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# The jobs of 17 of your favorite TV characters, and what it's really like to do them

Zoë Miller Feb 5, 2020, 1:10 PM



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Many popular TV shows feature unique or popular careers. NBC,Michael Desmond/CBS via Getty Images,Fox

- **Some TV characters have unrealistic careers whereas others seem to be accurately doing their job.**

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- **As an OB-GYN, Mindy Lahiri on "The Mindy Project" would have more administrative work to complete.**

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- **Phil Dunphy on "Modern Family" would need to update his approach to selling real estate.**

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- **The life of an architect is much less romantic than Ted Mosby's on "How I Met Your Mother."**

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TV seems to make everything look easy, especially jobs.

If you've wondered how sex columnist Carrie Bradshaw could afford her lavish lifestyle on "Sex and the City," or what it takes to open a bed and breakfast, like Lorelai's Dragonfly Inn on "Gilmore Girls," you're not alone.

Here are 17 professions that have been on the small screen, plus how realistic they were portrayed and what it's really like to do them.

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## The crime scene technicians on "CSI" wouldn't be working on just one case at a time.



"CSI" isn't always accurate. [CBS](#)

CBS's "CSI," the popular crime drama that spawned multiple spin-offs ("Miami," "New York," and "Cyber"), follows members of the Las Vegas Police Department's crime-scene investigation team who are tasked with solving murders.

According to [Daryl Clemens](#), a crime scene technician for the Forensic Services Unit of the Grand Rapids Police Department in Michigan, [the least-realistic aspect of "CSI"](#)

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"The majority of police agencies in the United States are very small and they do not



have a dedicated crime-scene team," Clemens told Insider. "Those guys are going to be doing whatever their regular assigned duties are. It could be they're on patrol, it could be they're detectives."

When they're not answering a call, Clemens told Insider that he and his colleagues are tagging evidence, examining fingerprints, and creating digital composite photos of suspects.

But unlike the characters on "CSI," his team doesn't conduct interviews. That's a job reserved for detectives.

It's also worth noting that crime-scene units handle many types of cases, not just homicides.

"We respond to literally everything. We'll go from retail prod to multiple homicides," Clemens said. Some of the most common incidents he handles are burglaries where someone forgot to lock their house or their car.

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**Mindy Kaling as Mindy Lahiri.** FOX

Mindy Kaling created and starred on Fox's "The Mindy Project," which is inspired by her mother's career as an OB-GYN.

The series takes place in New York and centers around Mindy Lahiri, a rom-com obsessed woman who works at a small medical practice.

In real life, working as an OB-GYN involves much more administrative work and time with patients than the show indicates, as [Dr. Mary Jane Minkin](#) a practicing gynecologist with the Yale School of Medicine, explained in an interview with Insider.

"I basically go into an office and I see patients all day, including things like calling

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Plus, Minkin added, OB-GYNs are never truly off-duty — "We're always available. We're always on call."

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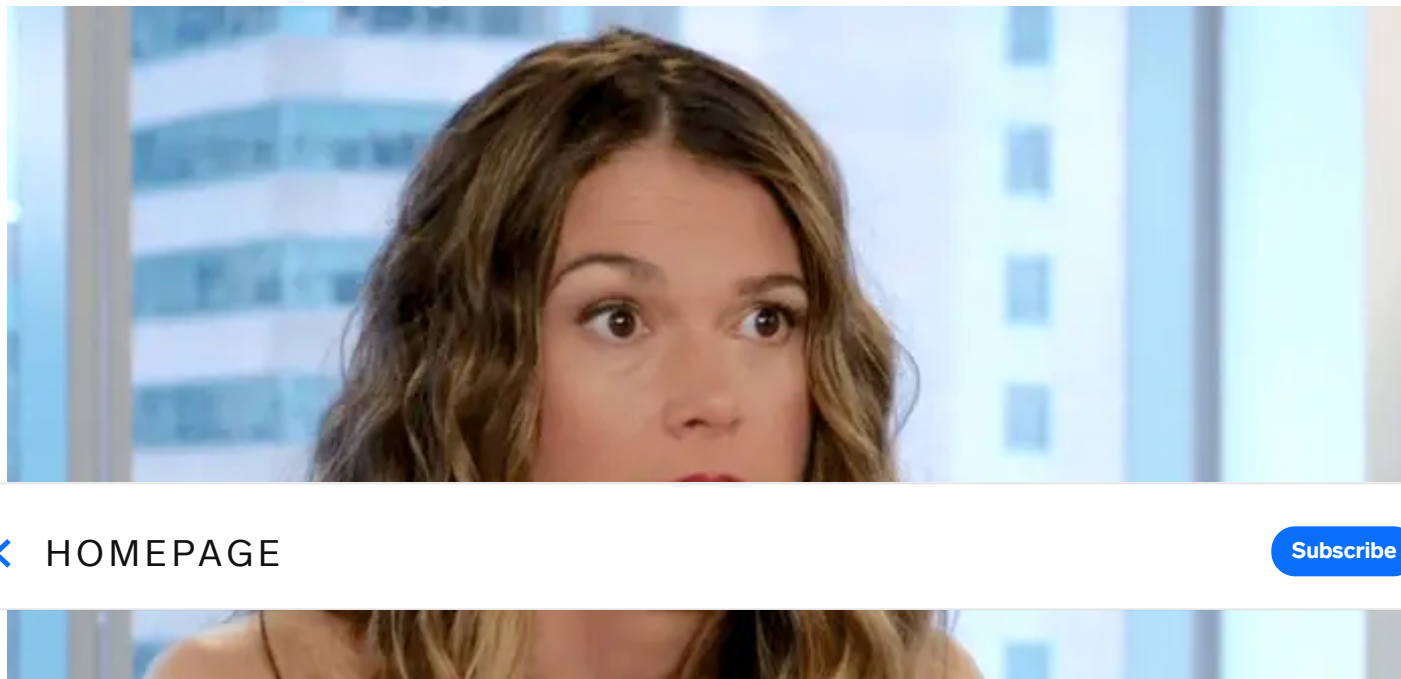
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Authors: Tommy, August 2020

**Marketing assistant Liza Miller on "Younger" would probably be mailing books and using analytics tools.**



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**Sutton Foster as Liza Miller.** TV Land

TV Land's "Younger" stars Broadway performer Sutton Foster as Liza Miller, a 40-year-old woman who poses as a 26-year-old in order to get a job in book publishing.

Liza works as the assistant to a marketing director, and her responsibilities range from creating a Twitter campaign to liaising with authors.

As someone who works in book publishing, I've noticed that the series doesn't highlight all the technical facets of the job.

In the past, I've interned in the publicity and marketing department of an independent publishing company in New York, where I did research, mailed books to influencers, and generated audience-engagement reports.

In addition, marketers oftentimes brainstorm advertising strategies and create content for social media. Depending on the company, it might also be the marketing team's responsibility to photograph books for Instagram.

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## It takes hard work to run a bed and breakfast like The Dragonfly Inn on "Gilmore Girls."



Lauren Graham as Lorelei Gilmore. Netflix

On The CW's "Gilmore Girls," Lorelai (Lauren Graham) and her best friend Sookie (Melissa McCarthy) co-own the Dragonfly Inn, a cozy accommodation in the fictional

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Heather Turner, marketing director at the [Professional Association of Innkeepers](#)

International, told Insider that the Dragonfly appears to be overstaffed for an inn

international, told Insider that the Dragonfly appears to be overstated for an inn with 14 or 15 rooms.

"It just seems like there are a lot of people floating around who don't seem to be doing much," she said.

Turner also noted that the show doesn't emphasize the hard work that goes into running an inn — Lorelai is often in the lobby chatting with guests or family members.

In reality, she said, innkeepers are "checking in guests constantly or making beds or cleaning toilets."

"I think most bed and breakfasts are a lot more professional," Turner added. "They're not as kitschy, if you can call it that."

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**William Jackson Harper as Chidi Anagonye.** The Good Place/NBC

On "The Good Place," the NBC comedy that puts a fresh spin on the afterlife, Chidi Anagonye (William Jackson Harper) is a professor of ethics and moral philosophy.

According to [Gideon Rosen](#), a philosophy professor at Princeton University, the show's approach to philosophical concepts is generally accurate and approachable.

"Whenever Chidi gives those quick philosophy lessons and explains what people were saying, it's always completely right and pretty accessible," Rosen [told The Ringer](#). "A normal person would understand when somebody tells you that, according to utilitarianism, the right act is the one that creates the most happiness. That's easy to understand, and they get it exactly right."

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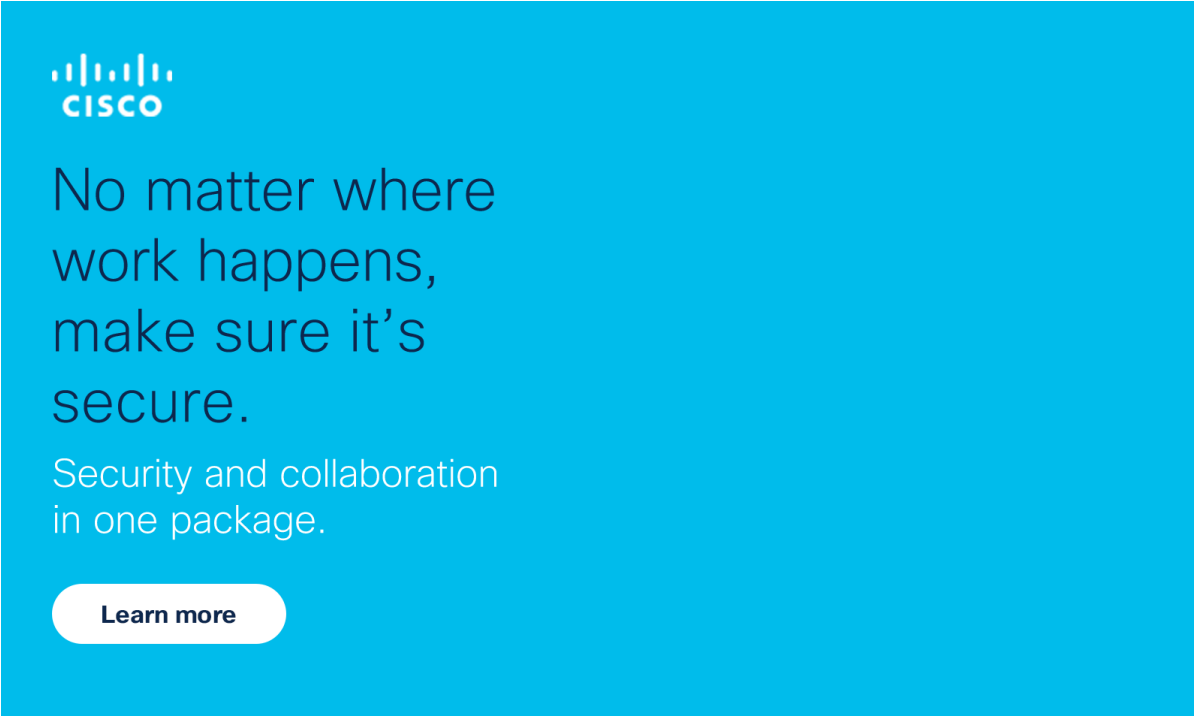
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constant indecision, an aspect of his personality that's exaggerated for comedic

effect.

Rosen said that novice philosophers must determine which tenets they agree with, but "people who stick with the subject for a little while, for better or worse, find themselves accepting some views and rejecting others."

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A blue rectangular advertisement for Cisco. In the top left corner is the Cisco logo, consisting of seven vertical bars of varying heights above the word "CISCO" in white. Below the logo, the text "No matter where work happens, make sure it's secure." is written in white. Underneath that, "Security and collaboration in one package." is written in a smaller white font. At the bottom left, there is a white rounded rectangular button with the text "Learn more" in blue.

  
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**Phil Dunphy on "Modern Family" would need to update his approach to selling real estate.**

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### Ty Burrell on "Modern Family." ABC

On ABC's "Modern Family," Phil Dunphy (Ty Burrell) is a real-estate agent in California. A self-professed "cool dad," he's more often seen interacting with his wife and children than doing his job.

When he is out in the field, [his strategies are questionable](#), whether he's trying to sell a property that's too fancy to be child-friendly to a woman with young kids or having his teenage daughter stalk a prospective buyer online to transform the house into his ideal abode.

Brittany Nettles, a Keller Williams realtor in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who founded the group [She Moves Philly](#), and her team member Britt McLaughlin, said that "Modern Family" gets some facts right about real estate, but exaggerates others.

"I think some of the things they portray on that show are true, but taken to the extreme. We do try to match people with their perfect home, but we don't stalk them on social media," McLaughlin told Insider.

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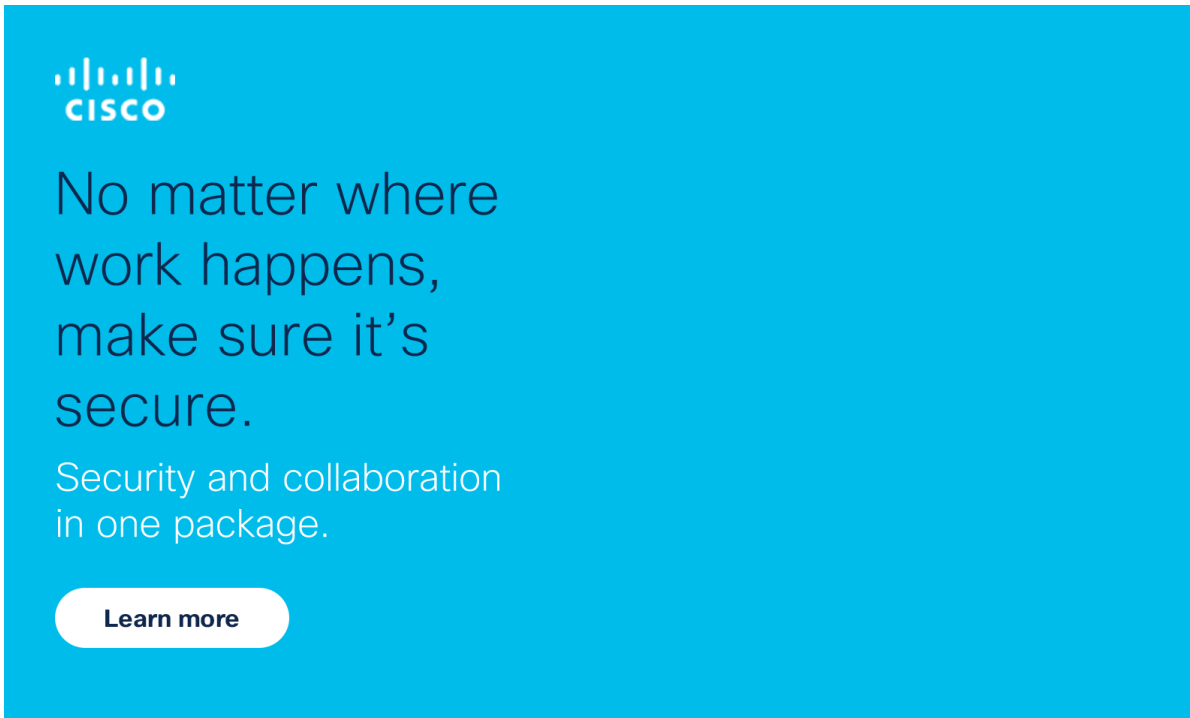
hobbies and their pastimes, and what they actually tell us at a buyer's consult."




However, Nettles and McLaughlin observed that the show diverges from reality in two areas: Phil trash-talking other realtors behind their backs and his old-school, car-salesman-esque approach to his job.

"We're all competing toward the same goal, whether you're a buyer or a seller or a buyer's agent," Nettles said. "We all play nice in the sandbox. It's not a rivalry."

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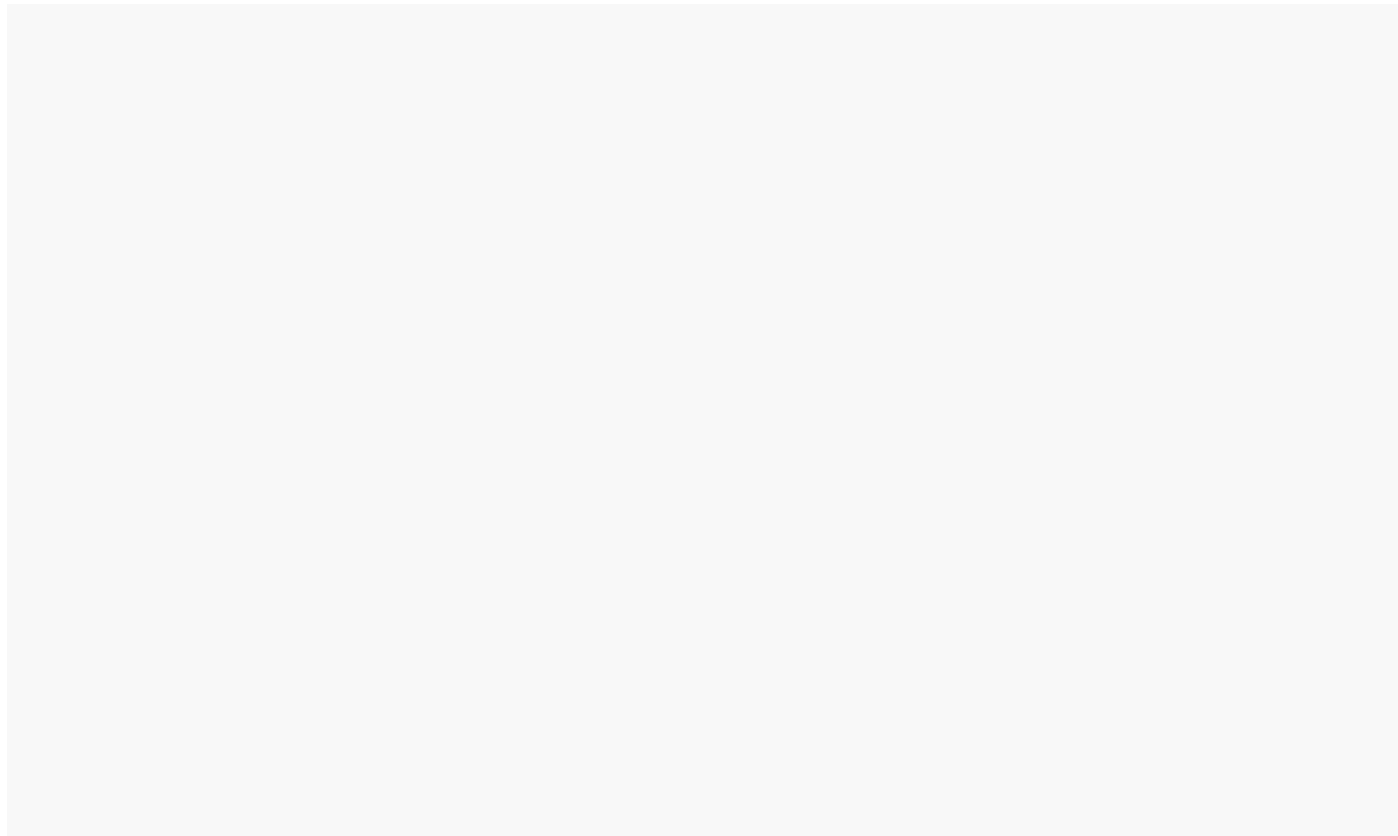
  
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**Monica is a head chef on "Friends" but, in real life, she would need to be working longer hours.**

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**Courteney Cox as Monica Geller.** NBC

Monica Geller (Courteney Cox) is a head chef at two different restaurants on seasons four through nine of NBC's "Friends."

Alistair McMurray, sous chef at the upscale restaurant Eleven Madison Park, previously told Insider that real chefs work longer hours than Monica seems to on the show.

He said that head chefs oftentimes have a Wednesday through Sunday schedule, and that Monica's responsibilities would include tasks like preparing the kitchen and recapping the previous day's service.

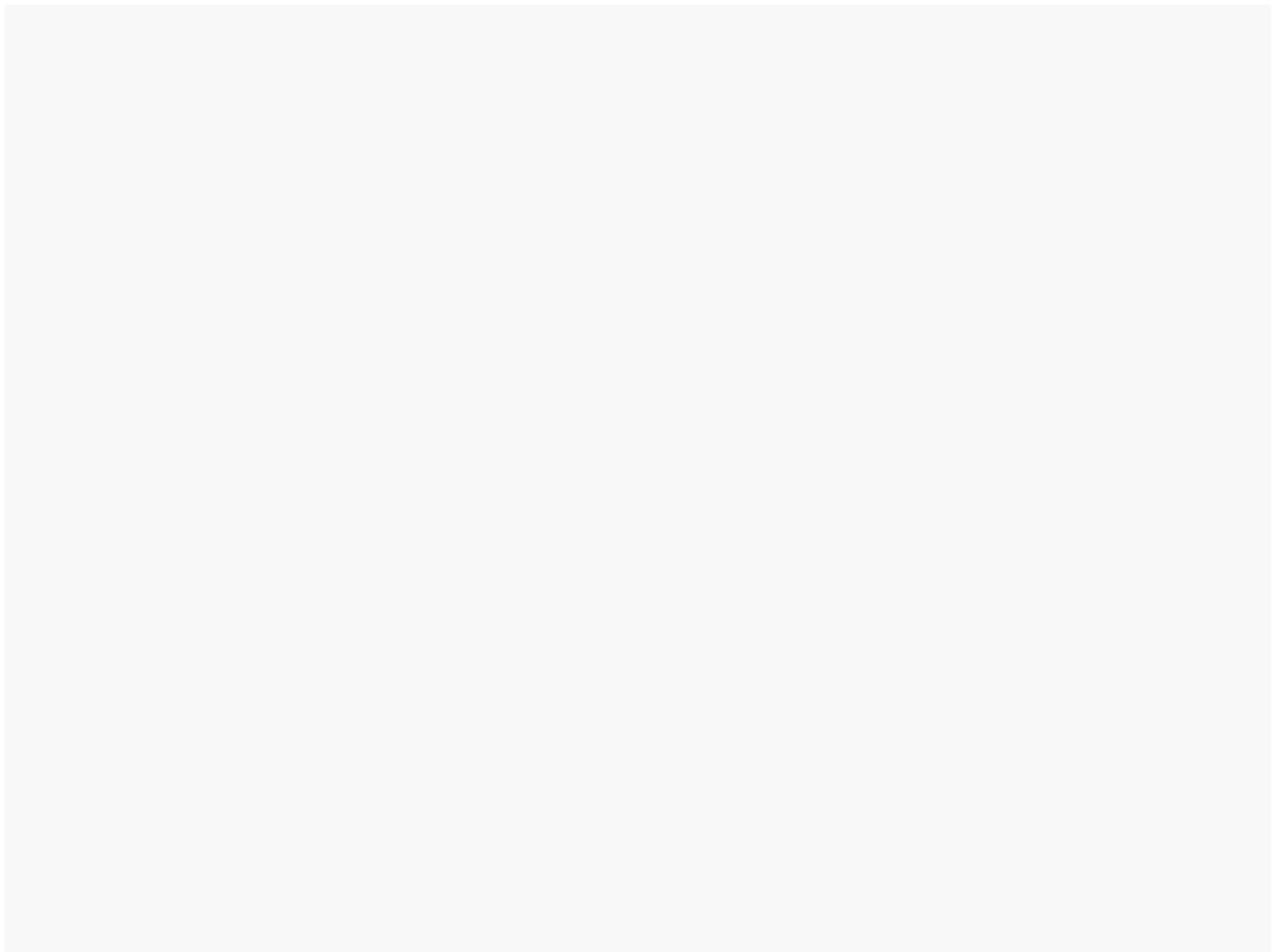
Even on her off days, she would likely have to attend tastings and food-development meetings.

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## Today, advertising agencies are more technologically advanced than they were on "Mad Men."



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Jon Hamm gained acclaim for his performance as Don Draper, an advertising executive in the 1960s, on AMC's "Mad Men."

Although the series underscored the era's social and sexual mores, it also encapsulated the inner workings of a creative company at that time.

Marla Kaplowitz, president and CEO of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's), told Insider that the advertising world has changed quite a bit since the 1960s.

For example, today, the "Mad Men" advertising team would surely be utilizing more platforms.

Kaplowitz also explained that during the 1960s and 1970s, agencies released "big beautiful campaigns" via mass media. Today, there would still be large-scale campaigns but they'd be done a bit differently.

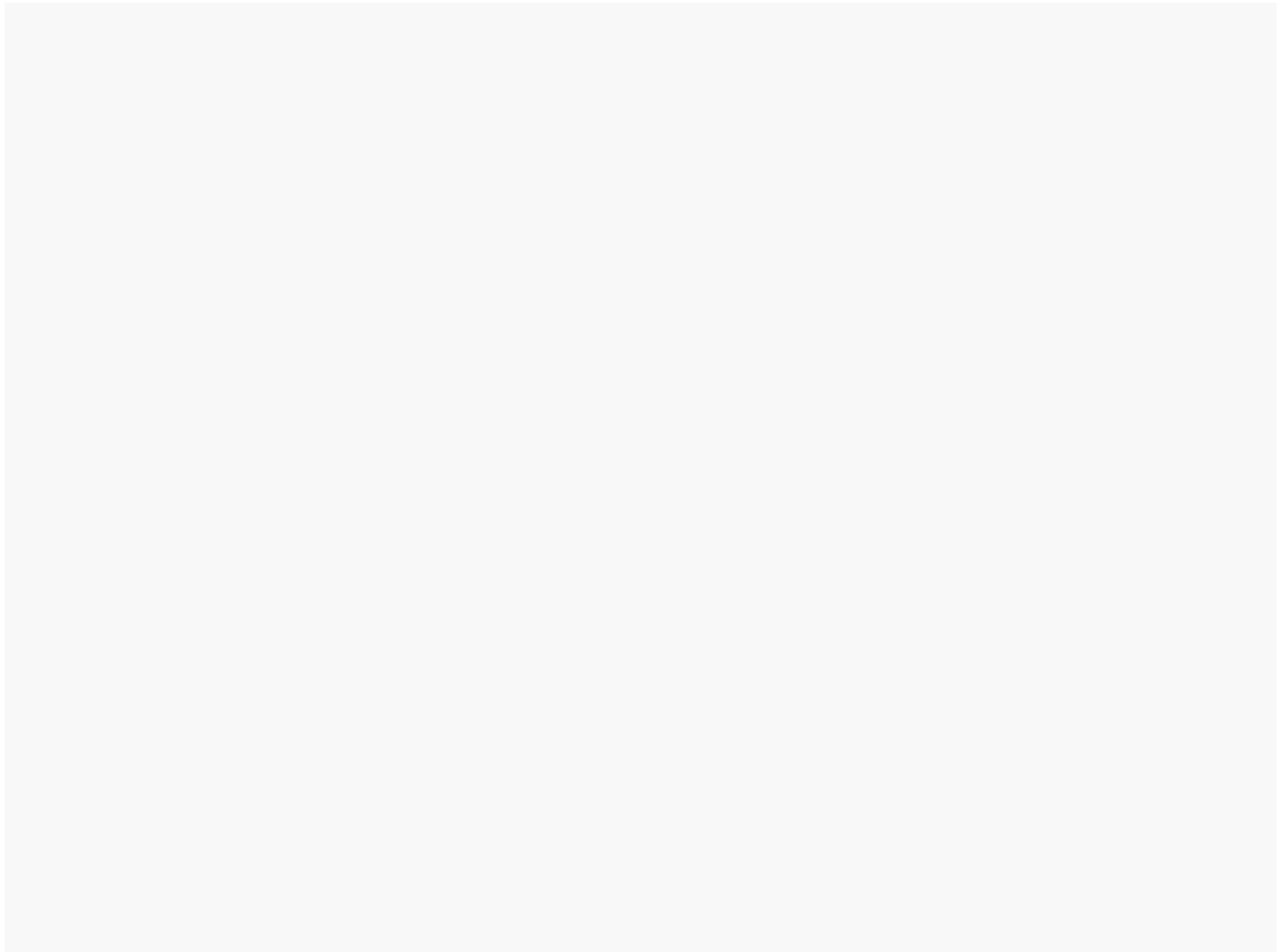
The advent of computers and social media made it easier for different departments to collaborate and for campaigns to be executed on a smaller scale. Now, there are bespoke campaigns tailored to different platforms, from LinkedIn to Instagram.

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## Real social-media editors collaborate with teammates more than Kat Edison does on "The Bold Type."



**Aisha Dee as Kat Edison.** NBCUniversal

Freeform's "The Bold Type" centers around three women who work at a women's magazine called Scarlet, which is loosely based on Cosmopolitan.

One of the protagonists, Kat Edison (Aisha Dee), is Scarlet's head of social media.

Anika Reed, who is a social-media director, wrote an article for USA Today about

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"As someone who manages social media accounts for a major publication, I know perfecting social posts and pushing out content quickly in a thoughtful and accurate way can be a minefield," Reed [wrote in 2018](#). "Unfortunately, mistakes do happen and the show does a fairly good job with its handling of Twitter mistakes and online trolling."

Reed agrees that a person in Kat's position would have some autonomy in crafting posts for different platforms, but she noted that it's unrealistic that Kat doesn't cooperate with her colleagues more often to develop a social strategy.

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## Not all psychiatrists are analysts like the title character on "Frasier."

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**Frasier was played by Kelsey Grammer.** NBC

A "Cheers" spin-off, NBC's "Frasier" tells the story of a radio psychiatrist named Dr. Frasier Crane (Kelsey Grammer).

Dr. Bill Pozios, a forensic psychiatrist with Michigan's state prison system, has a much different job than Frasier but sees commonalities across all subdisciplines of psychiatry.

"We're still providing psychiatric treatment to people who are diagnosed with mental disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, substance use disorders, anxiety disorders," Pozios told Insider. "The relevance of that is that it suggests mental disorders affect everybody, whether you're incarcerated or a patient of Frasier's on television."

A founder of the consultation group [Broadcast Thought](#), Pozios said that Frasier's go-to form of therapy is not the only one out there.

"On Frasier, he's an analyst and certainly that is an aspect of psychiatry that is depicted in a trope-ish manner sometimes in film and television, but is certainly still in practice today," he said, acknowledging that psychoanalysis is [just one form of talk](#)

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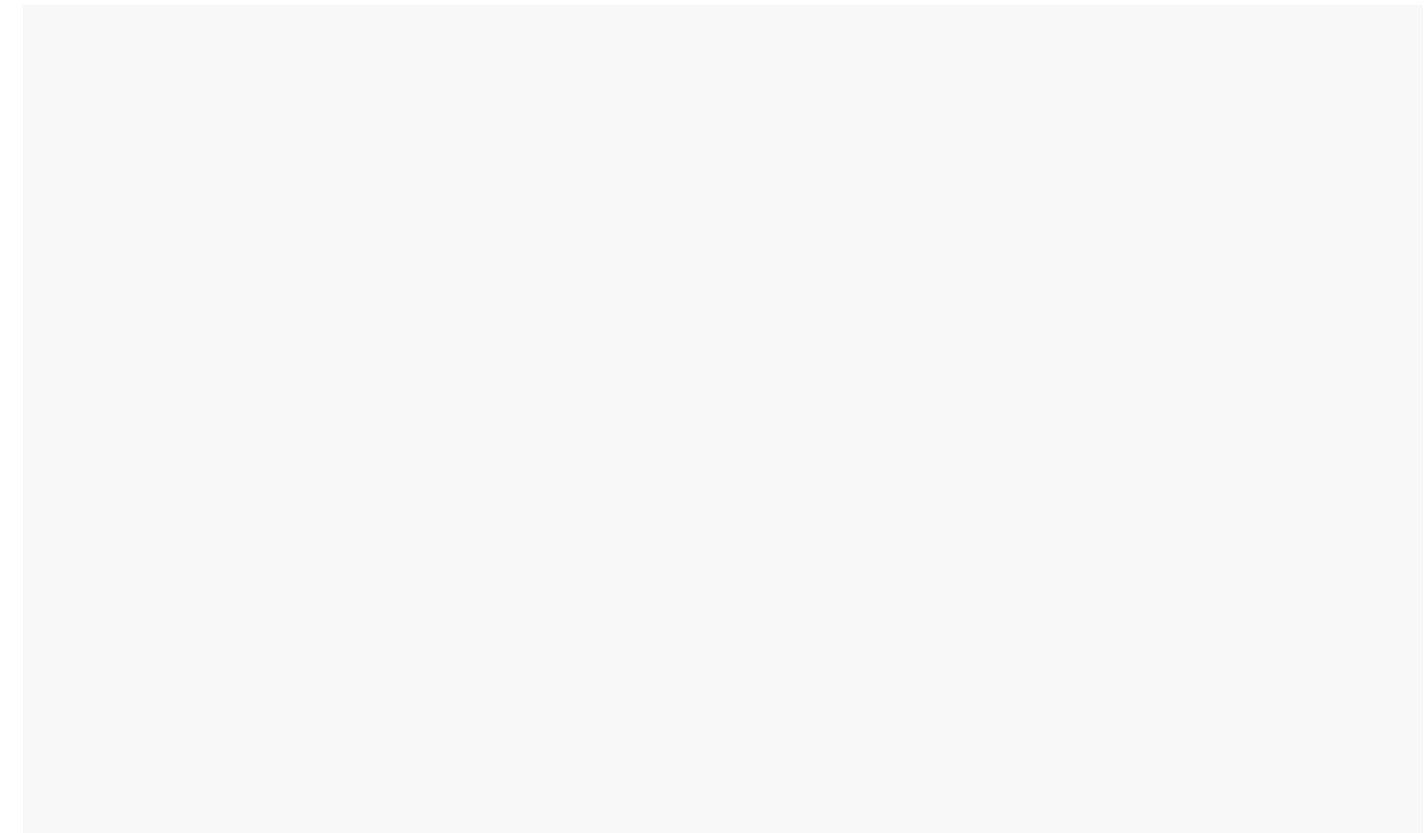
Other examples range from cognitive behavioral therapy to dialectical behavioral

therapy.

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## The big-box employees on "Superstore" would likely get in trouble for racing in shopping carts.



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## America Ferrera on "Superstore." NBC

Starring America Ferrera and Ben Feldman, NBC's "Superstore" is a sitcom about employees at a big-box store called Cloud 9.

[In a Reddit thread](#), users who say they used to work in retail described the series as "over-exaggerated and not realistic," comparing it more obviously fictionalize shows like "The Office."

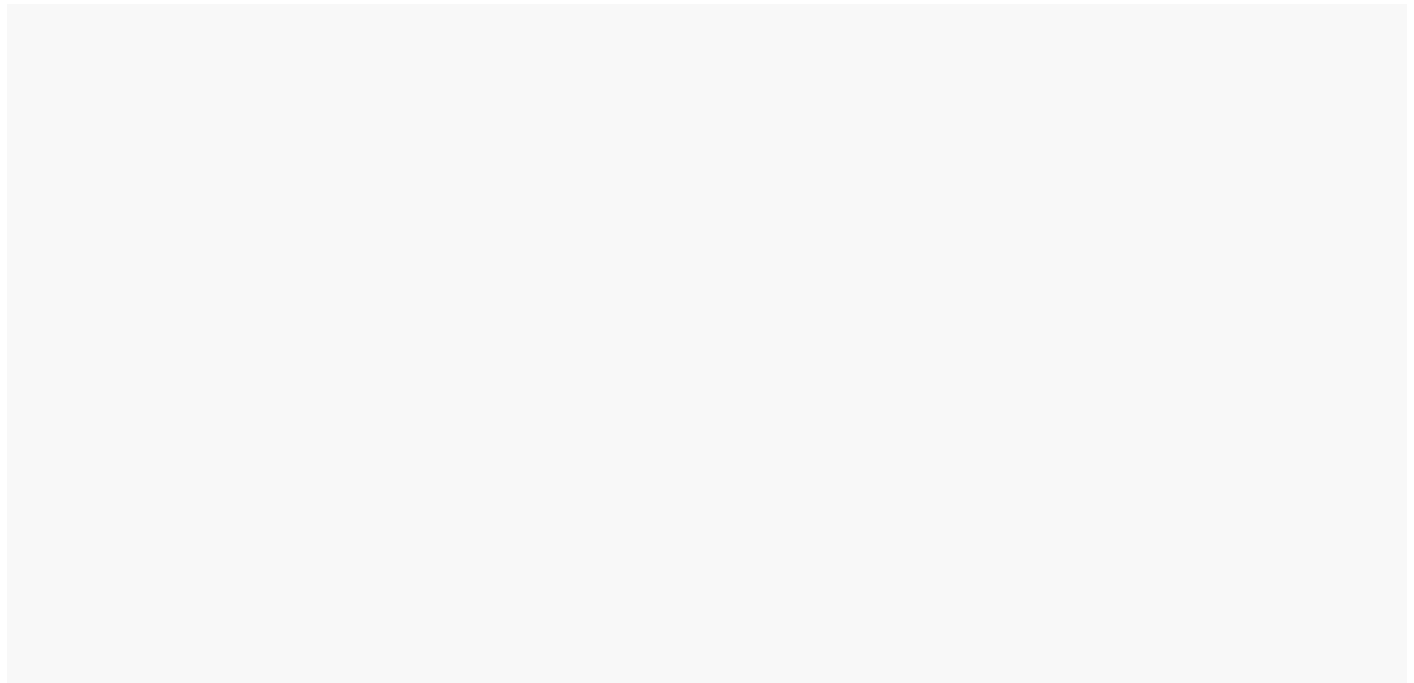
They observed that, in real life, employees would get in trouble for standing around and chatting or engaging in immature antics, like racing in shopping carts.

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## The life of an architect is much less romantic than Ted Mosby's on "How I Met Your Mother."

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**Josh Radnor on "How I Met Your Mother."** Michael Desmond/CBS via Getty Image

Ted Mosby (Josh Radnor), the protagonist of CBS's "How I Met Your Mother," is an architect in New York who is obsessed with finding his soul mate.

Chicago-based architect Carl Sergio told Insider he identified with the character's idealistic aspirations about how his designs could change the world, but noted that the series isn't very realistic when it comes to Ted's career.

As Sergio told Insider, "The show depicts one end of a very broad spectrum — the romanticized view of architects hand-drafting on huge tables, in open loft spaces in an open office, entering (and winning) competitions for the Next Big Thing," like a New York skyscraper.

He said that the majority of architectural projects are mundane, don't pay very much, and require long work hours. He also pointed out that most drafting is now completed digitally.

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conditions or review construction that's in progress.



Sergio also said it's highly unlikely someone like Ted, who is in his late 20s, would be licensed and designing his own building. "Many of us aren't even out of grad school by then," Sergio explained.

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**"Parks and Recreation" satirizes what it's like to work in a park system.**



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**Amy Amy Poehler as Leslie Knope.** NBC

Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), the perky, waffle-loving protagonist of NBC's "Parks and Recreation," is the deputy director of parks in recreation in Pawnee, Indiana, a fictional city.

Maria I. Nardi, director of [Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces](#), told Insider that the comedy series cleverly satirizes the inner workings of a parks department.

Her department and its fictional counterpart "share a common passion and conviction that parks serve as catalysts for transforming communities."

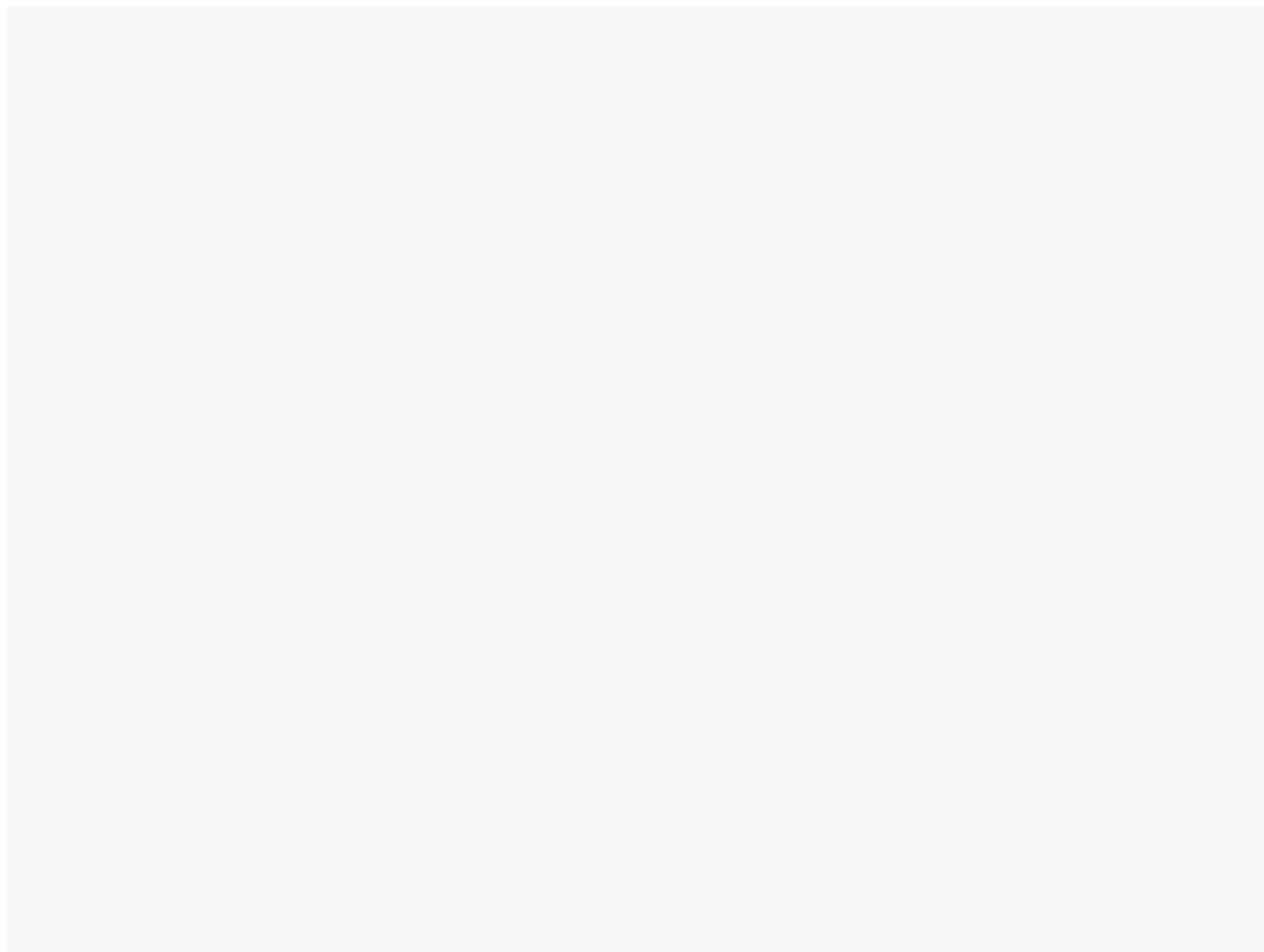
Although some plots are over-the-top, like those concerning Pawnee's deeply-entrenched rivalry with the neighboring town of Eagleton, others imitate real life.

"The season-two episode when Knope attempts to turn a construction pit into a park reminds me of the development of Greynolds Park, an official Miami-Dade Parks heritage park," Nardi explained. It was created by burying mining equipment and it now contains the highest publicly accessible point in the county.

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**Beth Pearson on "This Is Us" is a ballet teacher with her own dance studio, but it's not realistic that someone who hasn't danced for two decades would be hired to teach.**



**Susan Kelechi Watson as Beth Pearson.** NBC

Beth Pearson (Susan Kelechi Watson) owns a dance studio on NBC's "This Is Us."

But, as [Dance Magazine](#) points out, it would be unlikely that someone would hire a

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Not to mention that opening a studio [usually entails multiple steps](#). Dancers typically

need to apprentice for other studio owners, develop a following, and write a business plan before they can take on students of their own.

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**Carrie Bradshaw would probably need a side hustle to afford her lifestyle on "Sex and the City."**

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**Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie Bradshaw.** HBO

The iconic HBO series "Sex and the City" is based on [Candace Bushnell](#)'s book of the same title, which is a compilation of her columns from the New York Observer.

Bushnell's fictional counterpart, Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), also writes a sex and dating column for a newspaper in New York City.

Carrie may have an enviable wardrobe and thrilling social life, but her career as a writer is secondary to the show's dramatic plotlines.

Many have noted that it's implausible that she could have afforded an Upper East Side (UES) studio and a closet full of designer shoes on her salary.

According to the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the median annual salary for writers in 2018 was \$62,170, or \$29.89 per hour.

That figure accounts for all professionals under the writing umbrella, including best-selling authors. Plus, a columnist isn't necessarily a staff writer and might be paid as a freelance contributor.

Freelancers often choose to supplement their earnings with a side hustle, something Carrie doesn't do.

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on the UES, where studios rent for between [\\$2,348 and \\$2,886](#), according to City

Dailty



Reality.

Another aspect of the job the series often overlooks is the ramifications Carrie's columns could have on her personal life.

"I didn't expect the look of terror that occurred once or twice in different men's eyes," Mandy Stadtmiller, a former New York Post dating columnist, [told Elite Daily](#). "I

remember getting a cease-and-desist by text after having a drink with some guy who was afraid I would write about him."

In her memoir, "[Unwifeable](#)," Stadtmiller addresses additional troubles she faced related to her line of work, including struggles with sex addiction and alcohol abuse.

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**Mr. Schuester, the choir director on "Glee," would need to spend more time teaching his students new songs.**

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**Mr. Schuester was played by Matthew Morrison.** FOX

On Fox's "Glee," Mr. Schuester (Matthew Morrison) is a high-school Spanish teacher who also helms a glee club called New Directions.

Daniel Gregerman, the choral director at Niles North High School in Skokie, Illinois, [told Jazz Times](#) that the show accurately depicts what it's like to fight for arts funding.

"When we are facing economic turmoil, with budget cuts and teacher slashing, we have to look for every straw we can grab to support our programs. What they portray on 'Glee' is true," Gregerman said. "On 'Glee' the message is, 'If you don't win the championship, we'll have to cut your program,' or, 'Yes, you can go to sectionals, but we can't afford the right bus for [the student in] the wheelchair.'"

On the other hand, [some pros say the series glosses over the hard work required to learn new songs.](#)

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Hersey High School in Arlington, Illinois, said in an interview [with the Daily Herald,](#)

a newspaper serving the Chicago suburbs.

Michael has found that her students get frustrated when they don't master a song right away — something you seldom see on "Glee."

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**As a surgical intern, Meredith Grey wouldn't have taken on complicated procedures.**

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**Ellen Pompeo as Meredith Grey.** ABC

Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo), the titular character on the ABC medical drama "Grey's Anatomy," starts out as a surgical intern and ultimately becomes a chief of general surgery.

She started as an intern and, contrary to what the series illustrates, [interns do not attempt complicated procedures such as brain surgeries.](#)

"Typically, interns on a surgical service take care of the patients on the floor. They rarely see the inside of the [operating room], and when they do, it's usually to assist with an emergency or a run-of-the-mill case," Amanda Kirzner, a doctor of osteopathic medicine [wrote on The DO](#), the blog of the American Osteopathic Association.

[Instead, interns often complete routine tasks](#), such as placing orders for nurses and meeting with patients' families.

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