample to

¹¹In deriving our estimating equation we replace the term $\ln\left[1 - \sum_s (1 - \gamma_{k,t}^s)D_{i,t}^s\right]$ with $\sum_s D_{i,t}^s (\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s - 1)$, where the coefficients $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s$ are related to the coefficients $\gamma_{k,t}^s$ and to terms of order higher than one in the linear approximation of the left-hand side around $\gamma_{k,t}^s = 1, \forall s$. Derivations for the estimating equation for γ_t^r proceed analogously. The derivation of equation (21) assumes that $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^u$ does not vary with unemployment duration $D_{i,t}^u$. In unreported regressions, we have estimated $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^u$ non-parametrically by grouping households into bins of weeks unemployed. Our estimated $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^u$ for each bin indicates a duration-independent $\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^u$. This finding supports the assumption in the model that the instantaneous consumption of the unemployed does not depend on duration.

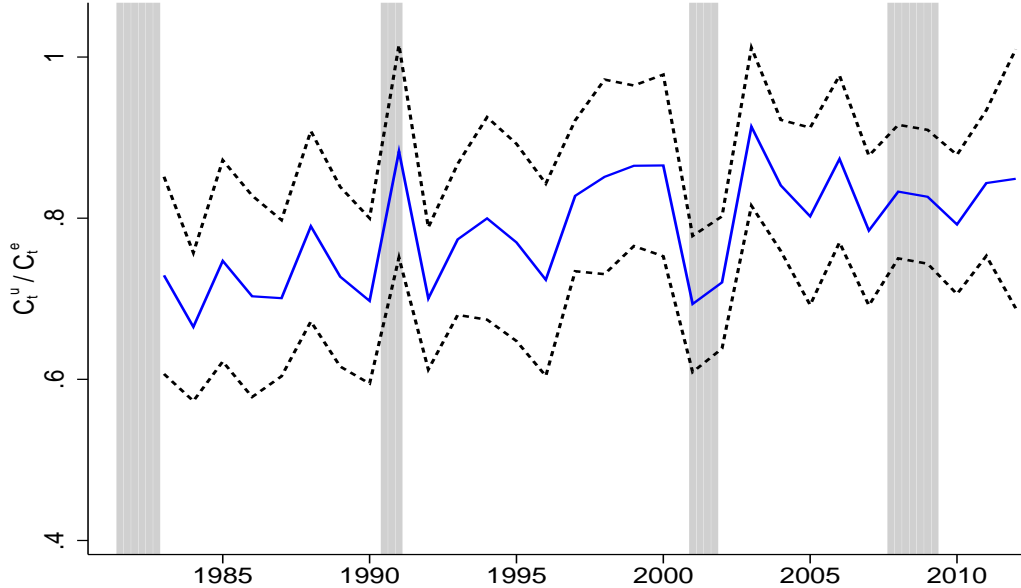


Figure 2: Decline in Nondurables and Services Upon Unemployment

Notes: The solid line reports the estimates of $\gamma_t^u = \exp(\tilde{\gamma}_{u,t} - 1)$, where $\tilde{\gamma}_{u,t}$ is estimated from equation (21) using data from the CE. The dotted lines give 95 percent confidence interval bands based on robust standard errors. Regressions are weighted using survey sampling weights. See footnote 12 for included covariates.

households with a head age 30 to 55 at the time of the final interview. We include a rich set of controls in $\mathbf{X}_{i,t}$ to control for taste shocks and ex-ante permanent income that potentially could correlate with an individual's employment status.¹²

We focus our discussion of results on the unemployment margin because γ^u will directly inform our calibration of preferences. Figure 2 reports γ^u by year, for the aggregate category of nondurable goods and services, less housing, health, and education. The mean of γ^u implies a 21 percent decline in expenditure on nondurable goods and services during unemployment. The series does not exhibit any apparent cyclicity, with a correlation between the cyclical components of γ^u and the unemployment rate of -0.03. We also test for cyclicity parametrically by interacting $D_{i,t}^u$ in equation (21) with both the state and national unemployment rates and again cannot reject the hypothesis that the consumption ratio is acyclical (see Table 2).

¹²These controls include: the mean age of the household head and spouse; the mean age squared; the marital status; an indicator variable for Caucasian or not; indicator variables for four categories of education of the household head (less than high school, high school diploma, some college, college degree) interacted with year; indicator variables for owning a house without a mortgage, owning a house with a mortgage, or renting a house, interacted with year; indicator variables for quantiles of the value of the home conditional on owning, by region and year, interacted with year; a binary variable for having positive financial assets; family size; and family size squared.

Table 2: Relative Expenditure of the Unemployed $\tilde{\gamma}^u$

	Total food		Food, clothing recreation, vacation		Nondurables and services
	CE	PSID	CE	PSID	CE
$\tilde{\gamma}^u$	0.79	0.86	0.72	0.73	0.77
	(0.013)	(0.045)	(0.015)	(0.096)	(0.012)
$p_{val}(\tilde{\gamma}^u \perp U^{state}, U^{nat.})$	0.88	0.42	0.89	0.25	0.63
Observations	53,413	31,616	53,413	4,871	53,413

Notes: The parameter $\tilde{\gamma}^u$ gives the log point difference between the expenditure of an unemployed and the expenditure of an employed. The CE columns cover reporting years 1983-2012. The PSID columns cover reporting years 1983-86, 1989-1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 for food and years 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 for clothing, recreation, and vacations. Equation (21) is used for the CE and equation (22) is used for the PSID. Regressions are weighted using sampling weights. Standard errors are in parentheses and are based on heteroskedastic robust (CE) or heteroskedastic robust and clustered by household head (PSID) variance matrix. $p_{val}(\tilde{\gamma}^u \perp U^{state}, U^{nat.})$ reports the p -value of a joint test that interacting $D_{i,t}^u$ with the state and national unemployment rates in equation (21) or (22) yields coefficients equal to zero.

The cross-sectional identification in equation (21) relies on the richness of the control variables to absorb differences in ex-ante permanent income. We complement this approach with panel regressions relying on within household changes in consumption. First differencing equation (21) to remove the individual fixed effect we obtain:¹³

$$\Delta \ln C_{k,i,t} = \Delta \gamma_{k,t}^0 + \sum_{s \in \{u,n\}} [(\tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s - 1) \Delta D_{i,t}^s + \Delta \tilde{\gamma}_{k,t}^s D_{i,t-1}^s] + \Delta \epsilon_{i,k,t}, \quad (22)$$

We use the panel dimension of the PSID to estimate equation (22).¹⁴ Table 2 reports estimates of $\tilde{\gamma}_k^u$ from equation (21) for the CE and from equation (22) for the PSID. For total food, the PSID suggests a somewhat larger $\tilde{\gamma}_k^u$ than the CE, but this may reflect an upward bias in the PSID.¹⁵ We also exploit the new questions in the PSID covering broader

¹³In deriving equation (22), we impose that $\phi_{k,t} = \phi_k$. In unreported results, we have also estimated equation (22) by interacting a set of controls with year categorical variables and find that the PSID results in Table 2 remain essentially unchanged.

¹⁴The PSID asks detailed questions about labor force status. We use these to construct the fraction of the reporting period in unemployment in a manner analogous to the BLS U-3 definition, $D_{i,t}^u = \left[\frac{\text{weeks searching or on temporary layoff in year } t}{\text{weeks in the labor force in year } t} \right]_i$. This more precise definition of unemployment constitutes an additional dimension along which the PSID provides robustness for the CE results.

¹⁵The PSID asks about ‘‘usual’’ weekly expenditure on food at home and then about food away from home without prompting a frequency. These questions leave some ambiguity as to whether the food expenditure questions apply to the time of the interview or to the previous year. We follow the recent literature in mapping the questions to the previous year’s expenditure (Blundell, Pistaferri, and Preston, 2008). However, if some respondents’

measures of consumption expenditure. Here the estimated $\tilde{\gamma}_k^u$ from the PSID appears nearly indistinguishable from the $\tilde{\gamma}_k^u$ from the CE for the same set of categories. The overall similarity between the CE and the PSID results suggest that the control variables in $\mathbf{X}_{i,t}$ proxy well for differences in ex-ante permanent income. Because of non-homotheticities across consumption categories, our preferred results come from the CE for total nondurable goods and services, reported in the last column of the table.

Our estimate of the consumption drop upon unemployment lies comfortably within the range of those found in previous studies. In an early assessment, Burgess, Kingston, St. Louis, and Sloane (1981) report in a survey of UI recipients after five weeks of unemployment that expenditure on the categories of food, clothing, entertainment, and travel fell by 25.7 percent relative to before the unemployment spell. Gruber (1997) reports a decline in food expenditure of 6.8 percent in the PSID for the period up to 1987. The difference between his results and ours mostly stems from the removal of households with a threefold change in consumption from his sample. Using a survey of Canadians unemployed for six months that asks about total expenditure over the previous month as well as expenditure in the month before unemployment, Browning and Crossley (2001) find a mean decline of 14 percent. Aguiar and Hurst (2005) report a 19 percent decline in food expenditure among the unemployed using scanner data. Stephens (2004) conducts an analysis of the effects of job loss on consumption in the Health and Retirement Survey (HRS) and the PSID and finds a decline in expenditure on food of between 12 (PSID) and 15 (HRS) percent when an individual experiences a job loss between interviews. Finally, using cross-sectional variation in the PSID, Saporta-Eksten (2014) estimates an 8 percent decline in consumption expenditure on selected categories in the year in which a job loss occurs. However, Saporta-Eksten (2014) does not condition on the fraction of the year

interpret the question as referencing food expenditure at the time of the interview, the resulting measurement error in unemployment status would bias the estimated $\tilde{\gamma}_k$ in the PSID regressions upward. Additionally, while the CE asks about detailed categories every three months, the PSID asks about the broad categories of food at home and food away and over a longer recall period. Hence even if respondents interpret the question as referring to the previous year, recall bias may cause their response to partly reflect their current consumption patterns. The newer PSID expenditure questions on clothing, recreation, and vacation explicitly reference the previous year as the reporting period. The smaller difference between CE and PSID for these categories is consistent with reference period ambiguity introducing a bias into the PSID food results.

spent out of work. To convert the 8 percent estimate into an instantaneous consumption decline requires adjusting by the fraction of the year spent jobless. Assuming an average unemployment duration of 17 weeks would imply a consumption decline of roughly 24 percent, in line with our estimate. A similar type of adjustment applies to the Stephens (2004) estimate.

We apply our estimates of the consumption ratios in two steps. First, the calibration of the preference parameters in Section 4 requires data on the mean level of C_t^e (denoted by C^e) and the mean level of C_t^u (denoted by C^u). For these means, we impose constancy of the consumption ratios $\gamma_t^s = \gamma^s$ in equation (19) and obtain a time series for C_t^e and $C_t^u = \gamma^u C_t^e$.¹⁶ We then define $C^e = (1/T) \sum_t C_t^e$ and $C^u = (1/T) \sum_t C_t^u$. Second, obtaining a time series of ξ_t requires a time series of C_t^e and C_t^u . We jointly impose the adding-up constraint for total consumption in equation (18) and the risk-sharing condition in equation (7) to solve for the time series of C_t^e and C_t^u . This approach ensures the internal consistency of our estimated parameters with the model's analog of the first-order condition for risk sharing in the data. The time-varying consumption ratio C_t^u/C_t^e implied by this procedure is extremely smooth, falling comfortably in the confidence interval of the estimated γ_t^u .¹⁷

3.4 Hours Per Worker

We measure hours per worker N_t as the average weekly hours reported in the basic monthly CPS microdata by the employed. These data start in 1968. We extend the series back to 1961 and fill in some missing months between 1968 and 1975 using data from Cociuba, Prescott, and Ueberfeldt (2012). We seasonally adjust the series by first estimating an ARMA model including categorical variables for each month of the year and months in which each of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Labor Day, Columbus Day, or Veteran's Day occurred during the CPS reference week. Then we apply a multi-step moving average filter similar to that contained in

¹⁶We set $\gamma^u = 0.793$, the value from estimating equation (21) for a constant γ^u . For the other categories, we estimate $\gamma^n = 0.743$ and $\gamma^r = 0.940$. Similarly to our estimates of γ^u , we cannot reject acyclicity of these consumption ratios. We also use the same time-invariant $\gamma^n = 0.743$ and $\gamma^r = 0.940$ when estimating the time series of C_t^e and C_t^u .

¹⁷The model-generated consumption ratio is mildly countercyclical because hours per worker are procyclical and consumption and non-working time are substitutes in the utility functions we consider. Alternatively, imposing constancy of the ratio $C_t^u/C_t^e = \gamma^u = 0.793$ and using this constant ratio and equation (18) to solve for the time paths of C_t^e and C_t^u does not change the results reported in Section 5.

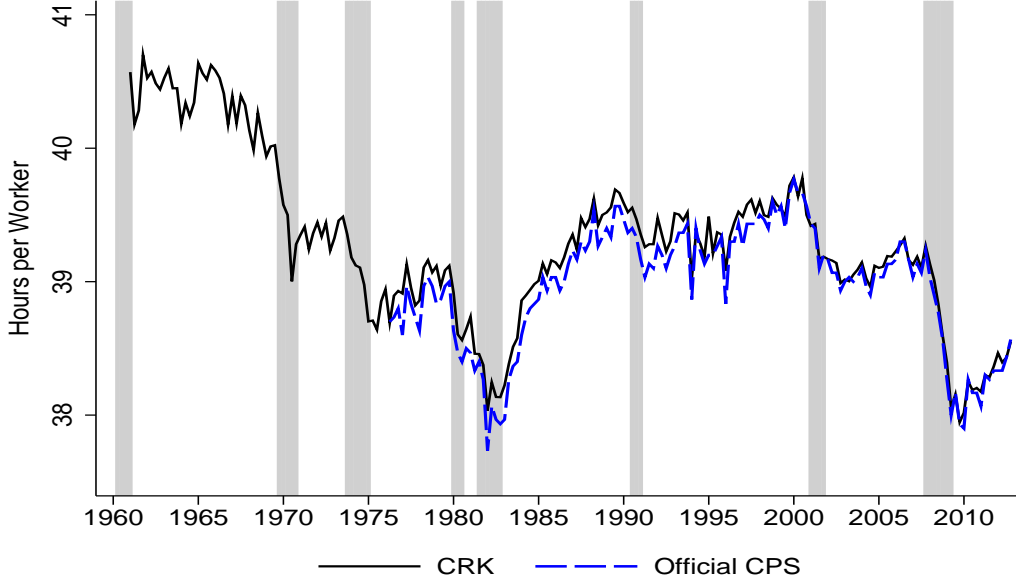


Figure 3: Hours Per Worker

X-11. Appendix B.1 provides further details on the seasonal adjustment.

Figure 3 shows the resulting hours series (“CRK”). Hours per worker are procyclical. The figure also shows the official BLS series from the CPS for comparison. During the overlapping period 1976-2012, the cyclical component of our series “CRK” displays a correlation of 0.96 with the “Official CPS” series.

3.5 Taxes

We measure the tax rates τ_t^w and τ_t^B as the population average of effective tax rates on labor compensation and UI benefits, respectively. For tax unit i , let income $y_{i,t} = y_{s,i,t} + y_{n,i,t} + y_{B,i,t} + y_{o,i,t}$ be the sum of taxable income from wages and salaries $y_{s,i,t}$, non-taxable labor compensation (such as health insurance) $y_{n,i,t}$, income from UI $y_{B,i,t}$, and other income (such as capital income) $y_{o,i,t}$. Let $\text{TL}(y_{i,t})$ be the total tax liability in period t of household i with income $y_{i,t}$. We measure the effective marginal tax rate on income source $k \in \{s, B\}$ as:

$$\tau_{i,t}^k = \frac{\text{TL}(y_{i,t} - y_{n,i,t}) - \text{TL}(y_{i,t} - y_{n,i,t} - y_{k,i,t})}{y_{k,i,t}}. \quad (23)$$

In equation (23), $\tau_{i,t}^k$ captures the effective tax rate faced by a household making an extensive margin decision regarding either working or taking up benefits, holding other income sources

fixed. We implement equation (23) using IRS Public Use Files in conjunction with NBER TAXSIM. The files contain a nationally representative sample of approximately 140,000 tax filing units per year in 1960, 1962, 1964, and 1966-2008. Our measure of tax liability TL includes federal income taxes, state income taxes, and FICA taxes. We construct τ_t^s and τ_t^B as the average in the population of households with positive wage and salary income and positive UI income, respectively. Because taxes apply on a calendar year basis, we set the tax rate in each quarter of a calendar year to the tax rate estimated for the whole calendar year.¹⁸

To estimate the effective tax rate on total labor income, τ_t^w , we adjust τ_t^s to take into account non-taxable compensation, $\tau_t^w = \left(\frac{y_{s,t}}{y_{s,t} + y_{n,t}} \right) \tau_t^s$. In the adjustment factor, taxable labor compensation $y_{s,t}$ is the difference between total labor compensation (NIPA Table 2.1, line 2) and the sum of employer provided health insurance (NIPA Table 7.8, line 12) and life insurance (NIPA Table 7.8, line 18). Total labor income $y_{s,t} + y_{n,t}$ in the denominator of the adjustment is total labor compensation (NIPA Table 2.1, line 2).

We use data on net taxes on production and imports (NIPA Table 1.12, lines 19 and 20) to measure consumption taxes τ_t^C . These indirect taxes include items such as federal excise taxes, state sale taxes, and property taxes and, therefore, affect both consumption and investment spending. We calculate consumption taxes as a fraction of net taxes on production and imports. The fraction equals the ratio of personal consumption expenditures to the sum of personal consumption expenditures and gross private domestic investment from NIPA Table 1.1.5. We estimate τ_t^C by dividing the fraction of these indirect taxes by the difference between personal consumption expenditure and the fraction of these indirect taxes.

Figure 4 shows our estimated tax series τ_t^w , τ_t^B , and τ_t^C . The series exhibit sharp movements around legislated tax changes. For example, UI benefits become partially federally taxable in 1979 and fully taxable as part of the Tax Reform Act of 1986. The sharp drop in τ_t^B in 2009 reflects the exemption of the first \$2,400 of UI income from federal adjusted gross income in

¹⁸Following the availability of tax law in TAXSIM, we include state taxes beginning in 1977. We extrapolate both τ_t^s and τ_t^B for 2009-2012 using the fitted values from a regression of the tax rates as computed using the IRS Public Use Files on the tax rates computed using the same methodology but with the March CPS as the micro data.

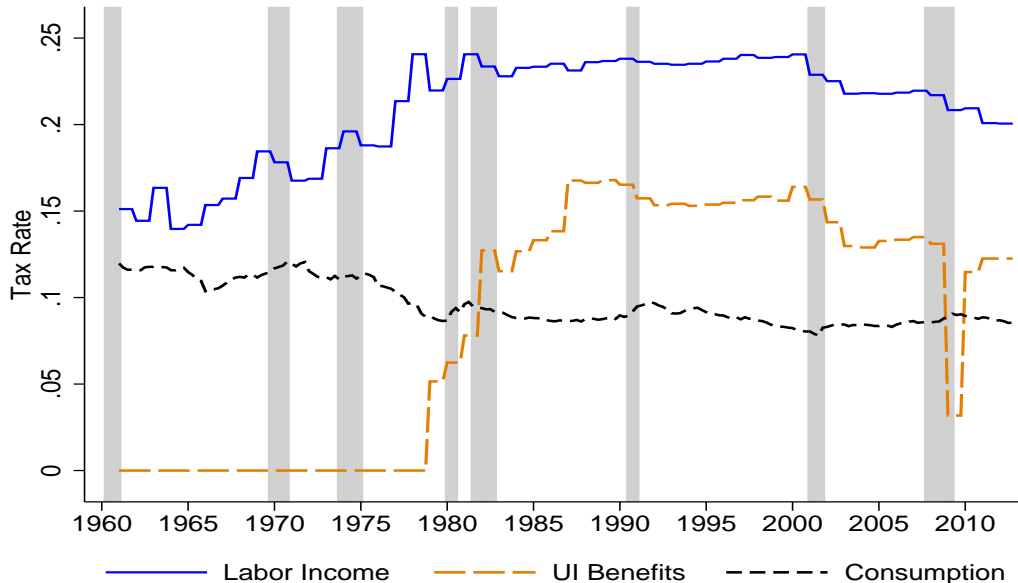


Figure 4: Tax Rates

that year. The secular increase in τ_t^w until 2000 reflects mostly the increase in FICA tax rates. Both τ_t^w and τ_t^B decline as a result of the Bush tax cuts in the early 2000s.¹⁹

3.6 Marginal Product of Employment

The marginal product of employment is another key object in models of unemployment. Let $Y_t = F_t(K_t, e_t N_t)$ be a constant returns to scale aggregate production function. We set to $\nu = 0.333$ the elasticity of output with respect to capital. We measure the pre-tax marginal product of employment, $p_t = \partial Y_t / \partial e_t$, as $1 - \nu$ multiplied by real GDP and then divided by the number of employed. The marginal product of total labor hours is given by $x_t = \partial Y_t / \partial (e_t N_t) = p_t / N_t$. We use a superscript τ to denote the after-tax marginal product of employment $p_t^\tau = p_t (1 - \tau_t^w) / (1 + \tau_t^C)$ and after-tax marginal product of total labor $x_t^\tau = x_t (1 - \tau_t^w) / (1 + \tau_t^C)$.

We normalize all variables by the after-tax marginal product of employment. Therefore, all variables (both in the data and in the model) are expressed relative to the mean level of $p^\tau = 1$. Additionally, we normalize the mean value of hours per worker to $N = 1$ and so $x^\tau = 1$.

¹⁹Our series for τ_t^w correlates highly with an effective labor income tax rate series calculated from NIPA sources. After extending the methodology of Mendoza, Razin, and Tesar (1994) to our longer sample, the R-squared from a regression of the one series on the other exceeds 85 percent.

4 Parameterization

In this section we specify utility functions, calibrate time endowments and preferences parameters, and parameterize the UI take-up cost function.

4.1 Preferences and Time Endowments

Flow utility is a function of a bundle of consumption and working time, $U^s(C^s, N^s)$, for each employment status $s \in \{e, u\}$. We let $N_t^e = N_t$ denote hours worked by the employed and $N_t^u = 0$ denote hours worked by the unemployed. Denote by L^u the (constant) endowment of time that unemployed spend on leisure and home production activities. Denote by T any fixed time cost associated with working. Time spent on leisure and home production by the employed is, therefore, given by $L_t^e = L^u - T - N_t^e$.

We measure the ξ component of the opportunity cost for each of three widely-used utility functions:

$$\text{SEP:} \quad U_t^s = \log(C_t^s) - \frac{\chi\epsilon}{1+\epsilon} (N_t^s + T)^{1+\frac{1}{\epsilon}}, \quad (24)$$

$$\text{CFE:} \quad U_t^s = \frac{1}{1-\rho} \left((C_t^s)^{1-\rho} \left(1 - (1-\rho) \frac{\chi\epsilon}{1+\epsilon} (N_t^s + T)^{1+\frac{1}{\epsilon}} \right)^\rho - 1 \right), \quad (25)$$

$$\text{CD:} \quad U_t^s = \frac{1-\chi}{1-\rho} (C_t^s)^{1-\rho} (L_t^s)^{\frac{\chi(1-\rho)}{1-\chi}}. \quad (26)$$

The first two utility functions feature a constant Frisch elasticity of labor supply along the intensive margin, ϵ , in the absence of fixed time costs $T = 0$. The utility function in equation (24), denoted by “SEP,” is separable between consumption and hours. The preferences defined in equation (25), labeled “CFE,” allow for non-separability between consumption and hours worked.²⁰ CFE preferences nest SEP preferences when $\rho = 1$. With $\rho > 1$, consumption and non-working time are substitutes and the consumption of the employed exceeds the consumption of the unemployed. The Cobb-Douglas (“CD”) utility function in equation (26) explicitly introduces leisure and home production time in the utility function of the unemployed. CD preferences feature a non-separability between consumption and non-working time, but they

²⁰See Shimer (2010) and Trabandt and Uhlig (2011) for further discussion of these preferences.

do not admit a constant Frisch elasticity even when $T = 0$.

We calibrate four models. The first model features SEP preferences and no fixed time costs ($T = 0$). The second model features CFE preferences and $T = 0$. The third model features CD preferences, a definition of non-working time of unemployed L^u that excludes some time uses, and $T = 0$. The fourth model also features CD preferences, but adopts the most extreme view of what could be considered utility-enhancing leisure of unemployed L^u and allows for fixed time costs $T > 0$. The purpose of the fourth model is to try to rationalize the level of the opportunity cost $z = 0.955$ advocated by Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008).

In general, our calibration strategy involves choosing two parameters to make two first-order conditions hold exactly at the mean values of the variables in the sample. The first condition is the risk-sharing condition (7) requiring the equalization of the marginal utility of consumption between employed and unemployed. For this condition, we use the mean values of consumptions estimated in Section 3.3, $C^e = 0.681$ and $C^u = 0.540$. The second condition is an efficiency condition for the choice of hours per worker, evaluated at mean sample values:

$$-\frac{\partial U(C^e, N^e)}{\partial N^e} = \lambda \left(\frac{1 - \tau^w}{1 + \tau^C} \right) x, \quad (27)$$

where x denotes the marginal product of total labor hours. In equation (27) we use the mean sample values of $\tau^C = 0.096$ and $\tau^w = 0.209$.²¹

The left panel of Table 3 presents our parameterization. For the SEP preferences, the risk-sharing condition always implies $C_t^e = C_t^u = C_t$. Thus, with perfect risk sharing, these preferences cannot match the consumption decline at unemployment. We follow Pistaferri (2003) and Hall (2009) and set the Frisch elasticity of labor supply to $\epsilon = 0.7$. We then pick $\chi = 1.48$ to make equation (27) hold exactly at the mean values of the variables in the sample. The right panel shows the elasticities implied by our parameterization. The intertemporal elasticity of substitution in consumption is $-1/\epsilon_{\lambda C} = 1$ and the Frisch elasticity of labor

²¹Our measurement of ξ does not require equation (27) to hold in any particular period. We require equation (27) only in the steady state of the model in order to calibrate preference parameters. This equation arises as a first-order condition, for example, under Nash bargaining. We view such an equilibrium as a desirable outcome in the long run, as any other equilibrium would imply that firms and workers coordinate at an inefficient allocation. See Shimer (2010) for a similar argument in a model without taxes (page 53, footnote 6).

Table 3: Parameterization of Preferences

Preferences	Parameters							Elasticities			
	L^u	T	ϵ	χ	ρ	α	$SE(\alpha)$	$-1/\epsilon_{\lambda C}$	ϵ_{Nw}	$\epsilon_{N\lambda}$	$-\epsilon_{NC}$
SEP		0.00	0.70	1.48		1.87	0.15	1.00	0.70	0.70	0.70
CFE		0.00	0.70	1.22	1.52	1.86	0.14	0.66	0.70	0.46	0.70
CD1	2.64	0.00		0.71	1.25	1.86	0.15	0.80	1.10	3.07	3.85
CD2	4.33	0.19		0.82	1.19	1.86	0.15	0.84	1.82	6.43	7.63

supply is $\epsilon_{Nw} = \epsilon = 0.7$. The elasticity of hours with respect to the marginal utility (holding the wage constant) is $\epsilon_{N\lambda} = 0.7$. Finally, the elasticity of hours with respect to consumption is also $-\epsilon_{NC} = -\epsilon_{N\lambda}\epsilon_{\lambda C} = 0.7$. The latter two elasticities measure wealth effects on hours along the intensive margin.²²

For the CFE preferences we again set $\epsilon = \epsilon_{Nw} = 0.7$. The solution of equations (7) and (27) gives values of $\chi = 1.22$ and $\rho = 1.52$. The intertemporal elasticity of substitution in consumption is $-1/\epsilon_{\lambda C} = 1/\rho = 0.66$. The elasticity of hours with respect to the marginal utility of wealth is $\epsilon_{N\lambda} = \epsilon/\rho = 0.46$ and with respect to consumption is $\epsilon_{NC} = 0.70$.²³

For CD preferences, we additionally need an estimate of the time endowment of the unemployed L^u . Using the American Time Use Survey (ATUS, 2003-2012), we find that unemployed spend 47.6 hours per week on leisure activities (for example, watching TV, listening to music, and socializing with friends), 16.5 hours per week on discretionary sleeping time (defined as the excess sleeping time over 49 hours), 24.6 hours per week on home production (for example,

²²The mapping of the elasticities $\epsilon_{N\lambda}$ and ϵ_{NC} into the elasticity of hours with respect to income ϵ_{NY} (which has a more direct mapping to empirical studies) requires specifying the income process and structure of the capital markets. For example, if shocks are relatively transitory and workers can access capital markets to smooth such shocks, then consumption and λ will not change much in response to income shocks, making ϵ_{NY} small. The opposite holds if shocks are permanent or borrowing is restricted.

²³These values are close to the values used in Hall (2009), with the small difference mostly reflecting that our estimated ρ is lower than the ρ implicit in Hall's formulation. See Hall's Appendix for a summary of evidence on these elasticities. In general, the CFE calibration comes closer to matching the evidence cited in Hall than the SEP, CD1, and CD2 calibrations.

cooking, home ownership activities, and shopping), 6.9 hours per week on child care, and 7 hours per week on activities such as education, religious activities, and own medical care. Dividing the sum of these hours (102.6) by hours per worker (38.8), we obtain $L^u = 2.64$ relative to a mean value of $N = 1$.

In Table 3, the row labeled “CD1” presents our parameterization when $L^u = 2.64$ and there are no fixed time costs associated with working ($T = 0$). The row labeled “CD2” presents an alternative parameterization of CD preferences which yields the level of $z = 0.955$ advocated by Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008). This parameterization sets $L^u = 4.33$, corresponding to the broadest possible view that all 168 hours per week potentially constitute utility-enhancing non-working time. It also requires fixed time costs of working equal to 19 percent of average hours per worker.²⁴ As Table 3 shows, both sets of CD preferences feature a higher Frisch elasticity of labor supply than the SEP and CFE calibrations. The CD preferences also imply much stronger wealth effects on hours than SEP and CFE preferences.

4.2 Benefit Take-Up Cost Function

We next estimate the curvature of the cost of benefit take-up $\psi(\zeta_t)$. We assume a constant elasticity of cost with respect to ζ given by $\alpha = \psi'(\zeta_t)\zeta_t/\psi(\zeta_t)$. We estimate α using the first-order condition for the take-up rate (9). Using a circumflex to denote percent deviations of variables from their trends, the first-order condition yields:

$$\widehat{\zeta}_t = \left(\frac{1}{\alpha - 1} \right) \left(\widehat{\lambda}_t + (\widehat{1 - \tau_t^B}) - (\widehat{1 + \tau_t^C}) + \widehat{B}_t \right). \quad (28)$$

Table 3 presents estimates of α from an OLS regression of equation (28), along with Newey-West standard errors with four lags. The take-up rate in the data comoves positively with the utility value of after-tax benefits per recipient, generating $\alpha > 1$. The four preference specifications imply different $\widehat{\lambda}_t$ series, but the estimates of α are stable across the different

²⁴A value of $T = 0.19$, implying fixed costs of more than 7 hours per week, appears quite large relative to typical estimates of commuting time. Rogerson and Wallenius (2013) review evidence on commuting time and find that T is approximately 0.1. Rogerson and Wallenius (2013) also point out that commuting time does not constitute a fixed cost if individuals adjust the number of days at work rather than hours per day, making $T = 0.1$ an upper bound under this interpretation of the fixed cost. In our robustness checks we consider an alternative model in which fixed costs are denominated directly in terms of utility rather than time.

Table 4: Summary Statistics, 1961(1) to 2012(4)

Statistic	SEP	CFE	CD1	CD2
p^τ	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
p	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.39
z	0.47	0.47	0.75	0.96
ξ	0.41	0.41	0.70	0.90
b	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
$\text{sd}(\hat{Y})$	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50
$\text{sd}(\hat{p})$	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89
$\text{sd}(\hat{z})$	1.66	1.52	1.19	1.10
$\text{sd}(\hat{\xi})$	1.92	1.63	1.29	1.20
$\text{sd}(\hat{b})$	8.97	8.95	8.96	8.96
$\text{corr}(\hat{z}, \hat{Y})$	0.52	0.42	0.55	0.61
$\text{corr}(\hat{\xi}, \hat{Y})$	0.87	0.87	0.86	0.86
$\text{corr}(\hat{b}, \hat{Y})$	-0.45	-0.45	-0.45	-0.45
$\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$	1.11	0.92	0.85	0.83
CI	[0.74,1.49]	[0.56,1.28]	[0.59,1.11]	[0.60,1.06]

Notes: We denote the percent deviation of some variable x_t from its trend by \hat{x}_t . We compute trends of variables using the HP filter with smoothing parameter of 1,600. The elasticity $\epsilon(\hat{x}_1, \hat{x}_2)$ is the regression coefficient of \hat{x}_1 on \hat{x}_2 . Newey-West standard errors with four lags are in parentheses.

preference specifications.

5 The Opportunity Cost of Employment in the Data

We now describe the properties of our estimated series of the opportunity cost of employment.

5.1 Baseline Results

Table 4 presents summary statistics for the period 1961(1) to 2012(4) and for each set of preferences. The level of z ranges between 0.47 and 0.96 of the after-tax marginal product of employment p^τ . The variation in the average level of z across preferences reflects the variation in the average level of the component of the opportunity cost associated with the value of non-working time ξ . In all cases, ξ constitutes the largest part of the opportunity cost, ranging

between 0.41 and 0.90.²⁵

To understand differences in the levels of ξ , we begin with the steady state value of ξ under the SEP and CFE specifications:²⁶

$$\xi^{\text{SEP}} = \xi^{\text{CFE}} = \left(\frac{\epsilon}{1 + \epsilon} \right) p^\tau. \quad (29)$$

For a value of $\epsilon = 0.7$, we obtain $\xi^{\text{SEP}} = \xi^{\text{CFE}} = 0.41$ relative to the after-tax marginal product of $p^\tau = 1$. A higher Frisch elasticity of labor supply results in a higher level of opportunity cost. However, using these utility specifications, one would need to assume a Frisch elasticity of 9 to rationalize a level of ξ equal to 0.90. Could, alternatively, fixed time costs explain such a high level of ξ under SEP or CFE preferences? Introducing fixed time costs changes the level to $\xi^{\text{SEP}} = \xi^{\text{CFE}} = p^\tau(1 + T/N)\epsilon/(1 + \epsilon)$. It also changes the Frisch elasticity to $(1 + T/N)\epsilon$. For T roughly equal to 120 percent of N , one would estimate $\xi = 0.90$ with a less extreme Frisch elasticity of 1.54. However, the magnitude of these fixed costs is implausible.

In the absence of fixed time costs ($T = 0$), we can write ξ under CD preferences as a function of the endowment of non-working time of the unemployed L^u :

$$\xi^{\text{CD}} = \left(\frac{1 - \gamma^u}{-\log(\gamma^u)} \right) (L^u - 1) \log \left(\frac{L^u}{L^u - 1} \right) p^\tau, \quad (30)$$

where $\gamma^u = 0.793$ is the consumption of the unemployed relative to the employed. We obtain that $\lim_{L^u \rightarrow 1} \xi^{\text{CD}} = 0$, $\lim_{L^u \rightarrow \infty} \xi^{\text{CD}} = \left(\frac{1 - \gamma^u}{-\log(\gamma^u)} \right) p^\tau = 0.89$, and that between these limiting cases ξ^{CD} is an increasing function of the endowment of time L^u . Our estimate of $L^u = 2.64$ under calibration CD1 yields $\xi^{\text{CD}} = 0.70$. Model CD2 implies a higher value of ξ both because we calibrate the endowment of time at the high level of $L^u = 4.33$ and because we introduce fixed time costs associated with working $T = 0.19$. Without fixed time costs but with $L^u = 4.33$, we

²⁵If flow utilities were equalized, $U^u = U^e$, we would have obtained $\xi = C^e - C^u$. In this case, our estimates of consumption differences imply that $z = 0.20$. A higher level of z requires $(U^u - U^e)/\lambda > 0$. The interpretation of $(U^u - U^e)/\lambda > 0$ is that non-working time is valued at a sufficiently high level relative to consumption, which is a standard assumption in the literature (see Rogerson and Wright, 1988). In the model with incomplete markets discussed in Section 7.5, the unemployed's expected present value of discounted utility flows V^u is lower than the employed's expected present value of discounted utility flows V^e , even when flow utilities satisfy $U^u > U^e$.

²⁶The Appendix to Hall (2014) first derives this equation for SEP preferences. The equation results from substituting the condition for hours in equation (27) into the expression for ξ in equation (12). Because our measurement exercise does not require that equation (27) holds in any particular period, equation (29) need not hold period-by-period.

would have estimated $\xi = 0.78$ and $z = 0.84$. Therefore, of the 21 percentage point difference in ξ and z between calibration CD2 and calibration CD1, 12 percentage points are due to fixed costs and 9 percentage points are due to the higher level of the time endowment.²⁷

The component of the opportunity cost associated with the value of benefits b is roughly 6 percent. This estimated level of b is smaller than the value used in a number of previous papers. What explains our estimate? Beginning with the UI component, the sample mean of pre-tax benefits per recipient, \tilde{B} , is roughly 21.5 percent of the pre-tax marginal product.²⁸ However, on average only about 40 percent of unemployed actually receive benefits. Therefore, pre-tax benefits per unemployed are roughly 9 percent of the pre-tax marginal product. Accounting for taxes raises UI benefits to roughly 10 percent of the after-tax marginal product because $\tau^w > \tau^B$. Finally, adjusting for benefits expiration and for take-up disutility costs (which further reduce the UI component) and adding the B_n component yields $b = 0.06$.²⁹

Turning to the cyclicity of the opportunity cost, Figure 5 plots the percent deviation of z from its trend for each of the four parameterizations. The four series track each other closely. All appear to be procyclical, falling during each recession in our sample. Table 4 confirms that z comoves positively with real GDP per capita Y over the business cycle. It also shows that z is quite volatile over the business cycle, with the standard deviation of its cyclical component exceeding the standard deviation of the cyclical component of the marginal product p .

The procyclical movement of z reflects the dominance of the ξ component in the sum

²⁷Using a narrower definition of leisure and home production that roughly corresponds to the time uses defined in Aguiar, Hurst, and Karabarbounis (2013) we obtain $L^u = 2.00$ and $z = 0.67$. Our inference about the cyclicity of z in this case is not very different than in the CD1 and CD2 cases. For example, we obtain an elasticity $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p}) = 0.87$ as opposed to values of 0.85 and 0.83 under CD1 and CD2 respectively.

²⁸A rate of 21.5 percent accords well with the benefit levels used by Mortensen and Nagypal (2007) and Hall and Milgrom (2008) and the rate suggested by Hornstein, Krusell, and Violante (2005). The Department of Labor estimates a wage replacement rate of about 45 percent (http://workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/unemploy/ui_replacement_rates.asp, accessed 2/15/2015). Converting a wage replacement rate of 45 percent to a total compensation replacement rate requires multiplying by the ratio of wages to total compensation, or a factor of about 0.8. The remaining difference can be explained by the gap between compensation and the marginal product and from differences in productivity and compensation between those receiving UI and the economy-wide average. We address the issue of heterogeneity in Section 6.

²⁹The sensitivity of reported reservation wages to UI benefits suggest that, if anything, our b may be too large. In our model, the increase in the reservation wage for individuals already receiving UI is given by the tax-adjusted bracketed term in equation (11), which has a sample average value of roughly 0.69. Estimates of the increase in reservation wages when UI benefits increase range from zero (Krueger and Mueller, 2013) to as large as 0.42 (Feldstein and Poterba, 1984).

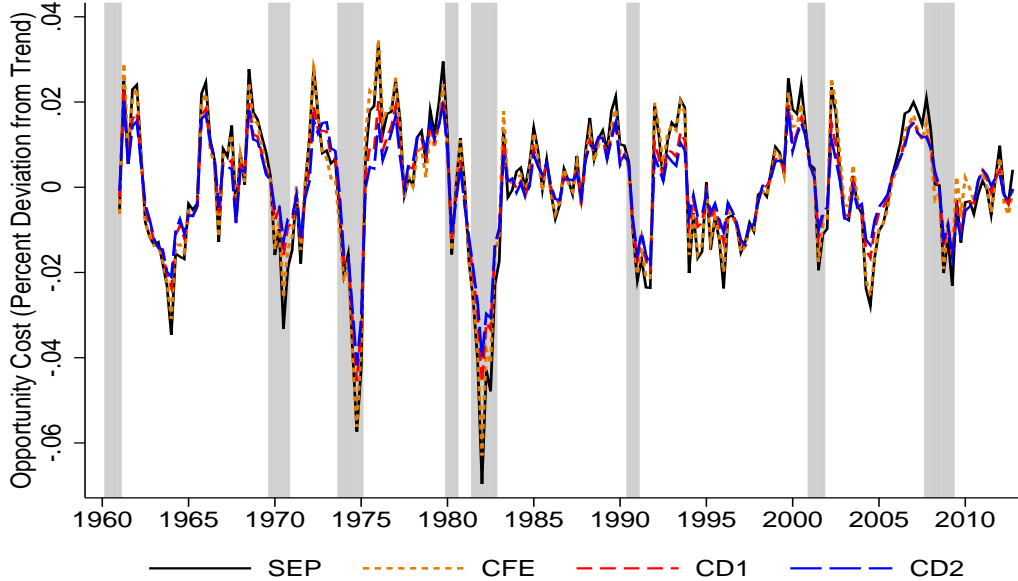


Figure 5: Cyclicity of Opportunity Cost of Employment

Notes: Variables are logged and HP filtered with a smoothing parameter of 1,600.

$z = b + \xi$. As Table 4 shows, the b component is countercyclical and very volatile, mostly reflecting the large increase in the UI take-up rate during recessions. However, the small level of b makes its fluctuations relatively unimportant for z .

To develop intuition about the procyclicality of the ξ component, it is useful to consider the SEP utility function. Under SEP we obtain:

$$\xi_t^{\text{SEP}} = \left(\frac{\chi\epsilon}{1 + \epsilon} \right) N_t^{1 + \frac{1}{\epsilon}} C_t. \quad (31)$$

The component ξ is procyclical because in the data both hours per worker and consumption are procyclical.³⁰ The intuition for the cyclicity of ξ in the SEP case carries over to the other preference specifications. In all cases, procyclical hours and consumption imply a procyclical ξ component of the opportunity cost. Quantitatively, ξ is less volatile in the non-separable specifications because, with procyclical hours, the complementarity in preferences between consumption and hours ameliorates the cyclicity of the marginal utility of consumption λ .

³⁰Our preferred measure of consumption C_t^{NIPA} in this paper excludes durables and housing services. At quarterly frequency and using a HP filter with smoothing parameter of 1,600 to detrend variables, the volatility of the cyclical component of C_t^{NIPA} relative to the volatility of the cyclical component of real GDP per person 16 years or older is 0.66. However, the stock of durables is also volatile over the business cycle. The relative volatility of the cyclical component of the real stock of durables is 0.73.

Table 4 also reports the elasticity of \hat{z} with respect to \hat{p} as a metric that takes into account both the correlation between the two variables and the relative volatilities. For consistency with prior literature that focuses on TFP shocks as the driving force in business cycle models and to correct for measurement error in \hat{p} , we instrument \hat{p} with the cyclical component of the Fernald (2012) unadjusted TFP series.³¹ The resulting elasticities of \hat{z} with respect to \hat{p} range between 0.83 and 1.11. The elasticity declines when moving from SEP to other preferences, reflecting the non-separability embedded in the other specifications. We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the elasticity equals 1 for any of the preference specifications. We conclude that the opportunity cost moves roughly proportionally with the marginal product over the business cycle.

5.2 Sensitivity Analysis

We assess the sensitivity of the cyclical component of z to a number of model assumptions and data moments. In Table 5, each row reports the elasticity $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ under a different alternative scenario for each of the four preference specifications indicated in the column headings. Row 0 provides the baseline elasticities. Unless otherwise noted, in each sensitivity exercise we recalibrate all model parameters whenever necessary in order to achieve the same targets as in our baseline procedure.

The first row reports elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ in the counterfactual in which the b component always equals its trend. The estimated elasticities increase, reflecting the fact that b is countercyclical. However, these increases are relatively small because b constitutes a small part of the opportunity cost.

The next row reports elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ when our underlying measure of consumption C_t^{NIPA} equals its trend. In this counterfactual scenario, all of the elasticities decline substantially. We conclude that the procyclicality of consumption is a major factor in generating the procyclical behavior of z .

³¹We motivate our focus on p instead of p^τ by appealing to prior literature in which productivity shocks are treated as exogenous. Empirically, the elasticity of the cyclical component of the tax wedge $(1 - \tau^w)/(1 + \tau^C)$ with respect to the cyclical component of p in our data is 0.014 (instrumented) and 0.067 (not instrumented). That is, taxes respond very little to cyclical movements in p .

Table 5: Sensitivity of Elasticity $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$

Case	SEP	CFE	CD1	CD2
0. Baseline Results	1.11	0.92	0.85	0.83
1. Benefit Component b_t Equal to Trend	1.32	1.13	0.98	0.93
2. Consumption C_t^{NIPA} Equal to Trend	0.52	0.33	0.22	0.19
3. Smaller Consumption Decline ($\gamma^u = 0.9$)	1.11	1.02	0.92	0.90
4. Hours N_t Equal to Trend	0.54	0.46	0.57	0.60
5. Hours N_t of Salary Workers	1.03	0.85	0.81	0.80
6. Hours N_t of Hourly Workers	1.21	1.00	0.90	0.87
7. Hours N_t Adjusted for Composition	1.19	0.98	0.89	0.86
8. Higher Frisch Elasticity ($\epsilon = 2$)	1.01	0.86	N/A	N/A
9. Alternative Model of Take-Up ($\zeta = 1.00$)	1.01	0.85	0.82	0.82
10. No Taxes ($\tau^w = \tau^C = \tau^B = 0$)	1.20	1.01	0.91	0.87
11. Fixed Utility Costs of Working for $z = 0.96$	0.96	0.91	0.85	0.84
12. Baxter-King Filter	1.17	0.97	0.91	0.88
13. No Instrumenting	1.01	0.87	0.78	0.75
14. No Instrumenting and Baxter-King Filter	1.15	0.98	0.89	0.86

Row 3 assesses the sensitivity of the elasticities to the value of the ratio of the consumption of the unemployed relative to the employed. Our baseline calibration of preference parameters uses the value of $\gamma^u = 0.793$. Row 3 instead sets $\gamma^u = 0.9$. With procyclical hours, the complementarity between hours and consumption makes the marginal utility λ less cyclical, which in turn ameliorates the procyclicality of ξ . The complementarity in preferences becomes stronger when the consumption ratio γ^u is lower. Therefore, increasing γ^u increases all estimated elasticities for non-separable preferences.³²

In row 4 we set hours per worker N_t equal to its trend. The elasticities decrease, but by less

³²Our baseline SEP preferences imply a unitary elasticity of intertemporal substitution. Using separable but non balanced growth preferences of the form $U = (C^{1-\rho} - 1)/(1-\rho) - (\chi\epsilon/(1+\epsilon))N^{1+1/\epsilon}$ allows us to decouple ρ from the consumption decline upon unemployment and examine the sensitivity of our results to the assumed elasticity of intertemporal substitution. With $\rho = 2$, which implies an intertemporal elasticity of 1/2, we find $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p}) = 1.77$. Intuitively, for given cyclical component of consumption, increasing ρ makes λ more cyclical.

than in the scenario in which consumption equals its trend. We conclude that the procyclicality of hours contributes to the procyclicality of z but that, quantitatively, cyclical movements in hours per worker matter less than cyclical movements in consumption.

Rows 5 and 6 replace N_t with series for hours per worker constructed separately for salaried and hourly workers respectively. Hourly workers experience more procyclical hours per worker than salary workers, explaining the larger elasticities in row 6 than in row 5. However, both types of workers have quite volatile and procyclical hours series, leading to significant procyclicality in z in both cases.³³

In row 7 we adjust our measure of hours for compositional changes. In principle, hours per worker could decline in recessions because economic activity reallocates toward industries or demographic groups with lower average hours. To adjust for such compositional shifts, we regress hours of employed on industry, gender, education, and age bracket categorical variables. We then construct hours for each worker as the sum of the regression residual and a sample mean, aggregate these hours, and apply our seasonal adjustment procedure. The elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ increase slightly as a result of this composition adjustment. In practice, compositional changes dampen rather than exacerbate cyclical movements in hours per worker.

In row 8 we increase the Frisch elasticity of labor supply for SEP and CFE preferences to $\epsilon = 2$ and recalibrate the remaining preference parameters to match the same targets as in our baseline results. A larger ϵ implies a smaller effect from fluctuations of hours per worker on fluctuations of the ξ component of the opportunity cost. However, even for $\epsilon = 2$ the estimated elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ remain close to one. We view the value of 2 as an upper bound of reasonable values of the Frisch elasticity, given that our model has an extensive margin of labor supply.

Row 9 examines the sensitivity of our results to the assumed model of UI take-up. Motivated by the evidence in Blank and Card (1991) and Anderson and Meyer (1997) that take-up rates are significantly below one and respond to benefit levels, in our baseline model eligible unemployed take up benefits when the utility value of after-tax UI benefits exceeds the utility cost of take-

³³We construct hours per worker for hourly and salary workers from the CPS monthly files. The identification of the type of worker is possible on a continual basis only starting in 1982. Before then we impute hours for these two groups based on a projection on aggregate hours.

up. We now consider an alternative model in which the opportunity cost of eligible unemployed always includes the full value of their UI entitlement with no disutility. Thus, we set α to infinity in equation (11) and $\zeta_t = 1$. With this modification, the level of b increases. However, the estimated elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ do not change much because without a take-up margin b fluctuates much less.

In row 10, we set all taxes to zero and recalibrate all parameters in the model without taxes. For all preference specifications we obtain larger elasticities. Taxes increase the level of b relative to the after-tax marginal product because the tax rate on UI benefits τ^B is lower than the tax rate on labor income τ^w . Because the b component is countercyclical, reducing its importance in the model without taxes generates larger elasticities.

In our baseline model, under calibration CD2, we introduced fixed time costs in order to achieve a high level of z . We now consider an alternative model in which fixed costs associated with working are denominated directly in terms of utility rather than in units of time. Specifically, each individual incurs a fixed cost FC when moving from unemployment to employment which, for simplicity, enters additively into the utility function. With this modification, ξ_t is given by equation (12) plus the additive term FC/λ_t . For each preference specification, we choose FC such that we obtain the mean value of $z = 0.955$ suggested by Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008). As row 11 of Table 5 shows, the elasticity $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$ declines somewhat relative to our baseline results only for the SEP case.

Finally, rows 12 to 14 report the sensitivity of our results to our procedure for estimating the elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}, \hat{p})$. Row 12 uses the Baxter-King (BK) filter to separate the trend from the cycle, using a bandwidth of 6 to 32 quarters. All elasticities increase slightly. Row 13 reports elasticities using the HP filter but without instrumenting for the marginal product. Here the elasticities decline by 0.05 to 0.1. Finally, row 14 shows that our results remain largely unchanged when we use the BK filter and we do not instrument for the marginal product.

To summarize, the combination of procyclical hours per worker, procyclical consumption, and a small level of benefits b imply a procyclical and volatile opportunity cost z . Further,

we estimate that a one percent increase in p is associated with an increase in z of at least 0.8 percent and we cannot reject the hypothesis that z and p move proportionally over the business cycle. This result appears robust to various preference specifications and alternative data definitions and modeling choices.

6 Heterogeneity Across Skills

Our measurement of z for the average unemployed followed from the assumption that all unemployed search for the same jobs and employers cannot discriminate ex-ante in choosing a potential worker with whom to bargain. We now relax this assumption and allow workers to differ along observable characteristics that may be correlated with their opportunity costs.

The economy consists of J heterogeneous households. In our empirical implementation we separate workers into four educational attainment categories. Each household j contains fraction l_j of the population. Within each group j , a fraction e_{jt} are employed and a fraction u_{jt} are unemployed. There are J segmented labor markets. We denote by f_{jt} the job finding rate in market j and by s_{jt} the separation rate. Employment for group j evolves as $e_{jt+1} = (1 - s_{jt})e_{jt} + f_{jt}u_{jt}$.

The problem of each household j is:

$$W_j^h = \max \mathbb{E}_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t [l_j e_{jt} U_j(C_{jt}^e, N_{jt}) + l_j (1 - e_{jt}) U_j(C_{jt}^u, 0) - l_j (1 - e_{jt}) \omega_{jt} \psi(\zeta_{jt})], \quad (32)$$

subject to the budget constraint:

$$(1 + \tau_t^C) (l_j e_{jt} C_{jt}^e + l_j (1 - e_{jt}) C_{jt}^u) + I_{jt} + \Pi_{jt} = (1 - \tau_{jt}^w) \omega_{jt} l_j e_{jt} N_{jt} + l_j (1 - e_{jt}) B_{jt} + R_t K_{jt}, \quad (33)$$

and the law of motion for eligibility:

$$\omega_{jt+1} = \left(\omega_{jt+1}^u (1 - f_{jt}) \frac{u_{jt}}{u_{jt+1}} \right) \omega_{jt} + \omega_{jt+1}^e s_{jt} \frac{e_{jt}}{u_{jt+1}}. \quad (34)$$

We note that flow utilities U_j are allowed to vary by j . In the budget constraint, after-tax benefits per unemployed of type j are given by $B_{jt} = (1 + \tau_t^C) B_{n,jt} + (1 - \tau_{tj}^B) B_{u,jt}$, where $B_{n,jt}$ denotes non-UI benefits per unemployed, $B_{u,jt}$ denotes UI benefits per unemployed, and τ_{tj}^B denotes the UI tax rate in group j .

To derive the opportunity cost of employment by group j , we proceed analogously to the aggregate case analyzed in Section 2. We first derive the marginal value of employment for household j , $J_{jt}^h = \partial W_{jt}^h / \partial (l_j e_{jt})$, as the sum of a flow payoff (after-tax wages minus opportunity cost) and a continuation value. Then, we define the opportunity cost of employment similarly to the aggregate case:

$$z_{jt} = b_{jt} + (C_{jt}^e - C_{jt}^u) - \frac{U_{jt}^e - U_{jt}^u}{\lambda_{jt}} = b_{jt} + \xi_{jt}, \quad (35)$$

where b_{jt} is given by equation (11) taking into account j -specific values of variables. The thrust of our procedure for constructing z_{jt} follows that for the aggregate described in Section 3. Here we sketch briefly our estimation and refer the reader to Appendix B.2 for more details.

For our estimates of the benefits per unemployed $B_{n,jt}$ and $B_{u,jt}$, we use the March CPS to measure the fraction of survey dollars in each program accruing to the unemployed of category j and the CPS basic monthly files to measure the fraction of unemployed belonging in group j . The first two rows of Table 6 report the sample averages of $B_{n,j}$ and $B_{u,j}$, expressed relative to a mean aggregate after-tax aggregate marginal product of employment of $p^\tau = 1$. The opportunity cost of low skilled workers contains higher non-UI benefits than that of high skilled workers. This difference reflects the existence of asset and income tests for non-UI benefits, which disqualify many high skilled workers. By contrast, UI benefits per unemployed increase monotonically with skill level. The average benefit more than doubles for workers with a high school diploma relative to those without. The statutory linking of UI benefits to previous wages explains the positive relationship between skill level and UI benefits per unemployed.

For our estimates of consumptions of employed C_{jt}^e and unemployed C_{jt}^u , we use the CE to measure the consumption declines upon unemployment by group γ_j^u and the relative consumptions of employed of different skills $\gamma_{ji}^e = C_j^e / C_i^e$. Applying these consumption ratios to an appropriately modified version of the adding-up identity (18), we obtain times series for consumptions. Table 6 shows that the consumption declines upon unemployment γ_j^u are quite stable across different skill groups. It also shows large differences across groups in the consumption of the employed, with consumption increasing monotonically with skill.

Table 6: Heterogeneity Statistics: 1969(1)–2012(4)

Case	Statistic	Less than High School	High School	Some College	College or More
	$B_{n,j}$	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01
	$B_{u,j}$	0.06	0.14	0.15	0.18
	γ_j^u	0.77	0.80	0.79	0.80
	C_j^e	0.55	0.63	0.71	0.85
	N_j	0.90	1.01	0.99	1.07
	s_j	0.10	0.05	0.04	0.02
	f_j	0.70	0.66	0.69	0.64
	τ_j^w	0.18	0.21	0.22	0.25
	τ_j^B	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.14
	p_j^τ	0.69	0.92	1.03	1.49
SEP	z_j/p_j^τ	0.49	0.49	0.47	0.45
	ξ_j/p_j^τ	0.42	0.41	0.41	0.41
	b_j/p_j^τ	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.04
	$\epsilon(\hat{z}_j, \hat{p})$	1.71	1.30	0.97	0.67
CFE	z_j/p_j^τ	0.49	0.49	0.47	0.45
	ξ_j/p_j^τ	0.42	0.41	0.41	0.41
	b_j/p_j^τ	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.04
	$\epsilon(\hat{z}_j, \hat{p})$	1.43	1.08	0.76	0.54
CD1	z_j/p_j^τ	0.79	0.78	0.75	0.72
	ξ_j/p_j^τ	0.72	0.70	0.70	0.68
	b_j/p_j^τ	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.04
	$\epsilon(\hat{z}_j, \hat{p})$	1.19	0.98	0.77	0.64
CD2	z_j/p_j^τ	0.96	0.95	0.92	0.89
	ξ_j/p_j^τ	0.89	0.87	0.86	0.85
	b_j/p_j^τ	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.04
	$\epsilon(\hat{z}_j, \hat{p})$	1.13	0.95	0.78	0.67

Notes: $B_{n,j}$, $B_{u,j}$, C_j^e , and p_j^τ are expressed as a fraction of the mean aggregate marginal product of employment in the sample. N_j is expressed as a fraction of the mean aggregate hours per worker in the sample.

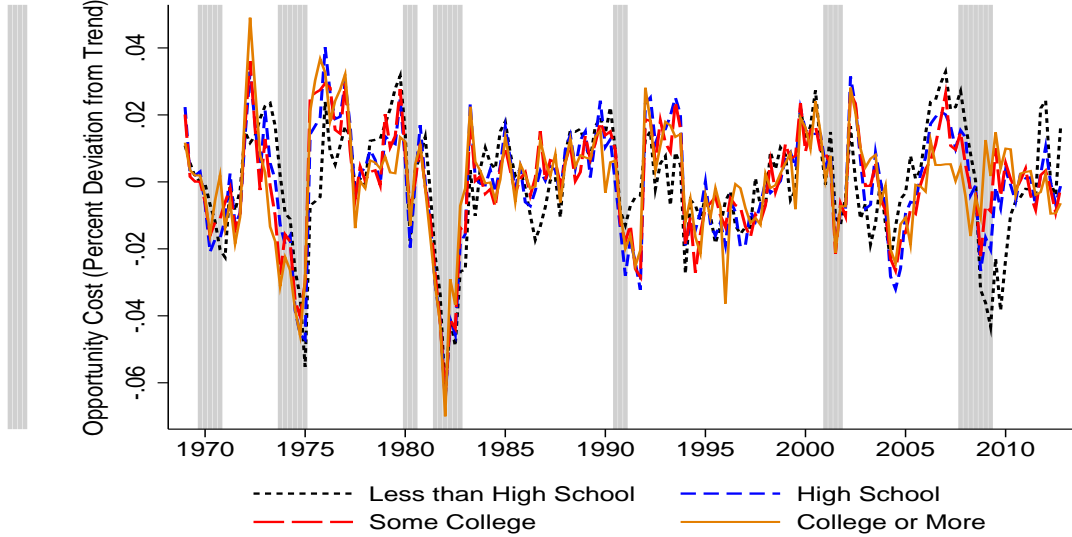


Figure 6: Opportunity Costs Across Skills (CFE Preferences)

We measure hours per worker N_{jt} , the separation rate s_{jt} , the job finding rate f_{jt} , and taxes τ_{jt}^w and τ_{jt}^B in an analogous way to the aggregate.³⁴ Hours per worker N_{jt} are the lowest for workers without high school diploma and the highest for college educated workers. The job finding rate f_{jt} appears relatively stable across groups, whereas the separation rate s_{jt} declines sharply with skill level. Reflecting the progressivity of the income tax system, taxes on both labor and UI income increase monotonically with skill. Table 6 also reports the mean after-tax marginal product of each group $p_j^\tau = p_j(1 - \tau_j^w)/(1 + \tau^C)$, where p_j denotes the pre-tax marginal product. We construct p_{jt} using a CES aggregator of the J different labor inputs and calibrate parameters such that, in the steady state of our model, the ratio of marginal products across groups equals the ratio of labor earnings. Given estimates of C_{jt}^e , C_{jt}^u , N_{jt} , and p_{jt}^τ , we proceed as in Section 4.1 and calibrate group-specific preference parameters using the risk-sharing condition (7) and the efficiency condition for hours (27) for each group j .

Figure 6 plots the cyclical components of z_j for the CFE preferences. The z_j 's are highly synchronized across groups. Table 6 reports various statistics across groups for the SEP, CFE, CD1, and CD2 calibrations.³⁵ The level of z_j relative to p_j^τ is relatively stable across groups.

³⁴For τ_{jt}^w and τ_{jt}^B , we apply the procedure described in Section 3.5 to micro data from the March CPS and then benchmark the resulting estimates such that the mean tax rate equals the rate using the IRS Public Use Files.

³⁵In the CD2 specification we set the fixed time cost at $T = 0.13$ such that the mean z_j/p_j^τ for the lowest skill

Table 6 also reports the elasticities $\epsilon(\hat{z}_j, \hat{p})$ by group and utility function. All elasticities appear well above zero, but low skilled groups exhibit much larger cyclicalities than high skilled groups. The difference partly reflects the larger share of procyclical non-UI benefits in the b_j of the low skill groups. It also reflects the lower procyclicalities of hours per worker N_{jt} in high skilled groups.

To summarize, the procyclicalities of the opportunity cost is present in each group after we disaggregate individuals by educational attainment. While there are interesting differences across groups, the same economic forces that drive the aggregate z to fluctuate over the business cycle also influence the skill-specific z_j 's.

7 Implications for Unemployment Fluctuations

In this section we discuss the importance of z for unemployment fluctuations. Section 7.1 demonstrates the implications of the cyclicalities of z in the standard MP model in which wages are set according to Nash bargaining. Section 7.2 shows that the same implications hold in the alternating-offer wage bargaining model. Section 7.3 extends the analysis to an environment with directed search and wage posting. Section 7.4 shows the relevance of z in an indivisible labor model. Finally, Section 7.5 derives a closely related object in a model with incomplete markets for idiosyncratic employment risk.

7.1 Canonical Search and Matching Model

We begin by showing the importance of a cyclical z within the context of the labor market search and matching framework of Mortensen and Pissarides (1994) and Pissarides (2000). We present details underlying the derivations of this section in Appendix A.2. The behavior of the household is given by the model described in Section 2.1. A representative firm operates the production function $Y_t = F_t(K_t, e_t N_t)$. The marginal value of employment for the firm, J_t^f , is given by:

$$J_t^f = p_t - w_t N_t + (1 - s_t) \mathbb{E}_t \tilde{\beta}_{t+1} J_{t+1}^f, \quad (36)$$

group is 0.96. We use the same T and the same L^u for all groups.

where $\tilde{\beta}_{t+1}$ denotes the stochastic discount factor of the household.

The labor market is subject to search and matching frictions. The firm posts vacancies v_t to increase employment in the next period. Each vacancy costs κ units of the numeraire good. Trade in the labor market is facilitated by a constant returns to scale matching technology that converts searching by the unemployed and vacancies by the firm into new matches, $m_t = m_t(v_t, u_t)$. Market tightness is given by $\theta_t = v_t/u_t$. An unemployed matches with a firm with probability $f_t(\theta_t) = m_t/u_t$ and the firm fills a vacancy with probability $q_t(\theta_t) = m_t/v_t = f_t(\theta_t)/\theta_t$. We denote by η the (constant) elasticity of the matching function with respect to vacancies.

The firm and the household split the surplus from an additional match according to the generalized Nash bargaining solution. The household's value of an additional match is given by equation (10) and the firm's value of an additional match is given by equation (36). The firm and the household bargain over the wage per hour worked w_t and hours per worker N_t . Denoting by μ the bargaining power of workers, we obtain a standard wage equation augmented to take into account taxes:

$$w_t N_t = \mu p_t + (1 - \mu) \left(\frac{1 + \tau_t^C}{1 - \tau_t^w} \right) z_t + \mu \kappa \theta_t. \quad (37)$$

The Nash-bargained compensation depends on the marginal product of employment, the tax-adjusted opportunity cost of employment, and a term related to labor market tightness. With Nash bargaining, hours per worker are chosen to maximize the joint surplus according to equation (27).

We begin our analysis by following much of the literature in treating steady state movements in the marginal product of employment p and the opportunity cost of employment z as exogenous. Appendix A.2 derives an expression for the elasticity of labor market tightness θ with respect to shocks to the marginal product p :

$$\epsilon(\theta, p) = B \left(\frac{\left(\frac{1 - \tau^w}{1 + \tau^C} \right) p - z \epsilon(z, p)}{\left(\frac{1 - \tau^w}{1 + \tau^C} \right) p - z} \right), \quad (38)$$

where B is a constant and $\epsilon(z, p)$ denotes the elasticity of z with respect to p . The response

Table 7: Steady State Elasticity of Unemployment With Respect to the Marginal Product

	$z = 0.47$	$z = 0.75$	$z = 0.96$
$\epsilon(z, p) = 0.00$	-0.74	-1.60	-8.76
$\epsilon(z, p) = 0.50$	-0.57	-1.00	-4.58
$\epsilon(z, p) = 0.80$	-0.46	-0.64	-2.07
$\epsilon(z, p) = 1.00$	-0.39	-0.39	-0.39

of unemployment is then given by $\epsilon(u, p) = -\eta(1 - u)\epsilon(\theta, p)$. Equation (38) generalizes the expressions given in Shimer (2005), Mortensen and Nagypal (2007), and Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) to allow z to change in response to changes in p .

Table 7 presents the elasticity of unemployment with respect to the marginal product of employment $\epsilon(u, p)$ as a function of the level z and the cyclicality of the opportunity cost $\epsilon(z, p)$. Each column corresponds to the levels of z that we estimated in Section 5.1 for different utility functions.³⁶ As a benchmark against which to evaluate the model, we estimate that the elasticity $\epsilon(u, p)$ is roughly -7 in the data. In the first row of the table, z is fixed as we vary p . The response of unemployment to shocks to the marginal product is small when the calibrated value of z is small, consistent with the result in Shimer (2005). The response of unemployment rises across columns, as the level of z increases. As pointed out by Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008), a higher z reduces firm's steady state profits. An increase in the productivity of a match then causes a larger percent increase in profits which strongly incentivizes the firm to create vacancies. Therefore, unemployment is more volatile.

The consequences of a cyclical z can be seen by moving down the rows of Table 7. A positive value of $\epsilon(z, p)$ means that z increases in response to increases in p . The higher is the responsiveness of z , the smaller is the increase in the net flow surplus of the match, $p^\tau - z$, and

³⁶The other parameters for this exercise are calibrated as follows. Over our sample we estimate an average separation rate of $s = 0.045$ and an average job-finding probability of $f = 0.704$. Following Mortensen and Nagypal (2007), we set the elasticity in the matching function to $\eta = 0.40$. We set the worker's bargaining power to $\mu = 0.60$ and the discount factor to $\beta = 0.99$. Finally, we use the sample averages of $\tau^w = 0.209$, $\tau^C = 0.096$, and $p = 1.386$, such that the after-tax marginal product equals $p^\tau = p(1 - \tau^w)/(1 + \tau^C) = 1$. Under these parameters we obtain $B = 1.05$.

the weaker is the firm’s incentive to create vacancies. As a result, holding constant the level of z , the response of unemployment becomes smaller when $\epsilon(z, p)$ is higher.

Equation (38) shows analytically that if $\epsilon(z, p) = 1$, so that both z and p change by the same percent, the elasticity of θ and u with respect to the marginal product is independent of the level of z .³⁷ Table 7 shows that when $\epsilon(z, p) = 0.8$, the elasticity of unemployment with respect to the marginal product is 63 percent of the elasticity obtained under a constant $z = 0.47$, 40 percent of the elasticity obtained under a constant $z = 0.71$, and 24 percent of the elasticity obtained under a constant $z = 0.96$. We note that the role of cyclical movements of z in unemployment fluctuations is quite general and does not rest on productivity shocks driving fluctuations in the model. The crucial determinant of unemployment volatility is the responsiveness of z relative to the responsiveness of p when some shock hits the economy, with the relative responsiveness given by $\epsilon(z, p)$.

In Appendix A.2 we simulate the full model in which p and z vary endogenously over time. Under a high but fixed level of z , unemployment is volatile in response to TFP shocks. When we allow z to vary cyclically, we obtain an elasticity $\epsilon(z, p)$ between 0.8 and 0.9, which is close to our estimate in the data, and find that the volatility of unemployment becomes much smaller. This holds irrespective of the level of z .

7.2 Alternating Offers Bargaining Model

Hall and Milgrom (2008) replace Nash bargaining with an alternative wage setting mechanism. In their alternating-offer bargaining game, when a firm with a vacancy meets an unemployed, the firm offers a compensation package \tilde{w} . The unemployed can accept the offer and commence work, or prolong the bargaining and make a counteroffer \tilde{w}' . Crucially, z parameterizes the flow opportunity cost of prolonging the bargaining and hence the threat point if the unemployed

³⁷In a model with labor market frictions, concave utility over consumption, and an explicit value of time, Blanchard and Gali (2010) show that unemployment is neutral with respect to fluctuations in productivity. In their model consumption moves one-to-one with productivity due to the lack of capital. Because they do not consider benefits and fluctuations in hours per worker, their z also moves one-to-one with productivity. In our case unemployment fluctuations are small but not zero when $\epsilon(z, p) = 1$. The difference is explained by the fact that in equation (38) we have assumed that vacancy costs κ are constant. Blanchard and Gali instead assume that hiring costs scale one-to-one with productivity.

deems the employer’s initial offer too low.³⁸ With a constant z , wages therefore respond weakly to increases in p . The rigidity of wages incentivizes firms to significantly increase their job creation.³⁹ Allowing instead z to comove with p in the alternating-offer bargaining model makes the unemployed’s threat point again sensitive to aggregate conditions. This increases the flexibility of wages and reduces the volatility of unemployment.

We illustrate this point using the linear search and matching model presented in Hall and Milgrom (2008). We first replicate their results for three linear models, the Nash bargaining model with $z = 0.71$ (“Standard MP”), the Nash bargaining model with $z = 0.93$ (“Hagedorn-Manovskii”), and the alternating-offer bargaining model with $z = 0.71$ (“Hall-Milgrom”). Then, we introduce in these models a cyclical z with $\epsilon(z, p) = 1$. Appendix A.3 presents the equations and parameters of Hall and Milgrom (2008), which we adopt here.

Table 8 summarizes the results. We first discuss results under Nash bargaining, building on the intuition of the previous section. The first row shows the slope of the expected present value of utility flows for the unemployed \tilde{U}^u with respect to the expected present value of a newly hired worker’s product \tilde{p} . With Nash bargaining, \tilde{U}^u is the outside option of the unemployed while bargaining. It helps to separate \tilde{U}^u into the sum of two components, the expected present value from receiving z discounted by the probability the individual remains unemployed, and the value of obtaining a job in a future period discounted by the probability of exiting unemployment in that period. In the Standard MP model with constant z , \tilde{U}^u responds substantially when \tilde{p} increases. Intuitively, low z means that future job prospects contribute relatively more to \tilde{U}^u , and a higher \tilde{p} increases the probability of an unemployed finding a high-wage job. In the Hagedorn-Manovskii calibration, a high fixed z makes the expected discounted value of future z ’s a more important component of \tilde{U}^u . As a result, total \tilde{U}^u responds less to the better job prospects created by a higher \tilde{p} .

³⁸Another important parameter is the probability (denoted by δ in Hall and Milgrom, 2008) that the bargaining exogenously falls apart and the unemployed returns to the general search pool. This probability governs the extent to which the wage depends on z rather than on wage offers at other firms.

³⁹Christiano, Eichenbaum, and Trabandt (2013) embed the Hall and Milgrom (2008) model of wage bargaining into a New-Keynesian dynamic general equilibrium model and show that the estimated model outperforms the standard MP model in several dimensions including volatility in the labor market.

Table 8: Cyclicalities of Wages and Unemployment Fluctuations

Statistic	Standard MP		Hagedorn-Manovskii		Hall-Milgrom	
	Fixed z	Cyclical z	Fixed z	Cyclical z	Fixed z	Cyclical z
Slope $d\tilde{U}^u/d\tilde{p}$	1.14	1.30	0.87	1.32	1.19	1.31
Slope $d\tilde{w}/d\tilde{p}$	0.93	0.98	0.71	0.98	0.69	0.91
Elasticity $\epsilon(u, p)$	-1.51	-0.44	-5.87	-0.40	-6.02	-1.75

The second row shows the slope of the expected present value of wage payments \tilde{w} with respect to \tilde{p} . With constant z , the increase in the unemployed's outside option in the standard MP model makes wages respond flexibly to productivity as well. In the Hagedorn-Manovskii model, the insensitivity of the outside option to movements in productivity makes the wage more rigid. This difference explains the success of the Hagedorn-Manovskii calibration in generating volatile unemployment fluctuations, shown in the third row of Table 8.

Turning to the Hall and Milgrom model with constant z , here too the change in job prospects of an unemployed makes \tilde{U}^u sensitive to variations in \tilde{p} . However, with alternating-offer bargaining, returning to the general search pool with value \tilde{U}^u no longer constitutes the unemployed's outside option. Instead, the unemployed's threat point is to continue to bargain, in which case he receives a flow value z . Therefore, wages do not respond significantly to productivity variations and the volatility of unemployment increases.

To summarize, both the Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) calibration and the Hall and Milgrom (2008) alternating-offers model achieve volatile unemployment in part by generating endogenous wage rigidity. In both cases, the wage rigidity comes from increasing the importance of z to the unemployed's outside option, in Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) by calibrating a higher z and in Hall and Milgrom (2008) by changing the bargaining game to increase the weight of z in the outside option. This logic makes clear why both models no longer generate volatile unemployment if z moves cyclically. In that event, the outside option in both models again becomes sensitive to productivity, wages become volatile, and the firm's incentive to

increase employment following a positive shock to \tilde{p} becomes weaker. The columns labeled Cyclical z in Table 8 illustrate this point quantitatively.⁴⁰

7.3 Directed Search and Wage Posting Model

The role of z in the random search and matching framework extends into the environment pioneered in Moen (1997) and Shimer (1996) with directed search and wage posting. Here we summarize the argument and defer to Appendix A.4 a more detailed presentation of the model as well as the derivations underlying our analysis.

We augment the basic environment described in Section 2 to have M distinct employment submarkets indexed by $i = 1, 2, \dots, M$. All submarkets have the same matching technology, production technology, and job separation rate. In each submarket, a triplet $\{w(i), N(i), \theta(i)\}$ describes the posted wage, posted hours per worker, and the vacancy-unemployment ratio.

The household maximizes the objective function (2), augmented to allow hours and consumption of employed to vary across submarkets. Similarly, the budget constraint of the household is given by equation (3) but with labor income $w_t N_t e_t$ replaced by the sum of income earned in M submarkets $\sum_i w_t(i) N_t(i) e_t(i)$. There are M laws of motion for employment, $e_{t+1}(i) = (1 - s_t)e_t(i) + f_t(i)u_t(i)$. The household chooses the allocation of consumption across its members and, additionally, how to optimally allocate searchers across submarkets. The marginal value to the household of an additional employed in submarket i is:

$$\frac{J_t^h(i)}{\lambda_t} = \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^w}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) w_t(i) N_t(i) - z_t(i) + \mathbb{E}_t \frac{\beta \lambda_{t+1}}{\lambda_t} (1 - s_t - f_t(i)) \frac{J_{t+1}^h(i)}{\lambda_{t+1}}. \quad (39)$$

In the Appendix we solve for a symmetric equilibrium in which all firms post the same wage and hours and $\theta_t(i) = \theta_t$ is the same in all submarkets. With symmetric hours, consumption bundles also do not differ across submarkets. As a result, we obtain $z_t(i) = z_t$ in equation (39), where z_t is again defined as in equation (10). The same measure of opportunity cost also appears in the model with directed search and wage posting.

⁴⁰With cyclicality in z , the Hall-Milgrom model performs better than the Hagedorn-Manovskii model. This is because in the Hall-Milgrom model wages partly depend on a firm-specific cost of continuing bargaining (denoted by γ) which is assumed to be constant over time. Making γ comove with the aggregate state ameliorates even more the unemployment fluctuations generated by the model.

The steady state elasticity of overall market tightness θ with respect to shocks to the marginal product p is given by:

$$\epsilon(\theta, p) = \bar{B} \left(\frac{\left(\frac{1-\tau^w}{1+\tau^C} \right) p - z\epsilon(z, p)}{\left(\frac{1-\tau^w}{1+\tau^C} \right) p - z} \right), \quad (40)$$

where \bar{B} is a constant. The elasticities $\epsilon(\theta, p)$ defined in equation (40) for the directed search model and in equation (38) for the Nash bargaining model are identical up to the constants \bar{B} and B . As a result, the implications of a cyclical z in the Nash bargaining environment also apply to an environment with directed search. The constants \bar{B} and B in the two models coincide exactly when the bargaining power of workers μ equals the absolute value of the elasticity of the job-filling rate q with respect to market tightness θ .

7.4 Indivisible Labor Model

In the models considered so far employment is a state variable. We now discuss the indivisible labor model of Hansen (1985) and Rogerson (1988). The household maximizes the objective function in equation (2) subject to the budget constraint in equation (3). The key difference relative to the search and matching model is that, instead of facing the exogenous law of motion for employment in equation (1), the household now chooses freely the number of employed e_t in each period.⁴¹

The marginal value of employment in this model is simply:

$$\frac{J_t^h}{\lambda_t} = \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^w}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) w_t N_t - z_t, \quad (41)$$

where z_t is still defined as in equation (10). Thus, the same measure of the opportunity cost arises in the indivisible labor model. Equation (41) implies a step function for the supply of labor along the extensive margin. If the after-tax labor income is below the opportunity cost (i.e. $J_t^h < 0$), then $e_t = 0$. If the after-tax labor income exceeds the opportunity cost (i.e. $J_t^h > 0$), then $e_t = 1$. If the after-tax labor income equals the opportunity cost ($J_t^h = 0$),

⁴¹As in Hansen (1985) and Rogerson (1988), this problem can be microfounded in a model in which many ex-ante similar individuals choose the probability e_t of employment. A lottery then determines which individuals actually work. Individuals have access to an insurance market which provides consumption equal to C_t^e when employed and C_t^u when unemployed. Only if preferences are separable in hours N_t , then $C_t^e = C_t^u$.

then the household supplies any employment $e_t \in [0, 1]$. To close the model, one can assume a downward sloping labor demand function relating $w_t N_t$ to e_t . In an interior equilibrium, $w_t N_t (1 - \tau_t^w) / (1 + \tau_t^C) = z_t$.

The consequences of a procyclical z for employment fluctuations apply equally well to the indivisible labor model. To see this, suppose that z is fixed (for instance, because b is fixed and there is no disutility from labor). A given decrease in labor demand with fixed z causes a large drop in equilibrium employment e without any change in the equilibrium wage w . Next, in response to the same decrease in labor demand, suppose that z also falls. The drop in the equilibrium e is now smaller and the equilibrium w also declines.

7.5 Incomplete Asset Markets Model

Our final extension considers the problem of an individual who cannot share risks perfectly with other members of the household, but instead accumulates assets a_t to self insure against idiosyncratic employment shocks. Assets earn a net rate of return equal to r_t . Individuals face the borrowing constraint $a_t \geq \bar{a}_t$. The transitions to and out of employment in the form of job finding rates f_t and separations s_t are treated as exogenous aggregate states from the point of view of workers. Let $\pi(\mathbf{Z}_{t+1}|\mathbf{Z}_t)$ denote the probability that the aggregate state transits from \mathbf{Z}_t to \mathbf{Z}_{t+1} .

Denote by a_{t+1}^e the choice of assets for period $t+1$ conditional on being employed in period t . The value function of an employed who starts with assets a_t is:

$$W^e(a_t, \mathbf{Z}_t) = U(C_t^e, N_t) + \beta \sum_{\mathbf{Z}_{t+1}} \pi(\mathbf{Z}_{t+1}|\mathbf{Z}_t) \left((1 - s_t) W^e(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) + s_t W^u(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) \right), \quad (42)$$

subject to the budget constraint $(1 + \tau_t^C) C_t^e + a_{t+1}^e + \Pi_t = (1 - \tau_t^w) w_t N_t + (1 + r_t) a_t$. Similarly, denote by a_{t+1}^u the choice of assets for period $t+1$ conditional on being unemployed in period t . The value function of an unemployed who starts with assets a_t is:

$$W^u(a_t, \mathbf{Z}_t) = U(C_t^u, 0) + \beta \sum_{\mathbf{Z}_{t+1}} \pi(\mathbf{Z}_{t+1}|\mathbf{Z}_t) \left(f_t W^e(a_{t+1}^u, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) + (1 - f_t) W^u(a_{t+1}^u, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) \right), \quad (43)$$

subject to the budget constraint $(1 + \tau_t^C) C_t^u + a_{t+1}^u + \Pi_t = b_t + (1 + r_t) a_t$. For simplicity, we

abstract from UI eligibility and the take-up decision and simply lump these margins into b_t . Finally, we note that Π_t now also includes transfers that do not depend on employment status.

An individual entering period t with assets a_t receives a surplus from moving from unemployment to employment equal to $J_t^h = W^e(a_t, \mathbf{Z}_t) - W^u(a_t, \mathbf{Z}_t)$. We define $J_{t+1}^h = W^e(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) - W^u(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1})$. Evaluating both terms of J_{t+1}^h at a_{t+1}^e restricts the $t + 1$ surplus to only that part associated with entering $t + 1$ in the employed state. Substituting (42) and (43) into J_t^h , we obtain:

$$\frac{J_t^h}{\lambda_t^e} = \left(\frac{1 - \tau_t^w}{1 + \tau_t^C} \right) w_t N_t - z_t - z_t^A + (1 - s_t - f_t) \mathbb{E}_t \left(\frac{\beta \lambda_{t+1}^e}{\lambda_t^e} \right) \frac{J_{t+1}^h}{\lambda_{t+1}^e}, \quad (44)$$

where z_t is defined again as in equation (10) and z_t^A denotes a component of the opportunity cost related to the differential asset accumulation between the employed and the unemployed.⁴² We divide by the marginal utility of the employed λ_t^e because the wage negotiated during bargaining is paid in the state of the world in which the individual accepts the offer.

The opportunity cost implied by equation (44) is equal to the sum of the z from equation (10) and z^A . Therefore, the z we measure in the data does not constitute a sufficient statistic for unemployment fluctuations in the incomplete markets model. Measuring z^A requires finding an empirical counterpart for the value function, a task that goes beyond the scope of this paper. In Appendix A.5 we calibrate a version of the incomplete markets model and find that the term z^A is generally small and does not offset the procyclicality of z .

8 Conclusion

The flow value of the opportunity cost of employment falls during recessions. The key mechanism is that the household values most the contribution of the employed (through higher wage income) relative to that of the unemployed (through higher non-working time) when market

⁴²We have $z_t^A = -\frac{\beta}{\lambda_t^e} \mathbb{E}_t [f_t (W^e(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) - W^e(a_{t+1}^u, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1})) + (1 - f_t) (W^u(a_{t+1}^e, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}) - W^u(a_{t+1}^u, \mathbf{Z}_{t+1}))] + a_{t+1}^e - a_{t+1}^u$. Moving from unemployment to employment (holding constant initial assets at a_t) causes a “budgetary loss” equal to $a_{t+1}^e - a_{t+1}^u$ due to the fact that employed accumulate more assets. There is an offsetting gain as the individual starts $t + 1$ with higher assets. Because all of the surplus associated with a higher probability of having a job in $t + 1$ is included into J_{t+1}^h , the value function gains from entering $t + 1$ with assets a_{t+1}^e instead of a_{t+1}^u are evaluated as if the individual obtains employment in period $t + 1$ with probability f_t .

consumption is low and non-working time is high. This more than offsets the effect of the increase in government benefits.

A procyclical opportunity cost reduces unemployment volatility in models where z affects the wage bargain. Our preferred estimate of the elasticity of the opportunity cost with respect to the marginal product of employment is close to unity. With this value and Nash bargaining, fluctuations in unemployment generated by the model are essentially neutral with respect to the level of z and remain far smaller than unemployment fluctuations in the data. We reach a similar outcome in a model in which wages are determined by alternating offers or when the labor market has directed search and wage posting.

An interpretation of our results is that endogenous forms of wage rigidity, such as accomplished by Hagedorn and Manovskii (2008) and by Hall and Milgrom (2008), do not survive the introduction of a cyclical flow opportunity cost. Without rigid wages, these models cannot generate volatile unemployment. This pessimistic conclusion does not apply to models where wages are exogenously sticky or selected according to some process that does not depend on the opportunity cost of employment. Alternatively, using the Brugemann and Moscarini (2010) decomposition of wages into payments covering opportunity costs and rents due to frictions, the procyclicality of z implies that wage rigidity requires substantial countercyclicality in rents. The extent to which actual wages vary cyclically remains an open and important question (see Pissarides (2009) and Hall and Milgrom (2008) for contrasting views).

Our results also bear on recent work emphasizing the role of social safety net expansions in propagating the increase in unemployment during the Great Recession (Hagedorn, Karahan, Manovskii, and Mitman, 2013). We find, contrary to this hypothesis, that fluctuations in the value of benefits have only a small effect on the opportunity cost of employment. However, we have not modeled the complicated set of benefit phase-out schedules, considered in Mulligan (2012), that can give rise to high implicit marginal tax rates along the intensive margin or affect the decision to move out of the labor force.

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