The Amerindian Support Network, linked to University of São Paulo, is formed by a multidisciplinary team and, through different projects, offers care for indigenous communities and its members. The Network’s projects aim to strengthen ethnic self-assertion and promote equitable interethnic dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge. Projects are always defined and conducted in constant dialogue with members of indigenous communities. Thus, projects’ development becomes central to the Network: it promotes a joint knowledge that goes beyond the formal fulfillment of the proposed objectives. One of the Network’s initiatives is the comparison between happiness for the Mbyá Guarani of São Paulo and for Positive Psychology (PP). This project took shape as the debate on macro-social assessments of happiness grew in importance, but with little participation of indigenous communities. In general, the development of such assessments has been led by PP researchers, from national assessments (such as Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness) to global assessments (such as Gallup World Pool). However, the intention of reaching a universal assessment of happiness necessarily excludes marginalized communities from scientific debate, such as indigenous communities in Brazilian territory. Therefore, we developed this project having as its core the dialogue with indigenous Mbyá Guarani about their understanding of the best way to live and their perceptions about juruá kuery’s (reference to non-indigenous people) concept of happiness. From this contrast it will be possible to analyse the distance between these views and the potential consequences for public policies guided by happiness’ assessments. Even though the research is in its initial stage, it is already possible to share some of our learnings. If happiness for Positive Psychology takes the individual as an investigative unit, for the Mbyá Guarani this unity does not appear clearly, merging with the territory in which they live and with other members of their community. Territory and nature are central elements to the Mbyá Guarani way of being (nhandereko). The idea of a good life for the Mbyá Guarani (teko porã) always takes place in relation to a specific territory (tekoa), where knowledge with nature develops and serves as an important reference. Even though PP researchers acknowledge gaps in their underline theory, the revision effort seems far from significant. An example is the proposal by leading researchers in the field to include the statement “I feel connected to nature and all of life” in the 2020 Gallup World Pool. However, a single topic on “nature” in the Pool would continue to be far from representative for the Mbyá Guarani and odd in its fragmented characteristic. In a time when indigenous rights are being increasingly violated in Brazil, there is an urgent need to consider indigenous communities’ way of living when developing instruments for macro-social assessment. The absence of such understandings can easily legitimize public policies that are aggressive to the
indigenous way of life, such as deforestation, changes in the demarcation of indigenous lands and the reduction of rights and protection for indigenous peoples.

*Abstract written in co-authorship with indigenous and non-indigenous members of ASN.

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