What Is in GINA's Genes? The Curious Case of the Mutant-Hybrid Employment Law

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Table of Contents

I. Announcing the Discovery of a Mutation ................................. 1
II. The Improbable Enactment of a Mutant Antidiscrimination Law ...... 4
   A. GINA as a Mutant Antidiscrimination Law .......................... 4
   B. Enactment Without the Usual Pedigree of an Antidiscrimination
      Law .................................................................................. 6
III. Improbable Enactment of a Hybrid Antidiscrimination/ Privacy
     Law ............................................................................... 8
     A. GINA as a Hybrid Antidiscrimination/Privacy Law ............... 8
     B. GINA: Rare Enactment of a Federal Workplace Privacy Law .... 10
IV. Does GINA Signal an Evolutionary Trend In Employment Laws? ...... 13

Conclusion ............................................................................... 16

I. Announcing the Discovery of a Mutation

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA)\(^1\) was signed into
law on May 21, 2008.\(^2\) In general, GINA prohibits employers and health
insurers from obtaining genetic information or using it to make adverse


\(^2\) See Derrick Cain, Bush Signs Legislation to Prohibit Genetic Discrimination in the
decisions against individuals. Unless otherwise noted, GINA has been hailed as the “first civil rights act of the 21st Century.” Politically, it was an overwhelmingly popular piece of legislation, with the Senate passing it unanimously and the House passing it with only one vote in opposition. Its enactment was widely applauded, with the New York Times, for example, declaring that “lawmakers rightly saw that fairness and public policy arguments demanded a ban on discriminating against people for genetic traits they can do nothing about.”

For all of its accolades, however, GINA also is a conundrum. It is the first employment discrimination statute passed without a history of discrimination against the protected class. Accordingly, one commentator labeled it “the first preemptive antidiscrimination statute in American history,” and further noted that it is “perhaps the first antidiscrimination statute passed without an associated identity group.” One might say that genetic testing of GINA has revealed it to be a mutant antidiscrimination statute, differing in significant ways from prior antidiscrimination laws.

The discovery of such a mutation should be monumental. However, it has been argued that GINA, at least in practice, may turn out to be much ado about very little. Genetic information employment discrimination was not a problem when GINA was passed, and it may never have become a problem even without the passage of GINA. With the new law, it seems very unlikely that a significant problem will emerge regarding genetic information.

3. Title I of GINA covers health insurance, and Title II addresses employment discrimination. This essay focuses on Title II.
7. Roberts, supra note 4, at 441.
8. Id. at 484.
9. See id. at 462 (“[L]ittle evidence indicates that genetic-information discrimination is currently taking place on a large scale.”).
discrimination. So, maybe this mutation is not so monumental. Perhaps it will fade almost unnoticed into the annals of antidiscrimination law.

From a theoretical perspective, however, GINA is well worth considering as an aberrant antidiscrimination law, and reconsidering it as something other than just an antidiscrimination mutant. A law like none other before it may have significant theoretical implications. It may reveal something important about the current state of our employment laws, as well as the history, and perhaps the future. If GINA is such an exceptional law, how did it come to be enacted? Does its enactment suggest possible trends for the future of employment law? Ruminating about GINA may elucidate some truths about how employment law, politics, and societal values interact and provide some insight into future employment laws.

GINA is undoubtedly an exceptional antidiscrimination law, and I will treat it as such. However, when one tests GINA, one finds that GINA is not just a mutant antidiscrimination statute, but also a hybrid — part antidiscrimination statute and part privacy law.

Most of GINA’s ancestors are employment antidiscrimination laws that say little about privacy. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 196412 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)13 do not prohibit employers from inquiring about or revealing to others an employee’s color, race, sex, religion, national origin, or age. Under both of those laws, often there is no secrecy or privacy regarding these characteristics because they are easily discernible by observation or other means without making inquiry. In cases in which the protected characteristic is not obvious, an employer may be well advised not to ask about it, but that is because such an inquiry may help the employee prove that an adverse employment action was taken because of the protected characteristic — not because the statute protects the privacy of the information. On the other hand, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA),14 although predominantly an antidiscrimination statute, does

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10. Beyond litigation, GINA may play a significant role in alleviating people’s fears about genetic testing and thereby facilitate genetic research. See, e.g., id. at 471-74. However, it is far from certain that GINA will have that effect. See id. at 488-89 (positing that GINA may “legitimiz[e] the very fears it sought to relieve”).

11. I am not the first commentator to recognize the privacy DNA in genetic discrimination. See, e.g., Gaia Bernstein, The Paradoxes of Technological Diffusion: Genetic Discrimination and Internet Privacy, 39 CONN. L. REV. 241 (2006); Pauline T. Kim, Genetic Discrimination, Genetic Privacy: Rethinking Employee Protections for a Brave New Workplace, 96 NW. U. L. REV. 1497 (2002); see also MATTHEW W. FINKIN, PRIVACY IN EMPLOYMENT LAW 31-34 (3d ed. 2009).


have a less prominent privacy aspect. The ADA, in a limited way, prohibits inquiries regarding disabilities, but the statutory language of the Act and the litigation thereunder are predominantly about nondiscrimination. In contrast, the statutory language of GINA is devoted more to protecting the privacy of genetic information than to antidiscrimination. As discussed more fully below, part of GINA’s section declaring unlawful practices reads more like a privacy protection statute, similar to that in the Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1988 than an antidiscrimination law.

Part II of this essay considers GINA as a nonprototypical (mutant) antidiscrimination law and discusses its improbable enactment. Part III evaluates the privacy aspects of GINA, thus typing it as a hybrid privacy-antidiscrimination law. Part IV discusses what the enactment of a mutant-hybrid employment law may presage for future employment laws. Is the enactment of GINA the beginning of an evolutionary trend or a one-time mutation?

II. The Improbable Enactment of a Mutant Antidiscrimination Law

A. GINA as a Mutant Antidiscrimination Law

GINA is unusual as an antidiscrimination statute. It was enacted after about a thirteen-year track record in Congress, with no history of discrimination and no multitude of discrimination victims clamoring for justice. How did such an antidiscrimination law become enacted and what, if anything, does it tell us about future laws?

It is tempting to proclaim that GINA is not an antidiscrimination statute at all. It does not, after all, actually prohibit discrimination based on a characteristic that a person has, such as race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, or disability, but instead it prohibits discrimination based on genetic information and testing. One aspect of this distinction is that the


15. See id. § 12112(d) (prohibiting certain medical inquiries).
16. See id. § 12112(a)-(b) (prohibiting discrimination).
19. See discussion infra Part III.
21. See Roberts, supra note 4, at 447-51 (detailing GINA’s path to law).
22. See Kim, supra note 11, at 1524 (“[T]he most commonly accepted justifications for forbidding race and other prohibited forms of discrimination do not necessarily apply to employer discrimination based on genetic traits.”).
genetic trait itself is not the thing that is protected, but information about it, which usually is generated by testing or inquiring. Yet, ultimately it is the genetic trait that is being protected. Although this aspect of GINA does distinguish it from the other employment discrimination statutes in most cases, it does not make it unique among antidiscrimination laws. An employer cannot discriminate because of a protected characteristic unless the employer knows the employee possesses that characteristic. Most of the characteristics covered by antidiscrimination statutes are readily observable in most cases, and there is no question about the employer’s knowledge. However, in cases in which they are not, as in some cases of religion, disability, and pregnancy, the plaintiff must prove the employer’s knowledge. Thus, GINA’s protection of genetic information and testing differs somewhat from other antidiscrimination laws, but not much.

A second aspect of the distinction between protecting personal characteristics and genetic information and testing is that there is no well-defined class of people protected by GINA. For race, national origin, and sex (including pregnancy), in most cases persons can be classified in a group. However, this aspect of GINA also does not distinguish it from all other antidiscrimination laws in all cases. Consider, for example, that religion and disability often do not involve well-defined classes. With race and sex, there are only a few races and two sexes, and we know the races and sex that historically have been discriminated against in employment. In contrast, with religion and disability, there are an almost infinite number of classifications.

23. See Roberts, supra note 4, at 482-83 (“Discriminating on the basis of genetic information often relies on testing and scientific expertise, making genetic-information discrimination patently different from discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, or disability. To face the kind of discrimination covered by GINA, most individuals will have to opt-in to the category of potential victims by taking genetic tests.”).

24. See, e.g., Reed v. Great Lakes Cos., 330 F.3d 931, 934 (7th Cir. 2003) (“It is difficult to see how an employer can be charged with discrimination on the basis of an employee's religion when he doesn't know the employee's religion . . . .”).

25. See, e.g., EEOC v. Lee’s Log Cabin, Inc., 554 F.3d 1102, 1104 (7th Cir. 2009) (“Certainly an ADA plaintiff must demonstrate a causal connection between an employer's adverse action and its knowledge of her disability.”).

26. See, e.g., Geraci v. Moody-Tottrup, Int’l, Inc., 82 F.3d 578, 581 (3d Cir. 1996) (“We cannot presume that an employer most likely practiced unlawful discrimination when it did not know that the plaintiff even belonged to the protected class. The employer's knowledge, in this class of cases, is a critical element of the plaintiff's prima facie case.”).

27. See Kim, supra note 11, at 1520 (“One obvious reason that no widespread animus is directed against persons with genetic anomalies is that those individuals do not constitute a socially recognized group. Even conceptualizing the relevant disadvantaged 'group' raises some difficulties, given that each individual’s genetic material contains some anomalies that predispose to disease.”); Roberts, supra note 4, at 484 (characterizing GINA as an antidiscrimination statute “passed without an associated identity group”).
within each, and the history of discrimination is less focused. Age also presents the same diffuse group issues in the context of the ADEA, as age spreads out over a continuum from age forty upward. Of the characteristics covered by antidiscrimination laws before GINA, disability yields the most amorphous class, and the issue of coverage (whether one has a disability) has been the dominant issue in much of the litigation under the ADA.

In the end, one can say that genetic discrimination differs from other types of discrimination and that GINA is a different kind of antidiscrimination statute, but it has enough DNA to belong to the antidiscrimination family.

B. Enactment Without the Usual Pedigree of an Antidiscrimination Law

Before GINA was enacted there were three federal employment antidiscrimination laws that covered several characteristics: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (covering color, race, sex, religion, and national origin); the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA); and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. There are, of course, state and local laws that cover some traits not covered by federal laws. In about forty-six years since the formal recognition of employment discrimination law, it has not been easy for new traits to be added, although there have been numerous candidates. There is no comprehensive list of factors that lead to passage of an antidiscrimination law, but the following are often mentioned: 1) moral objection to the discrimination; 2) a cohesive and identifiable group of people that would be covered; 3) a history of discrimination against people who possess the characteristic; 4) immutability of the characteristic; and 5) irrelevance of the characteristic to job

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28. See Michael Selmi, Interpreting the Americans With Disabilities Act: Why the Supreme Court ReWrote the Statute, and Why Congress Did Not Care, 76 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 522, 533 (2008) (“[T]he need to define the protected class renders disability statutes different from other antidiscrimination statutes, and there is no accepted way to define disability.”).


33. See, e.g., D.C. CODE ANN. §§ 2-1401.02(22), 2-1402.11 (personal appearance); LA. REV. STAT. ANN. 23:351 (sickle cell trait); MICH. COMP. LAWS § 37.2202 (height and weight); SANTA CRUZ, CAL., MUN. CODE §§ 9.83.010, 9.83.020(13) (physical appearance).
34. Regarding the importance of immutability as a unifying principle that explains all of the protected characteristics in employment discrimination law, see Sharona Hoffman, The Importance of Immutability in Employment Discrimination Law, 52 WM. & MARY L. REV. 1483, 1544 (2011).
performance.35 As already discussed, GINA does not score well on the important factors of a history of discrimination and a cohesive and identifiable covered group. However, another thing that characterizes all laws that are enacted is political support. GINA was supported by the scientific research community and the private biotechnology sector.36

With the enactment of GINA, genetic information and genetic testing achieved coverage without the usual pedigree and arguably jumped ahead of other candidates for employment discrimination protection. The most obvious example of a characteristic supplanted by GINA is sexual orientation, a characteristic with a better pedigree for coverage and a track record of legislative efforts, beginning in Congress in 1994.37 The proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) would add sexual orientation and, as recently introduced, gender identity, to the characteristics protected by the federal antidiscrimination laws.38 Yet, GINA was enacted before ENDA.

Another predictor of the likelihood of enactment of new federal antidiscrimination laws is the enactment of such laws by states. On that factor, GINA had the advantage over ENDA. Genetic information and testing was covered by laws in a majority of states — about thirty-four — before GINA became federal law.39 In contrast, sexual orientation is not yet covered by a


36. See, e.g., Perry W. Payne, Jr., Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008: The Federal Answer for Genetic Discrimination, 5 J. HEALTH & BIOMEDICAL L. 33, 41-42 (2009) (“Companies, similar to genetic researchers, see genetic information nondiscrimination legislation as critical to their business model.”). I am grateful to Professor Pauline Kim for pointing out the important role of the scientific community in supporting the enactment of GINA.


majority of state laws,\textsuperscript{40} although we may be on the brink of Congressional passage of ENDA.

In addition to sexual orientation, other candidates for employment antidiscrimination coverage for which a good case has been made include caregiver status,\textsuperscript{41} family status,\textsuperscript{42} and appearance.\textsuperscript{43} Whether GINA “broke in line” ahead of ENDA or other possible antidiscrimination laws to achieve coverage for genetic information and testing, it is clear that it enjoyed a relatively rapid ascent without some of the qualifications possessed by other candidates for coverage.

Given the improbable enactment of GINA without the supporting history of discrimination, one commentator contemplated the mutant antidiscrimination law and asked whether it is a harbinger of a new race of mutant preemptive antidiscrimination laws.\textsuperscript{44} I think, however, that the key to unlocking the mystery of GINA’s improbable birth and any prognostications for the future based on its emergence lies in its hybrid nature. It leapt to the front of the antidiscrimination pack without the standard pedigree largely because it is not just an antidiscrimination law. It is also part privacy law.

\textbf{III. Improbable Enactment of a Hybrid Antidiscrimination/Privacy Law}

\textbf{A. GINA as a Hybrid Antidiscrimination/Privacy Law}

Before GINA became law, genetic information was viewed by many as a privacy issue, and it was argued that privacy law offered a more appropriate

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} See Smith, supra note 35, at 606-07.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} See Roberts, supra note 4, at 441, 489-90.
\end{itemize}
treatment than antidiscrimination law.\textsuperscript{45} What is the difference? First, the interests implicated by privacy are distinct from those implicated by antidiscrimination. Antidiscrimination law addresses interests in equal treatment of similarly situated individuals and antisubordination of historically disadvantaged groups,\textsuperscript{46} whereas privacy deals with a person’s “right to be let alone.”\textsuperscript{47} Privacy is a complicated concept and includes interests such as secrecy of information and autonomy.\textsuperscript{48} Second, the forms of the laws are different. Antidiscrimination laws focus on discriminatory motive--prohibiting employers from taking adverse employment actions because of a characteristic.\textsuperscript{49} Workplace privacy laws, on the other hand, tend to prohibit employers from taking certain actions that constitute invasions of the protected privacy interest without regard for the motive.\textsuperscript{50}

So which is GINA — antidiscrimination law or privacy law? Both. In name, it is an antidiscrimination law. As discussed above, it has some characteristics of an antidiscrimination law, but it also lacks some. It is written in the language of an antidiscrimination law, prohibiting employment discrimination because of genetic information.\textsuperscript{51} However, it also is written in the language of a workplace privacy law, prohibiting employers from “request[ing], requir[ing], or purchas[ing]” genetic information.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed,

\textsuperscript{45.} See, e.g., Bernstein, supra note 11; Kim, supra note 11.
\textsuperscript{46.} See, e.g., Samuel R. Bagenstos, The Structural Turn and the Limits of Antidiscrimination Law, 94 CALIF. L. REV. 1, 40-42 (2006).
\textsuperscript{48.} See Kim, supra note 11, at 1535; Daniel J. Solove, Conceptualizing Privacy, 90 CALIF. L. REV. 1087, 1099-1124 (2002).
\textsuperscript{49.} See Kim, supra note 11, at 1537. I do not mean to ignore disparate impact, which is a theory of nonintentional discrimination. However, intentional discrimination is the focus of antidiscrimination law, and most charges and lawsuits allege intentional discrimination.
\textsuperscript{50.} Id.
\textsuperscript{ a) Discrimination Based on Genetic Information. — It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer —
\textsuperscript{ 
(1) to fail or refuse to hire, or to discharge, any employee, or otherwise to discriminate against any employee with respect to the compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment of the employee, because of genetic information with respect to the employee; or
\textsuperscript{ 
(2) to limit, segregate, or classify the employees of the employer in any way that would deprive or tend to deprive any employee of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect the status of the employee as an employee, because of genetic information with respect to the employee.
\textsuperscript{Id.}
\textsuperscript{52.} Id. § 2000ff-1(b).
years before the passage of GINA, Professor Pauline Kim, in urging passage of a privacy law rather than an antidiscrimination law, argued:

> If regulating employer use of genetic information is primarily a problem of protecting informational privacy, rather than preventing invidious discrimination, the appropriate legal response looks quite different. Any legal effort will focus on defining and controlling the flow of critical information, rather than determining the motive of the employer in taking adverse personnel actions.⁵³

Thus, GINA has both antidiscrimination and privacy DNA. This might not be apparent, however, given the name of the law and the assignment of enforcement jurisdiction to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC is the agency charged with enforcement of the federal employment antidiscrimination laws.⁵⁴

**B. GINA: Rare Enactment of a Federal Workplace Privacy Law**

Just as enactment of employment antidiscrimination laws is difficult and politically charged, it is no simple task to pass workplace privacy legislation. Employees claim various expectations of privacy in the workplace, and employers counter, claiming a need to monitor or discover things that employees prefer to keep secret. Consider, for example, the topical issue of electronic and computer monitoring in the workplace. While employees claim a right of privacy in their communications, employers justify their “invasions” based on their needs to ensure productivity, secure confidential information, and avoid legal liability for communications by employees.⁵⁵ To appreciate the significance of the enactment of GINA as a federal workplace privacy law, it is instructive to consider another privacy law that was enacted — the Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1988 (EPPA)⁵⁶ — and a workplace privacy issue that remains largely unregulated by federal law — electronic and computer monitoring.

Enacted at a time when employer polygraphing of employees and applicants was rampant,⁵⁷ the EPPA pronounced a virtual ban on the administering of lie detectors.⁵⁸ The language of the prohibitory section of the EPPA is similar to

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⁵³. See Kim, supra note 11, at 1543.
⁵⁵. See, e.g., Finkin, supra note 11, at 281.
⁵⁷. S. REP. No. 100-284, at 3 (1988) (stating that “over two million polygraphs were administered annually”).
the language in section 202(b) of GINA, declaring it unlawful for an employer to “directly or indirectly . . . require, request, suggest, or cause any employee or prospective employee to take or submit to any lie detector test” or “to use, accept, refer to, or inquire concerning the results of any lie detector test of any employee or prospective employee.”

The EPPA should be seen as a monumental workplace privacy statute — a statute that essentially prohibits an employment practice that employers used pervasively for the purpose of protecting clear, legitimate, and undeniable interests. Compare Congress’s definitive ban on the use of lie detectors with its refusal to date to impose any limits on employers’ monitoring of employees’ computer and Internet use. Employers’ electronic monitoring of employees is pervasive and growing. Electronic monitoring, like lie detectors and genetic testing, is an example of science and technology advancing and making discoverable previously private information, thus pitting employers’ legitimate business and workplace regulation interests against the privacy interests of employees. In contrast to the virtual ban on the use of lie detectors by the EPPA, there is very little federal regulation of employers’ electronic monitoring of employees. Congress has considered

61. Id. § 2002(2).
64. See Bernstein, supra note 11, at 252 (“Although the history of technologies — such as wiretapping — manifests a social aspiration toward balancing technological diffusion and privacy protection, these resolutions are not always achieved. In some cases, an equilibrium may occur only decades later.”); id. at 241 (“New technologies often cause social controversies by creating novel privacy threats.”).
65. Although some would cite the Electronic Communications Privacy Act and the Stored Communications Act, they have had little impact on the practice of employer electronic monitoring or litigation regarding those practices. The Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986 (ECPA), Pub. L. 99-508, 100 Stat. 1848 (1986) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 18 U.S.C.), which amended the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, and the Stored Communications Act (SCA), which is Title II of the ECPA, predated widespread use of the Internet and many of the modern means of electronic communication. Thus, the laws were not written in terms that fit well with modern electronic communications. Furthermore, the ECPA and SCA are a “skew of statutory opacity.” FINKIN, supra note 11, at 358. Employees have pursued claims under the ECPA and the SCA based on electronic monitoring by employers, but most have foundered and failed in the ill-fitting statutory language. See, e.g., Jay P. Kesan, Cyber-Working or Cyber-Shirking?: A First Principles
bills that would have minimally regulated electronic monitoring by requiring employers to give notice before monitoring, but those bills have not become law, and it seems unlikely that they will.

There are many distinctions one can make between employers’ use of polygraphs and employers’ monitoring of computers and electronic communications, and those distinctions may well justify Congress’s different treatment of the two workplace privacy issues. My point is that the EPPA is a rare federal workplace privacy regulation — an almost absolute ban of privacy-invading tests used pervasively by employers to protect undisputed interests. GINA follows the path blazed by the EPPA. Before GINA, the EPPA stood as the exception to the principle that neither Congress nor the courts were very sympathetic to employee privacy interests when balanced against significant employer interests. Prior to the passage of GINA, some commentators paired genetic discrimination with electronic monitoring in discussions of workplace privacy issues. Acquisition and use of genetic information by employers became regulated, but electronic monitoring has not, beyond a few state laws.

GINA’s successful enactment as a workplace privacy law can be explained in part by reference to the EPPA. Like polygraphs, genetic testing and screening is a scientific advancement that probes deeply within a person and lays bare information that a person may prefer to keep private. Yet, there are


68. See, e.g., id.; Bernstein, supra note 11.


70. See, e.g., Bernstein, supra note 11, at 255-59 (discussing popular fears about genetic
differences. Genetic testing may be more accurate than polygraphs, and the occurrence of inaccurate polygraph results was a major concern with their use.\textsuperscript{71} However, the pervasive use of polygraphs at the time that the EPPA was enacted makes a better case for regulation than the dearth of genetic testing and screening at the time GINA was enacted.

In the final analysis, the common theme that yokes the EPPA and GINA is an Orwellian quality about the shredding of the deepest recesses of personal privacy by scientific and technological probing. This theme alarms people and resonates with lawmakers, who can campaign for election (or reelection) on defending the privacy rights of people. With lie detectors and genetic testing, devices contact and invade people’s bodies and extract information; this is intimate invasion of the person. As for computer and electronic monitoring, perhaps the invasion is not as frightening as devices do not act directly upon people’s bodies. However, although employers’ interests have been prevailing in electronic monitoring cases and debates to date, the striking of the balance in that area is far from over.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{IV. Does GINA Signal an Evolutionary Trend In Employment Laws?}

GINA is an exceptional antidiscrimination statute because it is preemptive — meaning that it was enacted without a supporting history of discrimination.\textsuperscript{73} Thus, it is a mutant antidiscrimination statute. I have reconsidered GINA to show that not only is it a mutant, but it is a hybrid law — part antidiscrimination and part workplace privacy.\textsuperscript{74} That

\textsuperscript{71} See S. REP. NO. 100-284, supra note 57.

\textsuperscript{72} Consider, for example, the cautious qualifying comments of the United States Supreme Court in City of Ontario v. Quon, 130 S. Ct. 2619 (2010):

The Court must proceed with care when considering the whole concept of privacy expectations in communications made on electronic equipment owned by a government employer. The judiciary risks error by elaborating too fully on the Fourth Amendment implications of emerging technology before its role in society has become clear. In Katz[v. United States], the Court relied on its own knowledge and experience to conclude that there is a reasonable expectation of privacy in a telephone booth. It is not so clear that courts at present are on so sure a ground. Prudence counsels caution before the facts in the instant case are used to establish far-reaching premises that define the existence, and extent, of privacy expectations enjoyed by employees when using employer-provided communication devices.

\textit{Id.} at 2629.

\textsuperscript{73} Roberts, supra note 4, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{74} GINA may not be the first hybrid, as the ADA also has privacy aspects. However, GINA is the first hybrid so evenly balanced between privacy and antidiscrimination. The dominant genes in the ADA are more clearly antidiscrimination.
characterization, when fully explored, helps explain how a law protecting an unlikely candidate for employment discrimination coverage was enacted.

In view of the difficulty and controversy involved in enactment of both federal employment antidiscrimination laws and workplace privacy laws and the unsuccessful candidates in each category, it seems that the hybrid nature of GINA strengthened it and improved its prospects for becoming law. The analogy that genetic discrimination is like racial discrimination and they are equally wrong has powerful, if facile, appeal, and this argument permitted proponents of GINA to “tap the moral authority of the civil rights movement.” The merging of the privacy arguments discussed above with the antidiscrimination arguments provided a powerful “two-fisted” rationale for enactment. Although either antidiscrimination or privacy arguments alone may have failed to carry the day, the pairing proved persuasive.

One lesson from GINA’s ascendency may be that pure-breed antidiscrimination laws and privacy laws have less chance of enactment than the new breed: hybrid antidiscrimination/privacy laws. That brings us to the provocative question: Is GINA the beginning of a trend or was it a one-time thing? Because I have characterized GINA as a mutant-hybrid antidiscrimination/privacy law, I ask a variation on that question: Will such hybrid statutes be an evolutionary trend or a one-time mutation that is unlikely to be replicated? The successful passage of GINA may tempt advocates of other causes, such as electronic monitoring regulation, to attempt to follow the template, but it is hard to see how many other privacy issues could be fitted with antidiscrimination trappings as effectively as GINA was. Additionally, there may be no more hybrid antidiscrimination/privacy bills that will garner the level of political support that the scientific community gave to GINA.

But before leaving this as a question to be answered in retrospect, let us consider a possible descendant to carry on GINA’s line: legislation prohibiting employers from obtaining or using credit history and credit information. Several states have passed laws significantly restricting the use of credit history and credit information, and of the four states, two passed such laws in 2010. California recently became the latest state to enact such a

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75. See supra Parts II and III.
76. See Kim, supra note 11, at 1501.
77. Id. at 1500.
78. See Roberts, supra note 4, at 490.
79. See supra note 36.
80. Oregon and Illinois in 2010 became the third and fourth states, respectively, joining Washington and Hawaii, to enact a law imposing restrictions on credit checks for employment purposes. See Philip L. Gordon, Incipient Legislative Trend Toward “Credit Privacy” Compels Restraint in Use of Credit Checks for Employment Purposes, Daily Lab. Rep. (BNA) No. 131, at I-1 (July 10, 2010) (discussing Oregon’s Job Applicant Fairness Act); Thom Wilder, New...
As mentioned above, enactment of antidiscrimination laws in a number of states sometimes presages federal legislation. A bill introduced in the U.S. House in 2009, the Equal Employment for All Act, would amend the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act to prohibit employers and prospective employers from taking adverse employment actions on the basis of consumer reports containing information regarding creditworthiness, credit standing, or credit capacity. The credit history and information bills, like GINA, are hybrid antidiscrimination/privacy laws. The name of the proposed federal law invokes the antidiscrimination theory of equal treatment without regard for the protected characteristic. Further establishing the bill’s antidiscrimination credentials, there have been numerous administrative charges and lawsuits filed under Title VII asserting that employment decisions based on credit information were illegal racial discrimination because of their disparate impact. Thus, the antidiscrimination credentials of the credit information laws are well established. Moreover, the privacy and secrecy of information aspect is obvious as well.

So, will credit information be the basis of the next mutant-hybrid antidiscrimination/privacy law, following the lead of GINA? My guess is that the proposed legislation will not enjoy success comparable to that of GINA for several reasons: 1) consumer reports and credit information seem more relevant to many jobs than does genetic information; 2) the important factor of immutability of the protected characteristic is wholly inapplicable; 3) assembling and acquiring credit information do not involve the invasive reach of science into people’s privacy; and 4) the groundswell of state laws has not yet reached the level that it did before GINA was enacted.

I think that the federal credit history bill will fail, and I can identify few other progeny of GINA that are likely to become law. I predict that GINA is a marvelous mutant-hybrid, which will have little practical usefulness and the likes of which we may never see again.

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82. See discussion accompanying supra notes 39-40.
85. See generally Steven C. Bednar, Employment Law Dilemmas: What to Do When the Law Forbids Compliance, 11 UtAHH B.J. 15, 17 (Dec. 1998); see also, Press Release, EEOC Files Nationwide Hiring Discrimination Lawsuit Against Freeman, http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/10-1-09b.cfm (detailing EEOC lawsuit alleging racial disparate impact based on use of credit information).
Conclusion

GINA is a seminal law in many ways. It is indeed “the first civil rights bill of the 21st century.” It is “the first civil rights bill of the new century of life sciences.” It is the first preemptive federal antidiscrimination law. So, it is a mutant antidiscrimination law. However, it also is the first significant hybrid privacy-antidiscrimination law. GINA is indeed a strange marvel to behold. At the end of the day, however, its effectiveness will be dubious and difficult to gauge, and it is not likely to be replicated in form by other federal employment laws. The enactment of GINA is a curious case.

86. See supra note 4 and accompanying text.
87. Id.
88. Id.