The value of recalling positive memories in the face of stress

The ability to generate positive emotions serves the adaptive function of enhancing psychological resources necessary for coping with stressors in daily life. One way to elicit positive emotions is to reminisce about past positive life events. Autobiographical memories are vivid representations of the past that trigger the re-experience of emotions tied to the original event, eliciting positive feelings and enhancing an individual's well-being.

In this talk, I will present behavioral and neuroimaging data suggesting that the recall of positive memories is intrinsically valuable to an individual. Specifically, recalling the positive past can recruit neural circuits involved in reward processing, and can influence emotion and decision making.

Further, we will discuss a) the restorative and protective function of self-generated positive emotions in coping with acute stress and b) the role of social context in bolstering this effect.

Taken together, the findings highlight how reminiscing about the positive past serves an important function in the maintenance of positive emotion and the promotion of successful adaptation to stress.