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Mother of Invention

Lori B. Andrews *on the Intersections of Technology, Bioethics, and the Law*

by Laura Standley

Lori B. Andrews

PHOTO BY DIANE M. SMUTNY

There's never a shortage of skeptics warning the rest of us about the dangers of supplying personal information to Facebook or associating a credit card with the latest app. They tell us, as matters of fact, to say no to cookies and declare outrage at government-monitoring of our Internet activities. Their attitudes are a commonplace part of new-millennium milieu. "Once you're out there, you're out there," is a standard-issue warning. The comeback is standard, too: "Out where? Who cares?"

Balancing technological innovations with their ethical implications is the sweet spot that has kept Lori Andrews, law professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Institute of Technology, busy her entire career. "I'm very interested in how we will be judged by future generations," Andrews says. Difficult questions that emerge from this intersection include simple missteps like a client posting something on a lawyer's Facebook page, destroying attorney-client privilege, or whether or not a person's digital identity should be included in his or her will. Big data, in fact, has become a part of life. Life insurance companies can use a person's Facebook page instead of a blood or urine sample to determine eligibility. Apps already collect countless bits of private information from users without their knowledge or consent and make that information available to employers and advertisers. The question is: should they? And if so, how?

> **"I'm very interested in how we will be judged by future generations"**

Lori Andrews aims to protect us from innovation as much as she's a natural born innovator. She's part lawyer, part consultant, part professor, part inventor, part writer, part feminist, and part mother. Even as a child, the typical barriers that block people from following their own sense of justice didn't stop her. "When my Ken doll went bald, I wrote to Mattel and saw action. That made me see you can actually change things," she says. Enacting change drives most of her pursuits.

From a young age, if she liked a publication she was reading, she didn't hesitate to pitch a story to write for them. Her bylines include *Archie Comics*, *Glamour*, and *The New York Times*, among many others, even including mystery novels. Writing articles supported her, in part, through undergrad at Yale—she was among the first classes of women admitted—and as her articles focused more and more on health care and reproductive rights, she decided to go straight through to Yale Law School. Writing and lawyering go hand in hand for Andrews. Writing fiction "is a way to smuggle in issues I care about—like genetic discrimination—and actually reach a larger audience than if I did a law review article or a case about it," she says.

When pressed to identify career-defining moments—she's appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Dateline*, she was at the White House when Obama announced Precision Medicine, she was named one of the Most Influential Lawyers in America by the *National Law Journal*—she says that "being in on the initial discussions about the appropriate way to regulate new technologies" is the thread that runs through it all.

The issues that Andrews considers—and is asked to consider by the French Parliament, the Chicago History Museum, her students, and her peers—are never as straightforward as they seem. Take, for example, gene mapping. Scientists can take something like the gene in a cheetah that makes it the fastest mammal on the planet and imbed it into a human embryo's DNA, raising ethical questions that range from Olympic standards for gene doping and what might become compromised in humans if a synthetic evolutionary trait is introduced into a person's DNA. "When I was teaching at Princeton, a biologist there did a study where he found a gene in mice that appeared to make them smarter. Immediately, people wanted to put the human version of that gene in their embryos to make their children smarter. Later research revealed that it made the mice more sensitive to pain, too," Andrews says.

Advances in preventive health care are not black and white either. Take genetic testing for the predisposition for breast cancer, which would allow for early screening. "Some women who get the test say they have a time bomb ticking away inside of them." Maybe the psychological impact is too great.

"One bioethicist rabbi said that women should have the duty to disclose if they have a genetic predisposition to breast cancer before getting married so that people can make different choices," she says. Imagine dating in 2050—including a genetic map on a dating profile might become the equivalent to listing height and weight. And, can you ethically reproduce if you know that your children would inherit something horrific?

"It might affect social institutions," Andrews continues, "like insurers or employers and how they judge applicants." Job interviews already create a panic, but having to account for every single gene in your body seems both unfair and simplistic. Didn't *Jurassic Park* prove to us that life finds a way?

At the Illinois Institute of Technology, Andrews pushes emerging inventors to consider the ethical questions *before* introducing their inventions. "The fundamental issue is that technology looks forward and the law looks backward," Andrews says. "I'm trying to get the law to look forward a little more, too."