

# ASSA Hotel Bedroom Interviews: Memo

*This memo was put together by Kathryn Holston and Anna Stansbury.  
Please feel free to circulate. If you have comments or questions, reach us at  
[kathrynholston@g.harvard.edu](mailto:kathrynholston@g.harvard.edu) and [annastansbury@g.harvard.edu](mailto:annastansbury@g.harvard.edu).*

## Concern

A number of job interviews at the ASSA meetings are still conducted in hotel bedrooms (rather than interview rooms or suites). In some of the cases, one or more of the interviewers may be sitting on the bed. The candidate may even be asked to sit on the bed.

## Why is this a problem?

Interviews in hotel bedrooms may be uncomfortable for many candidates. In addition, interviewing candidates in a hotel bedroom is likely to have disparate effects on candidates with different experiences, with the possibility for harming both individual candidates and the selection process more broadly:

## Examples of interview experiences from economics job market guides:

- “Interviews held in small hotel rooms may feel quite crowded, with interviewers perched on beds or leaning against walls” ([John Cawley](#), p.37)
- “I’ve heard of interviewers lying on the bed.” ([Navin Kartik](#), point 23)
- “You may be interviewing in the hotel room of the head of the interview committee. It is not uncommon for you to be in the room with an unmade bed and a dirty towel hanging over the bathroom door. Ignore these distractions and be professional. If the interviewers are doing their job, they will give you a chair (not the bed) to sit on.” ([Christopher Timmins](#), p. 10)
- “We reserved a large suite both to avoid the awkwardness of interviewing in a bedroom and to easily accommodate three to four interviewers and a job candidate. Booking the more expensive suite had a seemingly high return; several female candidates expressed relief upon entering our suite and described the discomfort of sitting on a bed facing three or four (often male) interviewers. For similar reasons, we also ensured that a female faculty member was present in all interviews of female candidates.” ([Holmes and Colander](#) p.9)
- “Pant suits are preferable to skirt suits for interviews on hotel beds” ([WEB job market advice](#))

### **Likely disparate effect on candidates of interviewing in a hotel room:**

- People who have experienced sexual violence may be made uncomfortable or triggered by the interview setting. Women are [far more likely to have experienced sexual violence](#) than men, meaning this is likely to have a disproportionate impact by gender, even more so for women of color. This is also the case for [LGBTQIA individuals](#).
- Going to an interview in a hotel room with a bed visibly present, with an interviewer sitting on the bed, with (likely) a mostly or all male panel, may make gender particularly salient for some female interviewees. This may make interviewees uncomfortable and, given research on stereotype threat and priming, may also impede their performance in the interview.
- Given the prevalence of sexual harassment at academic conferences (see e.g. [this report from the APSA](#) and the experiences in the crowdsourced [Harassment in Academia spreadsheet](#)), the experience of interviewing in a small hotel room with one or several men may be particularly uncomfortable.
- Being asked to sit on a bed may exacerbate all of the above. It can also be impractical, since beds are higher than chairs. As a result, several of us have heard the advice that women shouldn't wear skirts to the interviews.

### **Why do hotel bedroom interviews happen?**

From what we understand, there are insufficient conference rooms and suites in the hotels near the ASSA meetings for all interviews and/or the suites are too expensive for some institutions to reserve.

### **What can the profession do?**

In the medium term, we believe the goal should be to remove all interviews from hotel bedrooms. Instead, interviews would be in interview rooms or hotel suites without beds and with enough chairs present. A solution would need to respect both the capacity constraints of the local venues and the budget constraints of interviewing institutions. It may be possible to do some combination of:

1. Pre-reserving suites and only releasing suites to interviewing institutions, one per institution
2. Reserving seminar-style rooms in hotels or nearby conference centers for interviews
3. Reserving more ballroom-type spaces and putting interview cubicles further apart so that noise is less of a problem
4. Exploring the use of alternate spaces, such as nearby universities that may be on winter break at the time of the meetings

In the more immediate term, we argue that:

1. Candidates should never be asked to sit on a bed during an interview. The interviewing institution and/or AEA should arrange to provide additional chairs as needed.
2. If necessary to host interviews in a hotel room, interviewers should make an effort to organize the room setup to mirror an office interview.
3. The AEA should establish and publicize a process for interviewees to report inappropriate interview experiences.

## **Examples of best practices around interviewing from other academic associations:**

**The American Mathematical Society** Council issued the following [statement](#) on interviewing: "The AMS strongly encourages use of the Employment Center venues for all professional interviews of prospective employees at society meetings. The use of personal hotel rooms is particularly discouraged".

**The Mathematical Association of America** Board of Governors has the following [policy](#): "The MAA strongly discourages the use of personal hotel sleeping rooms as the site for professional interviews of prospective employees. This practice is intimidating for some job-seekers, particularly those who find the situation uncomfortable and possibly unsafe."

**The American Political Science Association** does not seem to have interview guidelines but has a detailed [professional code of conduct](#) on sexual harassment at the annual meetings. They also have an Ombuds available onsite at APSA meetings: "to speak with any meeting attendee on a variety of topics including but not limited to, consultation with any meeting attendees who believe that they have experienced any form of harassment."

**The American Philosophical Association** has [best practices](#) for interviewing, as well as a statement specifically on [hotel room interviews](#): "Departments should not conduct job interviews in non-suite hotel rooms. Candidates who are subject to such interviews can appeal to the APA and are guaranteed anonymity."

**The American Historical Association** has [guidelines](#) for the hiring process, which include: "Interviews should proceed in a manner that respects the professional and personal integrity of candidates and interviewers. Whenever possible, interviewing committees should include male and female representation." and "Interviews should take place in a professional setting. The AHA strongly urges institutions interviewing at the AHA annual meeting to use the facilities provided through the Job Center."

**The American Studies Association** has [guidelines](#) for interviewing: "The ASA discourages interview activities in hotel bedrooms. The ASA strongly advises that a parlor suite rather than a sleeping room be used and that a third person always be present in the room with the candidate. Interviewers using such facilities bear sole responsibility for establishing an appropriate, professional atmosphere and should take special care to ensure that all interviews are conducted courteously and in a proper manner."