

SNACKS

# These Vegans Really Believe Animal Crackers Are 'Problematic'

"[T]he phenomenon of animal crackers remains problematic and part of a wider culture of speciesism."

By [Karen Chernick](#) | Sep 24 2018, 3:00pm



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Nabisco, arguably the most well-known animal cracker variety, is not only vegan but scored extra points with animal rights activists last month when **it released** its lions, tigers, and bears from their century-long cage captivity on the snack's packaging. Cages linked the morsels with the circus industry, and in a letter PETA urged Nabisco to update the snack's graphics "given the egregious cruelty inherent in circuses" towards four-legged friends. The company acquiesced, a visual tradition that began in 1902 came to a halt, and numerous headlines ensued.



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Regardless of Nabisco's rebranding, though, a certain crop of vegans still won't be purchasing animal cracker boxes by the stringful. There's a school of vegan sociologists that steer clear of all animal-shaped foods, no matter their ingredients—bye-bye, plant-based gummy worms, Easter bunnies, Swedish fish, goldfish crackers, bear-shaped vitamins, and bunny grahams—out of concern that these could act as a gateway snack.

"[Animal crackers have] a clear latent function to socialize children with ideologies of human dominance and reiterate that they have full access to the natural world and the subordinates who live in it," explains Corey Lee Wrenn, a lecturer in sociology at Monmouth University and author of *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights* (2015). "By being able to 'collect' caged animals, pick them up, handle them, and eventually eat them, notions of human supremacy are underscored."

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actually harmed during production of vegan versions of the crackers, their consumption becomes part of an ingrained attitude of superiority that could eventually lead to mistreatment.

“It can only be positive to desist from representing non-human animals as imprisoned by humans,” says Matthew Cole, a sociology lecturer at The Open University in the United Kingdom, of Nabisco’s recent decision to remove animal cage imagery. “But, the phenomenon of animal crackers remains problematic and part of a wider culture of speciesism.”

This is a lesson, these sociologists strongly urge, that we should stop feeding our youth (or munching on, ourselves). “Children should be taught to respect other animals,” adds David A. Nibert, a vegan activist and sociology professor at Wittenberg University. “Eating their forms as crackers is just another step in the socialization process that accustoms children to exploitation.”

But if animal crackers encourage exploitation because of their recognizable shapes, should we be thinking twice about other foods? Where do photo cakes fit in? What does this say about— *gasp*—people who eat gingerbread men?

“Human-shaped cookies and crackers,” notes Wrenn, “are usually generic forms. If they were designed to specifically resemble Jewish persons or African Americans and were marketed to White children, we can perhaps recognize the ideological problem with animal crackers being marketed to human children in an anthropocentric society that engages in widescale, systematic violence against animals.”

Food for thought, but Wrenn’s views glaze over the possibility that consuming a particular shape could be a sign of affection. Every December, American children nibble on Santa Claus-shaped cookies and it is fair to assume that they would not willingly harm a cherished idol who brings them toys and yuletide joy. Consuming gingerbread people has not been linked with a desensitization process that promotes cannibalism or violence towards others, and many animal crackers could also be considered generic. “Likewise eating gingerbread houses promotes, um,” says Karen



For the time being, the solid market presence of plant-based animal crackers and a literal trail of crumbs seem to indicate that most vegans have no qualms about eating animals of the cracker variety. “Every product in our stores must sell well to earn its spot on our shelves,” says Rachel Broderick, a Trader Joe’s communications representative. “Our Organic Animal Crackers have been holding court in our cookie section for well over a decade now, so that certainly says something.”

For instance, a lot more people actually *want* to eat dry, semi-sweet wafers than I realized.

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