

# How Relationships Shape Emotions

August 12, 2011



Humans are very emotional creatures. James Coan studies how our emotions are shaped by our social relationships. In particular, he is interested in how we use various emotional behaviors—such as facial expressions and verbal communication—to adjust our emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Coan is testing the theory that when we are alone, tasks we have to perform may seem more difficult and appear to take up more of our resources than when we are in the company of others. This “social baseline theory” suggests that human social interactions have evolved as a way to help us conserve energy. Coan’s innovative work (integrating many disciplines and using multiple methodologies) will shape how research will be done for many years to come. In 2010, Coan was among the inaugural recipients of the [APS Janet Taylor Spence Award for Transformative Early Career Contributions](#).

[Q&A with James Coan](#)