

# Experiences are better when we know they're about to end

January 25 2012, by Jared Wadley

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(Medical Xpress) -- People often view the "last" moments of an event positively simply because they signal the end of an experience, say University of Michigan researchers.

Even if the experience is painful or negative, but concludes on a pleasant note, people will consider the event a more positive experience, says Ed O'Brien, a [graduate student](#) in the U-M Department of Psychology.

"Endings are powerful," he said.

O'Brien and colleague Phoebe Ellsworth, the Frank Murphy Distinguished Professor of Law and Psychology, conducted a [chocolate](#) tasting experiment with 52 [college students](#) to test the theory.

Volunteers could sample five different Hershey's Kisses chocolates (milk, dark, crème, caramel and almond), but did not know in advance how many pieces they would eat or the type. Participants rated how much they enjoyed the chocolate and described each flavor so that the researchers could record the order in which the randomly pulled treats were eaten.

Volunteers were randomly assigned to the "next" or the "last" condition. In the "next" condition, the experimenter said, "Here is your next chocolate," before offering each chocolate, including the fifth.

For the "last" condition, the experimenter said, "Here is your last chocolate," before offering the fifth chocolate. These participants rated the fifth chocolate more enjoyable than volunteers in the "next" condition.

As predicted, participants who knew they were eating the final chocolate of a taste test enjoyed it more. In fact, when asked to pick their favorite chocolate, the majority of "last" participants chose the fifth—even though the flavor of the fifth was randomly chosen. They also rated the overall experience as more enjoyable than [volunteers](#) who thought they were just eating one more chocolate in a series.

O'Brien says these findings may have far-reaching implications. For example, the last book in a series or last speaker in a symposium may receive unwarranted praise simply because they are at the end of a series. The last job applicant may look more qualified.

**More information:** The findings appear in the current issue of [Psychological Science](#)

Provided by University of Michigan

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