

Is 'slow dating' the smarter way to hook up? Ask the Love Scientists...

DATING | SEX

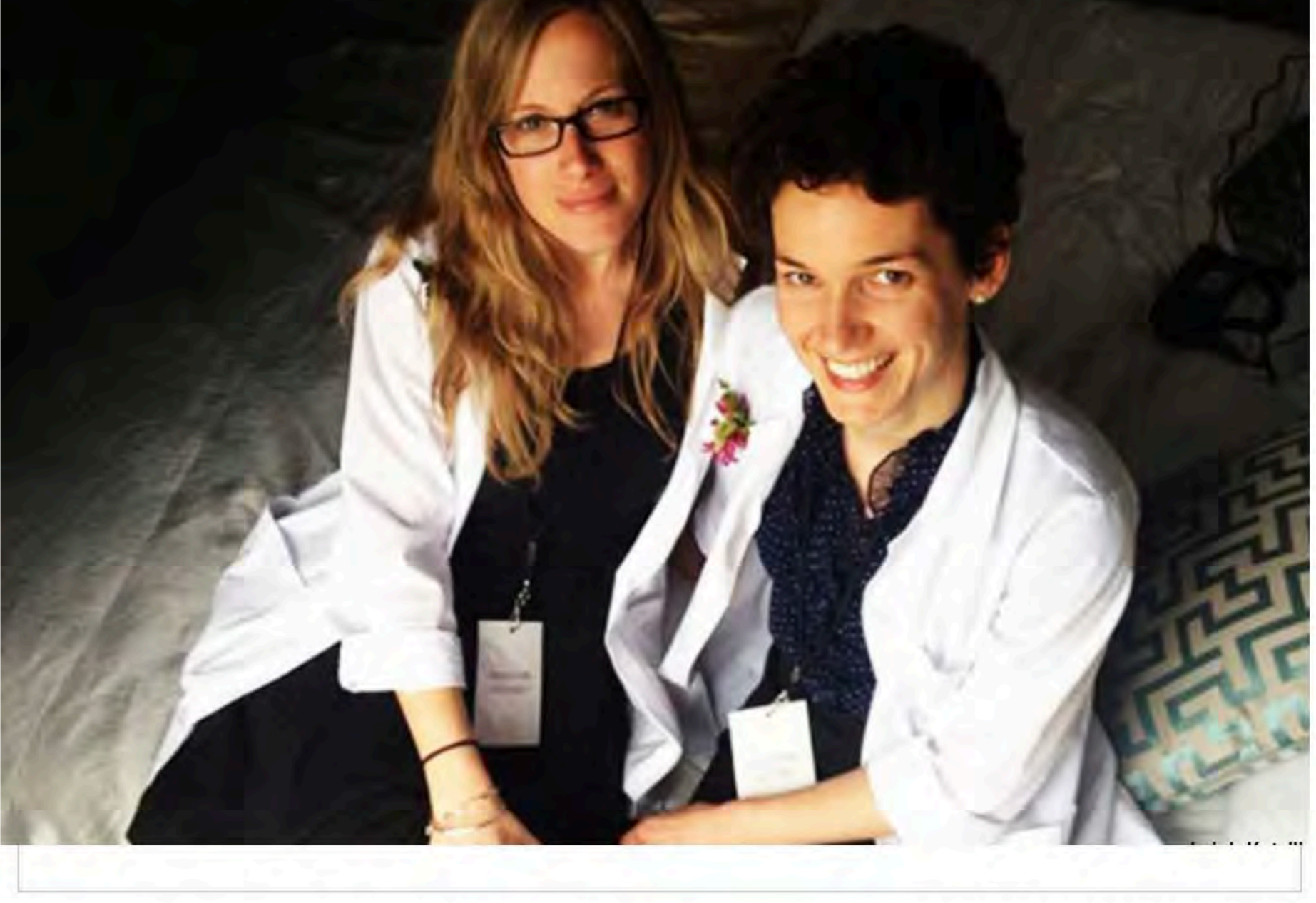


So how's your love life these days? Suffering a little from swipe-right fatigue? Matthew Lee reports from Montreal on the 'love scientists' who are working to bring dating back to its senses.

It began as a joke. "We thought it would be funny to wear lab coats and run a speed dating event where people only used their senses," says Amy Chartrand, one half of Montreal duo [Scientists for Love](#). "And then it kind of happened."

Amy and her friend, Leigh Kotsilidis, created five experiments to test how people relate to each other using each of the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight. And perhaps not so much of some of the other, lesser-known ones: vanity, instant gratification and hotness bias. Their real goal, though, was to offer an enjoyable alternative to online or normal speed dating and gently investigate how we become attracted to other people.

After a brief period of rigorous testing ("we spent lots of time holding each other's hands and staring into each other's eyes," recalls Leigh), they ushered 28 brave, blindfolded participants into Leigh's spacious Little Italy loft on a chilly night in February 2014, and the scientists' inaugural experiment was underway.



It's far from a formal scientific set-up, though. Amy works in theatre and Leigh's a poet so it's intuitively arty. It's also fun, friendly, non-judgemental and fuelled by a desire to better understand the complex, unpredictable dynamics of love and attraction.

"People tell me I'm in love with love," says Amy - her master's thesis was on desire and she officiates weddings in her spare time - "but it's more of an intellectual thing."

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Scientists for Love is also pretty far from speed-dating. In fact, says Leigh, it could be called 'slow-dating' because there's nothing particularly fast about the process.

"We're habituated to doing things fast, including writing people off. At our event participants don't say 'yes' or 'no' based on the immediacy of meeting a person; instead they experience them one sense at a time so their results are a gradation of how much they like that person, sensorially speaking. If people end up going on dates that's terrific but the focus is on creating community through shared experience."

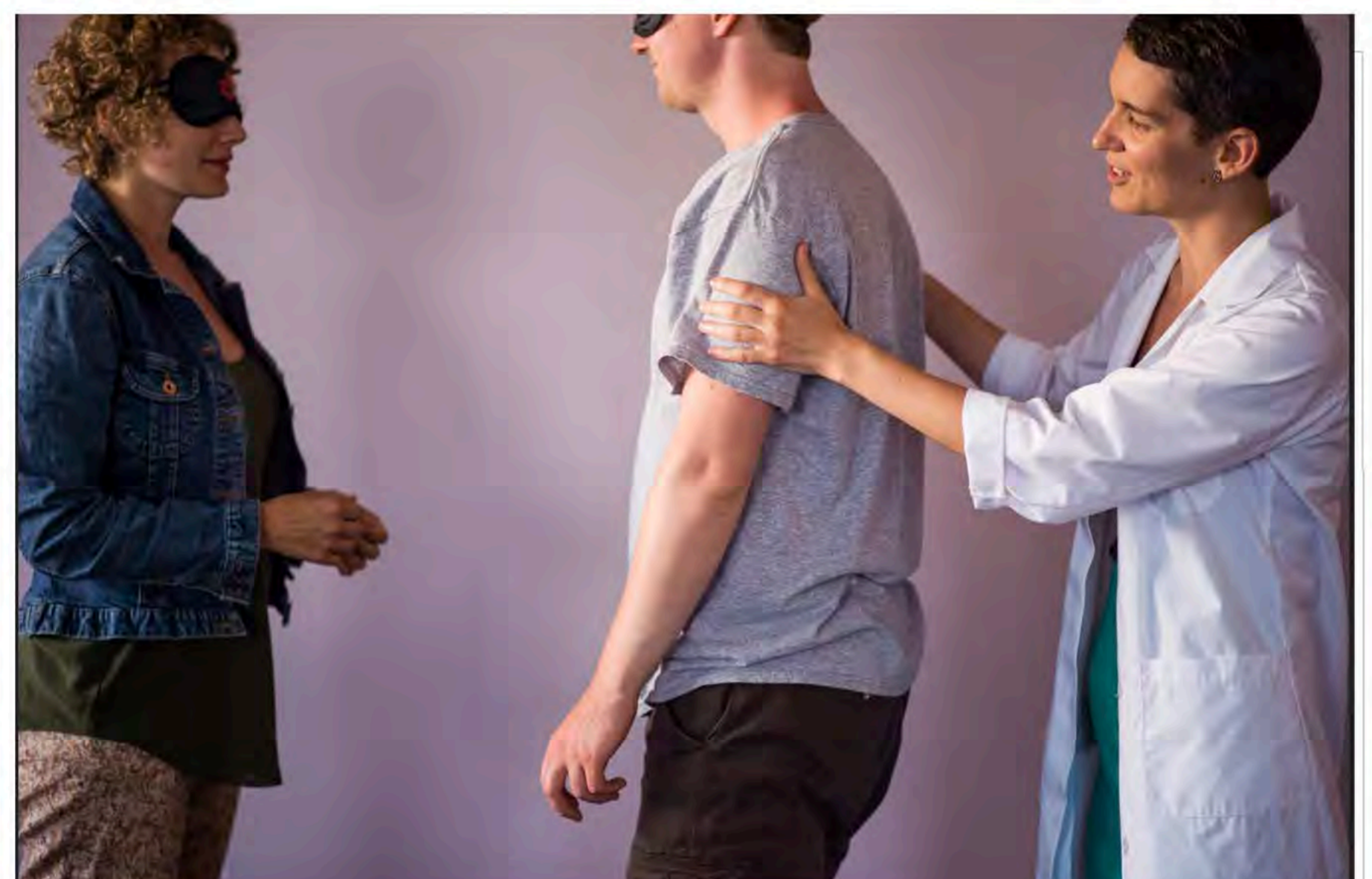


Photo credit: Dahlia Katz

Amy and Leigh's slow, sensory dating events have been a word-of-mouth hit, although perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that there's a demand for a dating experience more meaningful than swiping left or right on a phone. "We'd never say it's more effective than online dating but I think it's more human," says Leigh.

"With online dating you judge the photos first and then you see a list, like a resume. Here you hear their voice and touch their hands before you see what they look like."

Related story: [Swipe right: A guide to getting more out of your dating apps](#)

"People have asked if our event is about giving less-attractive participants a better chance of getting dates," says Amy. "But it's not. It's not about hiding what a person looks like until the end so that participants are more open to that person. That would be giving in to how society privileges looks above all. Our method is about getting our participants to open their minds about how they may be attracted to another person."



Photo credit: Vincenzo D'Alto

Sexual attraction is important, the love scientists say, but their experiments encourage people to focus on other factors that generate attraction. "Everybody remembers a former lover whose scent was intoxicating or who had a laugh that sounded like a mountain spring," says Amy. "It's cheesy but it's true. Isolating each of the senses highlights and encourages other ways we may feel connected to people."

Every event ends with a party at which Amy and Leigh present the test results on a giant chart. Then the participants, who can now see each other, can choose to put the love scientists' innovative approach to matchmaking to the test. And even if the speaking, sniffing and snacking doesn't produce a dream partner, the event seems to have a profound impact on those who take part.

"We had one man who had a traumatic break-up to a 12-year relationship and he said that after the [sensory dating] event he felt ready to date for the first time," says Leigh. "And one woman told us that following she was able to look strangers in the eye and smile at them for the first time. It's a shared experience in a group and real human connections are generated. And that can be transformative."

The experiments

Sound



Photo credit: Vincenzo D'Alto

The blindfolded participants recite the alphabet to their possible matches. "There was one guy all the women voted for," says Amy. "I think you could tell he was gentle and strong just from the tone of his voice. It's very instinctual." So the Jacksons were right after all: A, B, C - that's how easy love can be.

Touch



Photo credit: Dahlia Katz

The participants, still blindfolded, reach out and touch each other's hands for 30 seconds. It's up to you whether you go for a flirty touch, a firm grasp, or something more unexpected. "One woman declared a thumb war each time she touched a men's hands," recalls Leigh. "It was a really fun, playful thing to do."

Smell



Photo credit: Vincenzo D'Alto

Participants sleep in a T-shirt for a few nights and bring it to the event. The T-shirt is placed in a bag and sniffed by 15 people. "Often the guys will complain that the t-shirt is too perfumed," says Amy. "Some men really want to smell body odour."

Sight



Photo credit: Vincenzo D'Alto

Taste

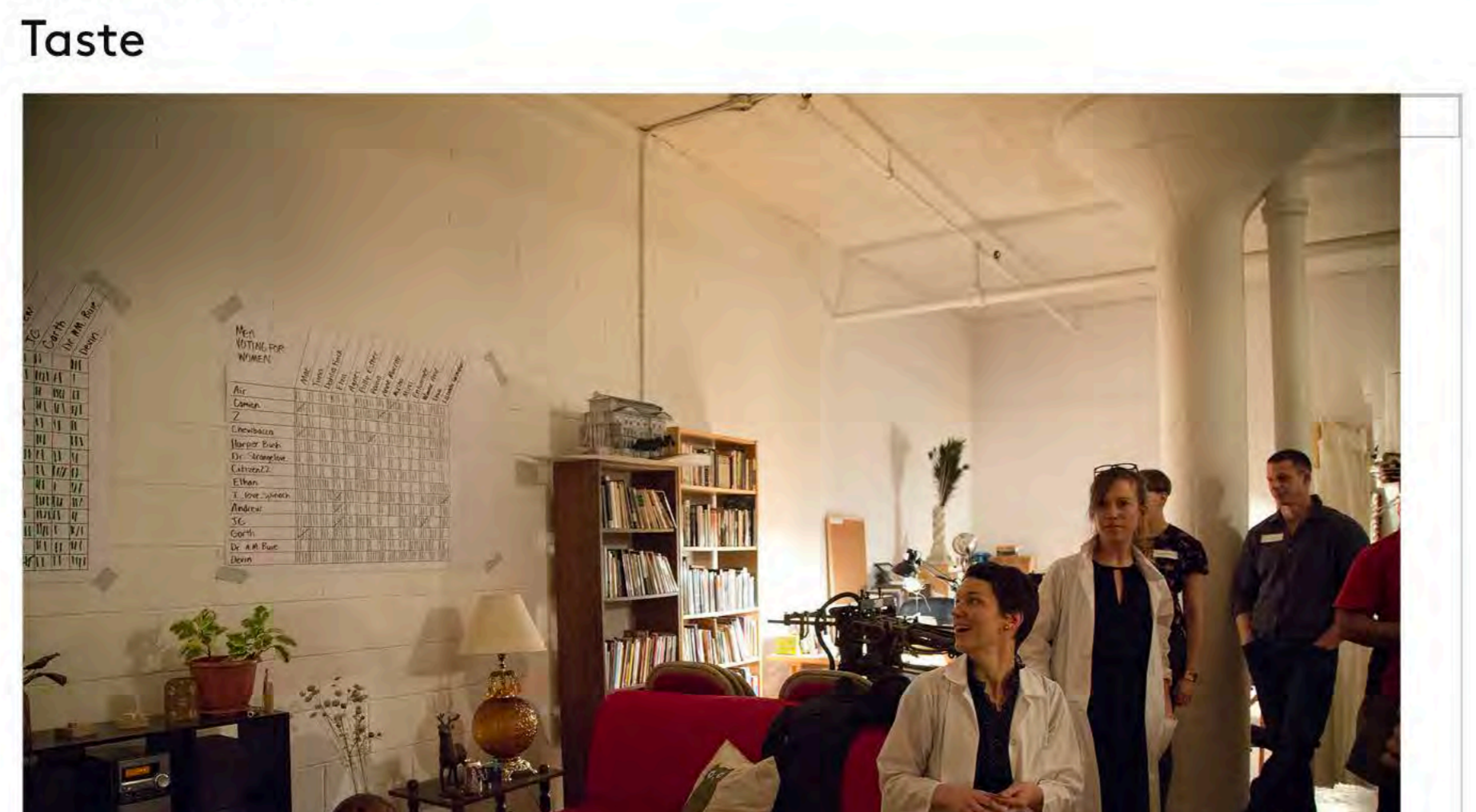


Photo credit: Vincenzo D'Alto

Everybody is asked to bring a snack for their would-be matches to eat. Grapes, goat's cheese and Cheerios are popular choices. Though not in the same bowl, we're guessing.

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