

# META-PREJUDICE IN DIETARY INTERGROUP RELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF VEGETARIAN STUDENTS AT SMAS MAITREYAWIRA BATAM

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Submitted: 2025-11-15

Published: 2026-05-31

Accepted: 2026-05-28

DOI: 10.24036/jrp.v9.i1.11

**Abstract—** *Meta-prejudice in dietary intergroup relations: vegetarian students' perceptions.* Situated within the framework of social psychology and social identity theory, this research extends previous studies on meta-prejudice and intergroup relations (in-groups and out-groups). This study analyzes the forms of meta-prejudice and the factors influencing its formation among students at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing documentation, interviews, and observation as data collection techniques with eight informants. Data gathered from interviews were subsequently analyzed using the analytical methods of triangulation theory and contextualized against existing theories and prior research. The findings indicate the formation process of vegetarian student identity. Furthermore, they reveal the forms of meta-prejudice held by vegetarian students regarding non-vegetarians, specifically the perception that vegetarians are considered peculiar, fanatical, and failing to meet adequate nutritional criteria; vegetarian dietary patterns were also found to be associated with an individual's attitudes and behaviors. Finally, institutional norms were identified as a significant factor influencing the formation of the meta-prejudice phenomenon. The implications of this study are directed toward the development of more inclusive values and norms education and prejudice reduction strategies.

**Keywords:** meta prejudice; vegetarian student; non vegetarian student; in group; social psychology

**Abstrak—** *Meta prasangka dalam hubungan antar kelompok dalam pola makan: persepsi remaja vegetarian.* Dalam kerangka psikologi sosial dan identitas sosial, penelitian ini melanjutkan kajian sebelumnya mengenai meta-prasangka dan hubungan antar kelompok in group dan out group. Penelitian ini menganalisis bentuk meta prasangka dan faktor yang mempengaruhi terbentuknya meta prasangka pada pelajar SMAS Maitreyawira Batam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan teknik dokumentasi, wawancara dan observasi terhadap 8 informan. Data yang terkumpul melalui pertanyaan wawancara kemudian dianalisis menggunakan metode triangulasi teori dan dikaitkan dengan teori dan penelitian sebelumnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pembentukan identitas pelajar vegetarian, bentuk meta prasangka pelajar vegetarian terhadap non vegetarian yang berupa persepsi bahwa vegetarian dianggap aneh, fanatik, tidak memenuhi kriteria gizi yang cukup, dan pola makan vegetarian dikaitkan dengan sikap dan perilaku seseorang, serta faktor norma institusional yang berpengaruh pada pembentukan fenomena meta-prasangka. Implikasi penelitian diarahkan pada pengembangan pendidikan nilai dan norma yang lebih inklusif dan pengurangan prasangka.

**Kata kunci:** meta prasangka; pelajar vegetarian; pelajar non vegetarian; kelompok dalam; psikologi sosial

## Introduction

Environmental and public health crises are driving a shift toward plant-based diets, which are considered a dual strategy for reducing emissions and lowering the burden of chronic disease. The EAT-Lancet Commission (2025) recommends a more plant-forward planetary-health diet as a way to balance health and sustainability goals, and the 2024 update reaffirms the need for global food system reform (Arrieta & Aguiar, 2023; Wang, Masedunskas, Willett, & Fontana, 2023; Willett et al., 2019). Sukma, Dewantari, & Kusumajaya (2015) state that implementing a vegetarian lifestyle means not consuming animal products, but some vegetarians still consume eggs, milk, and their processed products daily. This depends on the type of vegetarianism adopted.

A vegetarian lifestyle means that people no longer consume foods, beverages, and items that contain animal ingredients and instead consume plant-based foods (Azizah, Muchlizun, Abror, & Hidayatullah, 2022). A vegetarian lifestyle is associated with health reasons, environmental issues, and religious teachings that promote love for fellow living beings (Borrong, 2019; Nathania & Hartanto, 2021). From a Buddhist perspective, vegetarianism in Maitreya Buddhism has a more profound meaning than just a healthy lifestyle, namely to radiate love and respect and honor every form of life in this world (Angela & Benedicta, 2010). This lifestyle has prompted various responses regarding the pros and cons of vegetarianism, which is considered detrimental to one's health or potentially affecting the balance of the ecosystem (Nuwer, 2016).

At the individual level, three dominant motives drive the adoption of vegetarianism or veganism, namely health, environmental concerns, and animal welfare. Comparative evidence shows that vegetarians or vegans tend to be more motivated by environmental and animal welfare motives than omnivores, while health motives are relatively more evenly distributed (Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). Furthermore, in many societies where meat consumption is still normalized, vegetarian or vegan identities often encounter social resistance. Media discourse analysis studies in the UK reveal patterns of derogatory representation, which the authors refer to as "vegaphobia," and the phenomenon is believed to reproduce speciesism in the mainstream (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Survey and cross-contextual experimental evidence confirms that vegetarians or vegans are targets of prejudice, report perceived discrimination, and face negative stereotypes such as being considered extreme or moralistic (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017).

Teachings about vegetarian lifestyles create a barrier between those who practice them and those who do not. This difference leads to a psychological phenomenon that affects individual interactions. Putra (2014) explains that "in-group meta prejudice" refers to how members of a group believe that their group views certain out-groups, and "out-group meta prejudice" refers to what group members think about how out-group members view their group (Amiot & Sansfaçon, 2011). Furthermore, individuals have a psychological need to engage with social groups or social identities (Fadila, 2013). Social identity is the awareness of being part of a group, where the group provides norms, values, and even pride (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Group members are usually encouraged to have similarities, such as in ways of thinking (Putra, 2014).

The intergroup psychology literature also offers a lens through which to explain the impact. In addition to direct prejudice, attention is now turning to meta-perception, which is the in-group's belief about how the out-group judges them. Gordijn (2002) distinguishes meta-prejudice as the affective belief that others dislike us, as opposed to meta-stereotyping, which focuses on the content of attributes. In ambiguous interactions, the valence of meta-prejudice often more strongly predicts anxiety and withdrawal. Population-level findings show that exaggerated meta-perceptions can trigger hostility and support for harsh policies toward out-groups (Moore-Berg, Ankori-Karlinsky, Hameiri, & Bruneau, 2020). In vegetarian or vegan communities, perceived discrimination correlates with the fulfillment of social identity needs and psychological well-being. This pattern supports the Rejection-Identification model, which predicts increased group identification after rejection, but also illustrates the possible psychological costs when self-esteem is overly dependent on a single identity (Bagci & Olgun, 2019; Vestergren & Uysal, 2022).

The Indonesian context presents an intriguing case, namely at the Maitreyawira Batam Private High School (SMAS), which has adopted a vegetarian lifestyle into its curriculum and school culture. The vegetarian values integrated by Maitreyawira School advocate the teachings of Maitreya Buddha, which are believed to promote mutual love and develop the practice of compassion (Holyenty, 2023). This is also what connects the vegetarian lifestyle with various Buddhist communities in Batam. Maitreyawira School believes that by implementing a vegetarian lifestyle, it not only teaches compassion to students and the community but also improves health and saves the environment.

Maitreyawira School is the only educational institution in Batam City that has adopted a vegetarian diet into its rules and curriculum. This makes the students at this school different from students at other schools. Students consume vegetarian food and are not allowed to bring non-vegetarian food to school, a rule that is rarely enforced by other schools in Batam or even in Indonesia. The situation certainly affects how students view and interact with these rules. Schools that mainstream vegetarianism into their rules and curriculum make dietary identity very prominent in daily interactions. Theory predicts two possible dynamics that may occur simultaneously. First, social cure through in-group support that strengthens meaning, cohesion, and a sense of belonging. Second, the escalation of meta-prejudice can lead to intergroup anxiety and contact avoidance, particularly when the dominant norm outside the school environment remains pro-meat. Until now, there has been no Indonesian-based study that systematically maps the forms, factors, and consequences of vegetarian meta-prejudice as an in-group to non-vegetarians as an out-group in the institutional environment of schools.

This study aims to fill this gap. Its contributions are both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, this study operationalizes meta-prejudice in the domain of dietary lifestyle, which has often been positioned as a normative stigma rather than a measurable process of intergroup meta-prejudice. Empirically, this study provides evidence from Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, on how institutional policies that make vegetarianism a school norm are related to the valence of meta-prejudice, intergroup anxiety, and the intention to interact between vegetarian and non-vegetarian students. The results are expected to form the basis for designing interventions based on positive contact, strengthening inclusive class norms, and intergroup communication strategies that reduce dietary identity polarization.

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

As a basis for compiling this study, the researcher has reviewed various previous studies related to the theme of psychological prejudice and meta-prejudice in the context of intergroup relations in social life. Several previous studies have shown that prejudice can be influenced by individuals' perceptions of other groups that are considered different from their own group in terms of values, beliefs, or social identity. Some previous studies include: A study by Putra (2014) emphasizes the importance of meta-prejudice, namely the belief about how our group and other groups view each other, in forming prejudice and undermining identity. The study by Agadullina & Lovakov (2018) examined how prejudice confrontation and perceptions of outgroup cohesion (entitativity) also influence the intensity of prejudice. On the other hand, research conducted by Prasetya & Tondok (2023) highlights the role of ethnocentrism and social dominance orientation in shaping prejudice against certain ethnic groups.

The concept of meta-prejudice refers to in-group beliefs about how out-groups evaluate them affectively, and it differs from meta-stereotypes, which focus on attribute content. Preliminary findings indicate that in ambiguous interaction situations, the valence of meta-prejudice is a stronger predictor of anxiety and withdrawal than specific stereotype content. This positions meta-prejudice as an affective cognitive mechanism that bridges prejudice, identity threat, and intergroup contact quality (Gordijn, 2002). Recent research shows systematic negative bias in meta-perceptions. Political partisans in the United States exaggerate how much their opponents hate and dehumanize their group. This exaggeration predicts social distance and support for policies that harm the other side, reinforcing the relevance of meta-perception correction as an intervention (Moore-Berg et al., 2020).

In the domain of vegetarianism and veganism, the social context provides a rich testing ground. Mainstream media in the United Kingdom often frames vegans in a derogatory manner, thereby normalizing speciesism. This data is consistent with survey and experimental evidence that vegetarians and especially vegans are targets of prejudice and stereotyped as extreme or moralistic (Cole & Morgan, 2011; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). On the target group side, vegans report perceived discrimination, and these findings are related to the fulfillment of social identity and well-being needs, supporting the Rejection Identification model and the Social Cure approach while reminding us that over-reliance on identity-based self-esteem can carry psychological costs Bagci & Olgun (2019). A systematic mapping of vegan identity confirms four main themes: stigma, the role of ideology, morality in dietary change and maintenance, and veganism as a social movement, while highlighting methodological gaps in the tendency to lump all non-meat eaters together and the lack of exploration of contextual identity processes (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022). This study examines the meta-prejudice of students in schools regarding vegetarian values, which are shaped by their beliefs about individuals who do not share these values, using SMAS Maitreyawira Batam known for its distinctive characteristics as the research location.

Based on Tajfel et al., (1979) social identity perspective, group members tend to compare their group with other groups. When an outgroup is perceived as a competitor, ingroup members are driven to compete with outgroup members to maintain their self-esteem or pride. This study shows that individuals' perceptions and behaviors tend to be influenced by what they think about others. In this regard, it also seems possible that when members of the in-group believe that members of the out-group are prejudiced

against their own group (i.e., meta-prejudice from the out-group), this belief may influence meta-prejudice within the group.

Putra (2016) explains that meta-prejudice focuses on how in-groups view out-groups, as well as how out-groups view in-groups. This concept considers two types of perceptions in intergroup relations, whereas meta-stereotypes only consider one type of perception. In addition, meta-stereotypes focus on stereotypical characteristics (such as, for example, "Indonesians are aggressive") that are considered common characteristics of a particular group, whereas meta-prejudice relates to negative feelings or hatred (such as, for example, "Indonesians are a threat") towards a particular group. In some cases, a group may be described as having positive characteristics, but this does not always correlate with low levels of prejudice against that group.

Thus, Putra (2016) concluded that meta-prejudice from outside groups will influence support for prejudice through meta-prejudice within groups. The phenomenon of meta-prejudice often arises from differing views and values held by a group, making this concept relevant to the social dynamics at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam school, where students who do not adhere to vegetarian values interact with a school that incorporates these values into its curriculum and rules.

## **Research Method**

### ***Participants***

The research method used in this study refers to the qualitative approach described by Creswell (2016) in his book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. This method prioritizes a deep understanding of social phenomena through the analysis of data obtained in the process of interviewing informants and from previous studies. Structured interviews were conducted with informants who were students and educational personnel, both non-vegetarians and those who adhered to a vegetarian lifestyle, from August 2025 to September 2025. The sampling technique used in this study involved the purposive selection of informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely: 1) being a student or educator at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam, 2) comprising both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, 3) being willing to serve as research informants and participate in interviews, 4) having direct experience and involvement in the implementation of vegetarian values at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam, 5) having a deep understanding of vegetarian culture at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam, and 6) informants under the age of 18 having obtained ethical approval. In addition, eight (8) informants were selected for this study using these criteria. Because this study was conducted in a secondary education institution, the informants had to be between 16 and 45 years old. Therefore, this study submitted an ethics clearance and obtained ethical approval with decision number No.4836/KEP-UNISA/IX/2025. As a result, six (6) students, two (2) educational staff, four (4) vegetarians, and four (4) non-vegetarians were obtained. Table 1 provides additional information. All information regarding the study was disclosed to the informants, who could choose to withdraw if they did not wish to participate.

**Table 1.** Research informant characteristics

Initials of Informant	Ages	Work Status	Sex	Vegetarian Status	Latest Education	Ethnicity	Religion
AT	17 years old	Student	Male	Non vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
KS	17 years old	Student	Female	Vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
RJ	16 years old	Student	Female	Vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
YH	16 years old	Student	Female	Non vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
JA	16 years old	Student	Male	Non vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
BE	17 years old	Student	Female	Vegetarian	Junior School	High Chinese	Buddha
AF	45 years old	Teacher	Male	Non vegetarian	Bachelor	Acehnese	Islam
AG	33 years old	Teacher	Female	Vegetarian	Master	Chinese	Buddha

**Procedure**

The method that will be used in the research is descriptive qualitative, which is an approach that aims to describe in depth and holistically about the social phenomenon under study. Based on this statement, in the context of this research, the descriptive qualitative approach is used to understand and analyze in depth the forms, dynamics, and factors behind the emergence of the psychological phenomenon of meta prejudice against individuals who do not adhere to vegetarian values in the school environment of SMAS Maitreyawira Batam which adopts vegetarian values in the school curriculum. This research will focus on a clear description, analysis, and explanation of the phenomenon of meta prejudice that occurs to explain the relationship of this phenomenon to individual attitudes in school and their daily activities in learning and interacting with others.

The sources and types of data used in the research are divided into two, namely: Primary data which is the main information obtained directly from informants through narration and information provided either through interviews or participatory observation. Informants, namely Maitreyawira High School students, are assumed to have relevant views regarding the vegetarian values adopted by the school as well as attitudes and views towards non-vegetarian individuals and vice versa. In-depth interviews were conducted once with each informant between August 14 and September 9, 2025. Observations were conducted from July to August 2025 at SMAS Maitreyawira

Batam to understand social interactions and the application of vegetarian values in daily activities. Meanwhile, secondary data obtained by researchers will support information from secondary data. Researchers obtained data from various written sources such as scientific journals, previous research results, and reports relevant to the topic to strengthen the analysis and provide a theoretical context for the field findings. The combination of these two types of data is expected to provide a clear and in-depth picture of the psychological phenomenon of meta prejudice studied. The focus, direction, and plan of this research question are formulated as follows.

**Table 2.** Research focus and interview questions

No	Research Focus	Dimensions	Interview question direction
1	What form of meta-prejudice do students at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam have towards non-vegetarians?	Perception	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As a non-vegetarian, what is your opinion of people who follow a vegetarian diet? Why do you think that way?</li> <li>2. As a vegetarian, what is your opinion of non-vegetarians? Why do you think that way?</li> <li>3. Have you ever seen, or even had a problem with, or reprimanded people who do not follow a vegetarian diet?</li> <li>4. Are there any specific differences in daily interactions between vegetarians and non-vegetarians?</li> </ol>
2	What factors shape these prejudices (school values, family influence, media, or personal experiences)?	Factor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What factors influence your perception of vegetarians, and conversely, of non-vegetarians?</li> <li>2. How do the differences between vegetarians and non-vegetarians affect your daily life at school, such as in terms of friendships, grades, academic achievement, and other aspects?</li> </ol>

***Analysis technique***

Researchers use a qualitative data analysis approach called theory triangulation (Bennett, 1997), which involves the use of various data sources, theories, or methods to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. This helps reduce bias in data analysis and increases the credibility of research results. In this study, data triangulation will be conducted by combining several sources of information and theories to analyze the phenomenon of meta prejudice among students at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam. Data triangulation will include three main elements: first, conducting interviews with vegetarian and non-vegetarian students and observing their interactions in daily activities. Second, using theories about social identity and prejudice, including Tajfel and Turner's meta-prejudice theory, to assess how students' perceptions of vegetarians and non-vegetarians are formed (Tajfel et al., 1979). Third, combining in-depth interviews and observations to obtain a more comprehensive picture of student attitudes and interactions. With this triangulation, it is hoped that the results of the data analysis will be richer and more reliable, providing a deeper understanding of the factors that shape prejudice in the context of vegetarian-based schools.

## Results

Based on the rules and regulations of SMAS Maitreyawira, all school members are required to follow a plant-based lifestyle. This affects the consumption habits of all school members. At SMAS Maitreyawira, all food must be plant-based. A plant-based diet refers to foods that do not contain onions or meat.

The Maitreyawira School Rules state that “It is prohibited to bring and/or eat non-vegetarian food to or within the school or monastery environment.” This regulation is based on the teachings of Maitreya Buddhism and the school's vision and mission. Therefore, all members of the school community, including students, educators, and educational staff, are required to follow a vegetarian diet and are prohibited from bringing non-vegetarian food into the school or monastery environment. This provision also applies to all activities outside of school, given that all members of the school community have a responsibility to uphold and represent vegetarian values when representing the institution.

Based on the food served in Figure 1, there are several dishes that resemble non-vegetarian menus. For example, imitation meat made from plant-based ingredients such as tofu, soybeans, and flour that are processed in a certain way, as well as special menus such as chicken noodles, dumpling noodles, hamburgers, and risoles that are prepared without meat or onions. The purpose of this menu is to attract students' interest while accommodating the preferences of those who do not follow a vegetarian diet outside of school. In addition, there are a number of restrictions related to the implementation of a vegetarian diet that not only regulate the types of food that are allowed or prohibited from being brought into the school environment but also cover learning practices. For example, in biology and chemistry classes, the use of living creatures such as animals for practical purposes is prohibited in order to comply with vegetarian principles.



Fig 1. Vegetarian Food at SMAS Maitreyawira Batam

Maitreyawira School is a multicultural school that reflects the diversity of ethnicities, beliefs, cultures, and diets within it. As an institution that requires a vegetarian diet based on the teachings of Maitreya Buddha, some members of the school community practice this lifestyle. Although the majority of students do not follow a vegetarian diet outside of school, there are also some who consistently continue their vegetarian diet outside of the school environment. Not only that, but by being vegetarian, they also strive to respect all life on earth. Furthermore, some students have been accustomed to vegetarianism since childhood due to family influence, as explained by informants KS, RJ, and BE.

“Since childhood, I have been taught to be vegetarian, and my whole family is vegetarian, because in the religious teachings believed by my

family, being vegetarian is one way to respect living creatures.”  
(Informants KS, RJ, and BE, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

In addition to family factors that have accustomed them to a vegetarian diet, there are also other reasons such as environmental factors or the influence of people around them, which then become habits that are difficult to change, as explained by Informant AG.

“At first, I just tried it because of FOMO (fear of missing out), but after getting used to it, I felt it would be a shame not to continue being vegetarian.” (Informant AG, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

On the other hand, there are also students and school staff who do not follow this diet outside of school for various reasons. Some feel that it is not suitable for them and find it difficult to commit to maintaining a vegetarian diet consistently, as informant YH explained.

“I don't feel that strongly about maintaining a vegetarian diet.”  
(Informant YH, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

A similar point was also made by Informant JA. This relates to family factors, where not everyone follows the same diet, as well as cultural factors, which mean that people are not accustomed to maintaining a vegetarian diet, as explained by Informant AF

“I was raised in an Acehnese family, where every time there was a big celebration, we always cooked meat and it had become a habit, so it was rather difficult to change traditions and tastes that had become accustomed to the palate.”(Informant AF, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

However, some still follow a vegetarian diet on important days, such as the first and fifteenth days according to the Chinese calendar. Informant AT and Informant YH said

“We only eat vegetarian food on the 1st and 15th days according to the lunar calendar.” (Informant AT, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

In the process of establishing their identity as part of the in-group, vegetarian students encounter obstacles when they are outside of school or in spaces that are more dominated by the out-group. The main obstacle that arises is related to food accessibility. As stated by informant BE

“Outside of school, it is a little more difficult to find vegetarian food”  
(Informant BE, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

Similar difficulties were also experienced by several students before they moved to Maitreyawira School, when they were still attending public schools that did not implement a vegetarian lifestyle. This was explained by informants KS and RJ as follows.

“Vegetarians are a minority group. If you go to a public school, not many places provide vegetarian food, so access to vegetarian food is a little difficult.” (Informants KS and RJ, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

Despite the various obstacles they faced, the vegetarian diet also provided benefits that were felt tangibly by the informants. The most prominent benefit is related to health. Informant KS made the following statement, which is similar to those made by informants RJ, BE, and AG.

“I did some research and found that eating vegetables can reduce animal fat, which can potentially cause other diseases. However, it is still possible for vegetarians to get sick, but a vegetarian diet can prevent it.” (Informants RJ, BE, and AG, interviewed on August 19, 2025)

Although the community is dominated by non-vegetarian out-groups, Batam is considered to have relatively easy access to vegetarian food compared to other areas. As explained by informant RJ,

“Vegetarian food in Batam is also more accessible than in smaller cities outside the city.” (Informant RJ, interviewed on September 19, 2025)

Overall, the formation of vegetarian identity among Maitreyawira High School students is influenced by family, social environment, and religious values.

Various forms of jokes, sarcasm, and stereotypes experienced by vegetarian students do not only stop at direct experiences but also form meta-prejudices, namely their perceptions of how others judge and perceive their vegetarian identity. Based on an analysis of eight interview transcripts with informants from the vegetarian (in-group) and non-vegetarian (out-group) groups, a complex picture of meta-prejudice in the environment of Maitreyawira Batam High School was found. The school policy requiring a vegetarian diet in the school environment creates a “safe space” where vegetarianism is the norm. However, interactions with the world outside of school shape significant perceptions and meta-prejudices among vegetarian students.

In general, vegetarian students (in-group) believe that non-vegetarian students (out-group), especially those outside the school environment, have mixed views about them. These views are divided into two extremes: negative stereotypes that are demeaning and positive stereotypes that actually become a moral burden.

**Table 3.** Forms of in-group to out-group meta-prejudice

Dimensions	Meta Prejudice Category or Form: In-group to Out-Group	Key Findings or Indicators	Impact on Social Identity
Negative Stereotypical Perceptions	Inferior labeling	Called “goats,” “grass eaters,” “fanatics” (RJ, KS, AG)	Feeling symbolically distanced, there was a growing awareness that their identity was considered “strange.”
	Doubts about physical or nutritional abilities	Considered malnourished, weak, or physically small (KS, RJ)	Internalizing external perspectives as a form of social risk reflection
	Fanaticism and moral intolerance	Perceived as being too pushy and judging other people’s choices (AG, BE)	The burden of identity and caution in interactions arises
Positive Stereotypical Perceptions	High moral standards	Considered “good,” “pious,” “devout” (RJ, AG)	Enhancing symbolic moral status
	The burden of moral perfection	Pressure to always be nice because of vegetarian identity (AG, RJ)	Social pressure and restrictions on self-expression arise
In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics	Harmony in a safe school environment	Normalizing vegetarianism in schools (YH, KS)	Strengthening positive collective identities
	Tension outside the safe room	Interaction with the outside community leads to jokes and stigma (KS, RJ)	Strengthening meta-awareness as a minority group

Based on the information in Table 3, researchers found that the meta-prejudice experienced by vegetarian students reflected their awareness of being perceived as “others.” This perception is shaped by negative connotations, such as being viewed as strange, weak, or fanatical, as well as by positive connotations, such as being considered holy or pious. Both types of prejudice ultimately lead to social distance, placing vegetarian students in a position where they must exercise caution when interacting with out-groups. Conversely, in environments that enforce vegetarian norms and rules, these students feel more at ease, as such conditions foster a safe space for the in-group to express their identity without the pressure or burden of prejudice.

### Discussion

In accordance with the context of SMAS Maitreyawira Batam, which applies vegetarian values and norms, the phenomenon of meta-prejudice among vegetarian

students towards non-vegetarians reflects the interrelationship between identity, institutions, and social perceptions. This study uses a qualitative approach through documentation, interviews, and observation techniques with several informants. The discussion focuses on the process of forming vegetarian student identity, the forms of meta-prejudice that arise against non-vegetarian groups, and the factors that influence the emergence of meta-prejudice with reference to previous theories and research findings.

Historically, vegetarian diets have developed from various aspects, one of which is theological beliefs. This became the basis for the formation of identities, norms, and rules for vegetarian diets at Maitreyawira High School, which are based on the teachings of Maitreya Buddhism. This finding is in line with previous research conducted by Angela & Benedicta (2010) that the practice of vegetarianism in Maitreya Buddhism is a form of respect for all living beings. However, a new and more specific finding from this study is the formation of vegetarian student identity, which has not been widely discussed in previous studies.

The formation of vegetarian identity at Maitreyawira High School is shaped by several factors, namely habits instilled by the family since childhood, teachings and adherence to beliefs and rituals, as well as cultural and environmental influences. This identity then strengthens a sense of internal solidarity that creates a symbolic boundary between vegetarian in-group students and non-vegetarian outgroup students. In this context, vegetarianism is not only a religious practice but is also understood as a form of social identity that is lived out, similar to the concept of collective identity described by Tajfel & Turner (1979) in social identity theory. Cuhadar & Dayton (2011) explain that Social Identity Theory states that humans tend to form "in-group" and "out-group" categories to fulfil their needs for self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Discrimination and prejudice arise both from differences and from the psychological need to maintain a positive image of one's own group. This principle is what forms a meta-prejudice between vegetarian students as the in-group and non-vegetarian students as the out-group. Meta-prejudice refers to the way members of a group believe that other groups view them, specifically, the expectation or perception that the outgroup has prejudiced attitudes toward the ingroup (Gordijn, 2002). This concept differs from direct prejudice, which refers to an individual's negative feelings or beliefs toward another group (Nshom, 2024).

In this regard, this study found that meta-prejudice among vegetarian students emerged in several forms. First, there was an expectation that non-vegetarian groups viewed vegetarian students as "different" or strange because of their lifestyle and food choices. Second, there was a perception that non-vegetarians judged the nutritional intake and physical condition of vegetarian students to be less than optimal. Third, vegetarian students believe that non-vegetarians consider them too fanatical in practicing vegetarianism. Finally, there is a belief that non-vegetarians judge vegetarian students to have favorable personalities or high morals, as if there were specific standards that must be met.

In contrast to the research conducted by Moore-Berg et al., (2020), which found that meta-prejudice is generally associated with conflict and hostility between groups, this phenomenon is evident in American society, currently experiencing real polarization characterized by dislike, dehumanization, and disagreement with opposing political parties. In this context, each side tends to misinterpret perceptions and exaggerate the level of dislike and dehumanization that the other side has towards their group. The results of this study found that although vegetarian students exhibited various forms of

negative meta-prejudice, these perceptions were more internal and focused on evaluative expectations rather than generating intergroup conflict. In line with this, Gordijn (2002) found that people feel more uncomfortable when they perceive other groups to have negative prejudices against their group. Thus, these results are a new finding from previous studies discussing meta-prejudice. Brewer (1999) states that ingroup identification does not depend on negative attitudes toward outgroups; discrimination can be driven solely by preferences for the ingroup.

In addition to the form of meta-prejudice, this study has found factors that can influence the formation of the phenomenon of meta-prejudice among vegetarian students (ingroup) towards non-vegetarian students (outgroup), namely the influence of norms and the institutional environment on the level of meta-prejudice. In this context, the researchers found that the norms and regulations of Maitreyawira High School influenced the form of meta-prejudice experienced by vegetarian students, namely, first, vegetarian students found differences in the treatment and views of the outgroup towards them when they were in the Maitreyawira High School environment and outside the Maitreyawira High School environment. Second, vegetarian students feel that the Maitreyawira High School environment is a safe space that supports their identity without having to worry about stereotypes or prejudice. These findings reinforce the theory from previous studies by (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) that social context and group norms play a major role in shaping and reducing intergroup prejudice. However, previous studies have focused on ethnic, religious, or racial groups and discussed direct forms of prejudice, not dietary patterns such as vegetarianism and meta-prejudice. Thus, this study produced new findings in the form of environmental norms and regulations that can influence the formation of the phenomenon of meta-prejudice.

### **Conclusion**

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that seeks to elucidate the manifestations and determinants of meta-prejudice among vegetarian students towards non-vegetarians within the Maitreyawira High School context. Data were acquired via interviews and observations of informants. The study's results indicate that vegetarian students experience meta-prejudice, characterized by perceptions of them as peculiar, fanatical, malnourished, and physically frail, while non-vegetarian students expect them to consistently exhibit commendable attitudes and personalities. This study demonstrates that the norms and regulations at Maitreyawira High School, derived from the teachings of Maitreya Buddha, significantly influence and mitigate the level of meta-prejudice within the school environment. These findings reveal that perceptions and intergroup conflicts, as well as an individual's social and cultural context, influence meta-prejudice. By encouraging vegetarianism through rules and norms, Maitreyawira High School in Batam helps students and other members of the school community be more open-minded and accepting. Consequently, the implementation of these values and norms contributes to diminishing meta-prejudice among groups.

### **Limitation and Recommendation**

The study's findings underscore the significant influence of educational institutions and the environment in fostering moral and social values that promote tolerance across cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and dietary differences. An educational setting founded on the principles of love and respect for all life not only cultivates

individual character but also impacts the comprehension of diverse social identities. Moreover, these findings may serve as a reference for other value-based educational institutions to establish systems that mitigate prejudice and meta-prejudice among groups. To accomplish this, additional research could broaden the study's scope by incorporating non-vegetarian educational institutions for comparative analysis of the manifestations of meta-prejudice and the degree to which institutional norms may affect its emergence. Additionally, research may be conducted utilizing a quantitative methodology to objectively assess the degree of meta-prejudice and investigate the factors that contribute to its occurrence. This study significantly contributes to the understanding of the social psychological phenomenon connecting prejudice between vegetarian and non-vegetarian students, demonstrating that the meta-prejudice directed at non-vegetarian students is sometimes positive, despite the presence of negative prejudice against them.

### Acknowledgement

The researchers would like to thank the Principal of SMAS Maitreyawira Batam for granting permission to conduct research in the school environment and the Head of the Maitreyawira Library for providing facilities and space to conduct the research. This paper has been presented in 4th International Conference on Psychology and Health Issues (ICOPHI) 2025.

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