D o you share the same political views as your parents? Most researchers would expect this to be the case, but Dr. Edward Bell, professor of Sociology at Brescia University College, holds a different perspective on why this might occur.

In an article titled, “The Origins of Political Attitudes and Behaviours: An Analysis Using Twins,” published in the Canadian Journal of Political Science in December, 2009, Dr. Bell and his colleagues offer those Canadian respondents – both socialization and genetic factors are brought into the analysis with the idea that they interact to produce political behaviours, much like different perspectives. “Heritability analyses like those performed in Bell’s study are meant to be intellectual starting points rather than endpoints.”

In the article, Bell and his co-authors write, “The biggest challenge of all will be to integrate traditional approaches to the study of politics with bio-evolutionary approaches to the study of politics with bio-evolutionary perspectives.” Heritability analyses like those performed in Bell’s study are meant to be intellectual starting points rather than endpoints.

Traditionally, people’s political attitudes have been believed to be formed by socialization. In the approach used in Bell’s research – the first such study using Canadian respondents – both socialization and genetic factors are brought into the analysis with the idea that they interact to produce political behaviours, much like environmental and biological influences combine to create personality traits. Bell’s findings, among other things, suggest that interest in things political is partly contributed to political attitudes, feelings toward the political views.

Bell hopes to expand his research with the creation of the Canadian Twin and Higher Multiples Registry, which would be a national facility that researchers across the country could use. The project involves about thirty other researchers, and a grant application to fund it through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) is currently pending. Many medical and social science scholars are interested in research with twins.

“This line of research upsets a lot of intellectual and ideological apple carts. There’s a very strong current of social constructionism, which says we construct our own reality. On the other side of the coin, we’re not entirely socially constructed. Biological factors play a strong role. And those factors interact with social factors; they don’t act independently.”

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This publication highlights a small sample of the ongoing research at each of the academic divisions at Brescia. For information about other research, please contact any of the following:

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Prayer as piety vs. performance in Hamlet

Hamlet has been the focus of more research than any other work of Shakespeare, so Dr. Dominick Grace, chair of the division of Arts and Humanities at Brescia, was surprised at how little critical treatment there had been to a crucial aspect of the play.

In his article titled, “The Purpose of Praying: Devotion and Performance in Hamlet,” published in the October, 2010 issue of In-between: Essays & Studies in Literary Criticism, Grace examines the important role of prayer in the play. “There was room to say something about it that hadn’t been said before,” Grace said.

Grace wrote, “Confrontations with matters of faith occupy Hamlet for much of the action, and the play explores extensively the implications of appropriate vs. inappropriate Christian behaviour.” He concludes that the problematic of praying, as an act and as something observed, serve as the fulcrum on which the play turns.

The analysis of prayer, as either a private communication with God or as a piece of performance, is interesting to Grace because there was anxiety in the early modern period about being damned if prayer wasn’t virtuous. He acknowledges that this particular research, which examines questions of faith and religion, aligns well with Brescia’s Catholic roots.

Grace continues to teach Hamlet in his English classes, and his teaching influences how he conducts research. “What I try to do in any research is express it in a form that undergraduate students can understand, even though it may not change the landscape of the research.” However, his students shouldn’t expect to find his research on the list of required readings. “If I direct my students to read my research, I am unintentionally telling them that they should think as I do. This would result in having far too big an influence on them.”
Atikaki campaign provides a window on politics of wilderness protection

Dr. George Warecki studies how the Atikaki campaign marked a transition in the history of wilderness planning and advocacy.

In 1972 Marc Wermanger, a Minnesota-based conservationist, launched his campaign to protect a huge, interprovincial canoeists’ paradise, surrounded by a multiple-use buffer zone. Supporting conservation groups formed a coalition, opposed by local “productive” interests – forestry, mining, and fly-in fishing camp operators. The conflicted Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources reviewed the Atikaki proposal and weighed public input. When negotiations for a national park in Manitoba stalled in the late 1970s, the two provincial governments, recognizing key resource conflicts, replaced the original wilderness proposal with smaller, separate designs. Manitoba established Atikaki Provincial Park in 1985. Some 4600 square kilometres on the Ontario side became Woodland Caribou Provincial Park in 1983.

This campaign stands out because northerner Bill Addison helped to modify the original plan. Acknowledging the rights of various resource users in the region, he proposed more strict controls for a smaller wilderness core – and a system of wilderness parks to represent the province’s diverse habitats. The Ontario government gradually endorsed this vision, balancing wilderness protection and economic development in Atikaki.

“The Atikaki episode was a taste of things to come, both for the wilderness movement and the provincial government,” says Warecki. Lessons learned during this campaign eventually led to the Ontario Forest Accord (1999), an historic compromise by protection groups, industry, and the provincial government. “Preservationists have learned that an adversarial approach is counter-productive. Society has benefited from that – and from the government’s commitment to wilderness protection and economic development.”

An article titled, “‘Going Green’ in Food Services: Can Health Care Adopt Environmentally Friendly Practices?” has been published in the Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practices and Research (Spring 2011), based on the first study of its kind. Garcia said the research is unique because it looks at the food itself, rather than just the energy consumption to get food to the facilities.

“I saw a shift towards green in the industry but I wasn’t hearing anything in health care. I wanted to look further into it because the rest of the world is moving in this direction and health care seemed to be stuck,” Wilson said.

Food service departments are a large consumer of resources, so there is room for “greening” by supporting and adopting environmentally friendly practices. Wilson suggests that any reduction in energy use is significant – but “greening” food services doesn’t end there. Food services waste can be recycled, composted, or sent to a landfill. And food purchased locally reduces the carbon footprint of our meals in the health care industry.

Wilson, who was a Brescia student working in health care food services when she began her research, said there are real opportunities in long-term health facilities because they predominantly prepare foods on-site; significant changes are required to implement green practices in hospital food service departments.

“When we’re building new facilities we need to build kitchen facilities. Can they at least start building smaller kitchens where they make salads and provide some local, healthy food?” Wilson hopes her research starts conversations that address this question and others that lead to the gradual greening of food services in the health care sector. She says, “I think Brescia can play a huge role in talking about how food choices can impact the environment.”

Elisa Wilson (‘10), shown here, has researched the barriers and behaviours associated with ‘going green’ in the health care food services industry.

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Behaviour genetics help explain political views

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In an article titled, “The Origins of Political Attitudes and Behaviours: An Analysis Using Twins,” published in the Canadian Journal of Political Science in December, 2009, Dr. Bell and his colleagues offer those who study Canadian politics evidence that genetics play a role in political views.

Traditionally, people’s political attitudes have been believed to be formed by socialization. In the approach used in Bell’s research – the first such study using Canadian respondents – both socialization and genetic factors are brought into the analysis with the idea that they interact to produce political behaviours, much like environmental and biological influences combine to create personality traits. Bell’s findings, among other things, suggest that interest in things political is partly genetic.

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Dr. Ed Bell’s research finds that behavioural genetics play a role in political views.

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Atikaki campaign provides a window on politics of wilderness protection

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Warecki’s article, “Balancing Wilderness Protection and Economic Development: the Politics of Planning for Atikaki, 1972-1983,” was published in Ontario History in March 2010. The article extends Warecki’s ongoing research into Ontario wilderness protection – a topic he first tackled in the early 1980s as an MA student under provincial parks historian Gerry Killan of King’s College.

Warecki argues that the Atikaki campaign marked a transition in the history of wilderness planning and advocacy. Both evolved from an earlier model of ad-hoc, multiple-use conservation, to a more strategic and more protectionist, scientifically-based “systems” approach.

In 1972 Marc Wermanger, a Minnesota-based conservationist, launched his campaign to protect the Atikaki wilderness (spanning the Ontario-Manitoba border) blends environmental history and political science, focusing on the relationships between diverse interests in provincial policy-making.

“The Atikaki episode was a taste of things to come, both for the wilderness movement and the provincial government,” says Warecki. Lessons learned during this campaign eventually led to the Ontario Forest Accord (1999), an historic compromise by protection groups, industry, and the provincial government. “Preservationists have learned that an adversarial approach is counter-productive. Society has benefited from that – and from the government’s commitment to wilderness protection and economic development.”

Living Research

Health care food service departments can become a lot greener. This is the message conveyed by Brescia alumna Elisa Wilson (’10) and Dr. Alicia Garcia, chair of Food and Nutritional Sciences.

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