

Regional

Ibroscheva looks at how the media portrays women

We are continuously bombarded by commercial messages throughout the media, whether it is through TV, radio, newspapers, billboards or on the Internet. In addition to the obvious call for us to buy products, these advertisements contain other not-so-obvious messages that may influence how we think or even behave. Someone who studies these messages – specifically at the international level – is Elza Ibroscheva.

Ibroscheva was born in Bourgas, Bulgaria. She received her bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communications from the American University in Bulgaria, and her master's and doctorate degrees in mass communications and media arts from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Today she is an associate professor in the department of mass communications at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

While being raised in communist Bulgaria she started to study English on her own. A few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall she enrolled in the newly established American University in Bulgaria.

"It was basically the very first attempt to establish an American educational institution in Eastern Europe," Ibroscheva said. "So as a high school student I took a trip to the university. It was the very first semester it opened and as I walked into the doors I saw the wonderfully exciting range of things you could do, mainly with the humanities," she said.

One of the areas she has been working on is the different perception regarding terrorism that exists between the United States and Europe. "Within the European context and particularly so within the media coverage, the coverage tended to be a lot less framed within the perspective of this dual way of thinking, us versus the enemy, us versus them, radical Islam versus the westernized progressive way of thinking about the world and culture," she explained.

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

She also studied the way the European media looked at the mass killings in Norway in July 2011, when a single person murdered 92 people. "They did not shy away from calling the perpetrator a terrorist even though that is not really the image that would be widely construed as the physicality of a terrorist," Ibroscheva said. "As we all know he was a white, well-off, 32-year-old Norwegian and Christian with very expressed views of religion that were not unlike the ones of, for example, the perpetrators of 9/11."

She has also studied the impact of Internet access. "It certainly has provided opportunities for communication, for social organization, for activism, that we have never seen possible before," Ibroscheva said. "But on the other hand, we have to recognize the inherent danger in giving these types of tools of communication to groups that tend to be violent, that tend to be promoting and inflaming ethnic intolerance or the means to act against people who are different, people that come from different ideologies. They have been very successful in being able to wage their own propaganda, so to speak, and including visual forms which are even more powerful than the words themselves."

During the summer of 2011, Ibroscheva began to study the way in which the media portray female politicians in Lebanon. She decided to take on this specific topic because she had previously done research on the portrayals of female politicians in Eastern Europe.

"Lebanon presents itself as one of the most democratic states in the region," she said. "They also have a rather large (43 percent) representation of female journalists in their workforce, yet they only have



Suman Mishra./SIUE

Dr. Ibroscheva at her office.

three women in Parliament out of 120 members and all three of them are former widows of assassinated political leaders."

She notes that during a recent governmental crisis a political leader was asked why there were no women in the cabinet. "His statement went somewhere along the lines of, 'Well, the reason why there aren't any women in politics right now in the cabinet is because frankly there aren't any qualified women that we can put on the list.' And then he continued on to, I think, dig himself further into a hole by saying,

'Well, don't get me wrong. I love women and women love me, and I have proof of that because my household is full of women,' referring obviously to his family, daughters and wives," said Ibroscheva.

Her latest research involves critically analyzing the proliferation of sexualized images in post-communist advertising. She brings her research to her classes on visual media imagery, enlightening her students to advertising conventions around the world. She said that her students come away with a new appreciation for the

power of visual images. This is particularly so for the women in her class. "More for women than men," she said. "But I have also had a lot of male students come in who have said 'You have ruined me enjoying advertising.'"

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.