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Brains, beauty backfire in reality of TV – local expert

By NOEL MURPHY

BRAINS and beauty can backfire, especially for anyone looming large in the public eye, according to a Deakin University academic.

Dr Cassandra Atherton said a case in point was blonde bombshell Dr Bonnie Blossman, who had faced problems with colleagues, students, fans and cast members as a result of her appearances on US reality TV show *Big Rich Texas*.

Dr Atherton said the woes of the so-called “Hottie Doctor” highlighted the problems female academics face being taken seriously.

“Professors who are considered too good looking can be cast by their peers as lightweights,” said Dr Atherton, a professor in literary studies.

Dr Blossman’s role on the TV show challenged the stereotype of the “austere, introverted and tweedy professor” but her expertise was rarely put to use and her credentials regularly called into question, Dr Atherton explained.

The “Hottie Doctor” is actually an adjunct professor with a PhD in developmental physiology, a masters in microbiology and a bachelor of science in pre-medicine.

But celebrity and beauty was a double-edged sword for her, Dr Atherton said.

The combination had created problems with “university colleagues, her students as well as fans of the show and fellow cast members”.

“In the majority of articles in the press and in the way she is introduced to new cast members on *Big, Rich Texas* Dr Blossom’s status as professor is always questioned, based on her appearance.”

Dr Atherton said the university was supportive of Dr Blossman’s TV work but female colleagues were less enthusiastic.

“Dr Blossman has said ‘The students don’t take me quite as seriously as they did before, so I can’t be my silly self as much anymore. I have to be more serious.’

**BEAUTY AND BRAINS: Dr Bonnie Blossman, left and Deakin's Dr Cassandra Atherton.**