



# Sam Gosling

Author, Social Psychology Innovator

## TOPICS:

Marketing and Sales; Organization and People; Innovation

## BIG IDEAS:

### A Room with a Clue

How are we connected to the spaces in which we live and work? How do our living rooms, bedrooms, offices, music collections, and facebook profiles reflect what we are like and, more fundamentally, who we are? And how can our productivity and welfare be improved by understanding how we relate to our personal environments?

We are so tightly bound to our living and work spaces that many of the connections linking people and places go unnoticed. But these environments are rich with information about our values, attitudes, preferences, and personality. In his recent book, *Snoop*, Gosling presents the result of a decades worth of research unraveling the links between people and places and figuring out what they mean. Some clues—the Obama poster on the office wall or the high-brow books left casually lying on the coffee table—are deliberate (but not always disingenuous) signals to others about how we would like to be seen. Other clues—the music on your iPod or the disarray in the office-desk drawer—are inadvertent reflections of our styles of feeling and thinking and of our history of behavior. Gosling's studies of physical, aural, and virtual environments illuminate the intimate bonds between people the worlds they craft around themselves. The research yields lessons for the impressions we form of others in everyday life (and the impressions they are forming of us) and for designing spaces that accommodate our multifaceted psychological needs.

### From Mice to Men

In a classic scene from the movie *Pulp Fiction*, Jules Winfield, the gangster played by Samuel L. Jackson suggested, "a dog's got personality and personality goes a long way." His remark reflects a position that is seen as either blindingly obvious (by most dog owners, for example) or as plainly preposterous (by many animal researchers fearful of falling prey to anthropomorphism). Yet there is nothing in evolutionary theory to suggest that only physical traits are subject to selection pressures; indeed Darwin himself argued that emotions exist in both human and nonhuman animals, so why not personality too? Gosling's pioneering research (for which he received the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Early Career Award) on animals ranging from squid and hyenas to dogs and chimpanzees has demonstrated that our personality attributions to animals are not merely sentimental projections of human traits onto animals; instead, personality traits do exist and can be measured in animals. His lab's current projects focus on risk taking in chimpanzees, matching shelter dogs to suitable adoptive homes, and identifying military dogs suitable for explosive-detection work.

## BIOGRAPHY

Sam Gosling is an author and associate professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. He is a nationally regarded researcher and innovator in the field of personality and social psychology. His work has been widely covered in the media, including *The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, NPR, and "Good Morning America," and his research is featured in Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*. Gosling is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution.

Gosling's recently published book, *Snoop: What Your Stuff Says About You*, is a provocative and witty look at how our private spaces—from boardroom to bedroom—reveal our personalities, whether we know it or not! Does what's on your

desk reveal what's on your mind? Do those pictures on your walls tell true tales about you? For the last ten years Gosling has been studying how people project (and protect) their inner selves. By exploring our private worlds, he explores not only how we showcase our personalities in unexpected—and unplanned—ways, but also how we create personality in the first place, communicate it others, and interpret the world around us.