Background
Japanese are holistic in attending to contextual information in both social and physical stimuli, whereas Americans are analytic in attending to focal information (Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005). The origins of these cultural differences in attention are well-documented. However, to date, no one has examined if they have consequences for other psychological processes. Since attention regulates emotional experiences (Gross & Thompson, 2007), and since Japanese experience more mixed positive and negative emotions than do Americans in pleasant situations (Miyamoto, Uchida, and Ellsworth, 2010), the present research examines if in pleasant situations, differences in analytic and holistic attention serve to create differences in mixed emotions.

Study 1
115 European American undergraduates

Questionnaire
Think about a time when you as an individual succeeded in something important. Briefly describe how you felt and acted after you succeeded.
To what extent did you feel good (positive) emotions?
0 = not at all, 5 = very strongly
To what extent did you feel bad (negative) emotions?
0 = not at all, 5 = very strongly

Studies 2 and 3
71 European American undergraduates

Change-Blindness Task (Rensink et al., 1997)
15 image pairs, 1 min continuous loop per pair.
Press key as soon as notice “what 1 thing has changed between the 2 images”
Change in appearance of focal (analytic) or background (holistic) objects

Analytic:

Holistic:

Framed Line Task (Kitayama et al., 2003)
3 practice trials, 6 actual trials
Look at squares with lines inside of them
Draw lines of either same exact (analytic) or relative (holistic) length in squares that differ in size.

Analytic:

Holistic:

Questionnaire for Study 2
Think about a time when you as an individual succeeded in something important. Briefly describe how you felt and acted after you succeeded.
To what extent did you feel good (positive) emotions?
0 = not at all, 5 = very strongly
To what extent did you feel bad (negative) emotions?
0 = not at all, 5 = very strongly

Questionnaire for Study 3
Standardized situation:
When I was a sophomore in high school, I participated in a Science Olympiad’s physics lab event because of a suggestion to do so by my physics teacher. I had found a few days earlier that I would participate by myself because my original partner decided to pair up with a more advanced (AP) physics student. During the event, I carried out my calculations and answered questions as I thought correctly, not realizing that I was earning the first place out of 12-15 teams. I finally found out that afternoon that my school’s other team had earned fourth place.
If you experienced this situation, to what extent would you feel good (positive) emotions at the end of it?
1 = not at all, 4 = moderately, 7 = extremely
If you experienced this situation, to what extent would you feel bad (negative) emotions at the end of it?
1 = not at all, 4 = moderately, 7 = extremely

Conclusion
Holism guides attention to neutral or negative aspects of pleasant situations. Results connect cultural differences in attention to cultural differences in mixed emotions in pleasant situations, demonstrating a fundamental link between attention and emotion across cultures. These findings have social and clinical applications for training attention to regulate emotions in culturally appropriate ways.