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“An A is an A?” Maybe in North America, but less so elsewhere

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Abstract

With reference to recent debate about the increasing “an A is an A” mentality at business schools, I provide evidence on the prevalence of this mentality in North America versus other regions of the world (RoW). The evidence presented is derived from the data selection procedures employed in conducting systematic reviews of management research because a focus on specific journals in this selection can be seen as an artifact of the “an A is an A” mentality. My findings suggest that this mindset is more widespread in North American business schools and less so elsewhere. This implies that in order to find remedies against the detrimental effects of the “an A is an A” mentality, North American business school leaders and academics might find inspiration in other countries. In addition, I suggest that a part of the solution could also be directing PhD students toward a more inclusive selection of journals and articles in reviews of management research.

KEYWORDS

business schools, journal rankings, performance management, regional differences, systematic reviews, universities

INTRODUCTION

A series of recent articles have provided a thought-provoking discussion of the “an A is an A” mentality and the increasing primacy of journal publications taking hold at business schools (Aguinis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Aguinis, Archibold, & Rice, 2022; Balkin & Bresser, 2021; Bartunek, 2020; Harley & Fleming, 2021; Rasheed & Priem, 2020; Tourish, 2020a, 2020b; Wazir, El-Bassiouny, & Schmidpeter, 2022). According to Aguinis et al. (2020a, p. 135), this mentality has emerged as the new bottom line for valuing academic research conducted in business schools and can be summarized as follows:

Faculty recruiting committees and promotion and tenure panels readily discuss how many A's a candidate has published and how many A's are needed for a favorable decision, while conversations about the distinctive intellectual value of a publication are often secondary to its categorical membership in journals.

Several published articles on this mentality also suggest some ways forward to tackle the downsides associated with such a mindset (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Balkin & Bresser, 2021; Bartunek, 2020; Harley & Fleming, 2021; Rasheed & Priem, 2020). For instance, Aguinis et al. (2020a) suggested adapting business schools' performance management design and research performance measures and investing more in training and development of research skills. There is not much to disagree with at the conceptual level in terms of the arguments put forward in these articles, which is why I do not intend to reflect on the discussion so far but rather complement it with an empirical perspective. The available articles on the “an A is an A” mentality have been based on personal observations and critical analysis (Aguinis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Balkin & Bresser, 2021; Rasheed & Priem, 2020; Tourish, 2020a, 2020b) or published insights into historical evaluations of research excellence (Bartunek, 2020). Consequently, Bartunek (2020) called for the collection of empirical evidence on the phenomenon and expressed some skepticism toward the universality of the “an A is an A” mentality among

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the entirety of business schools, especially those “located outside the U.S.” (p. 166).

In this short Research Dialogue article, I respond to this call and offer some insights into the construction of samples for systematic literature reviews authored by scholars affiliated with North American business schools and with institutions in the rest of the world (RoW). Although the construction of review samples and thus the selection of works deemed “citable” does not deliver evidence on promotion and tenure criteria in business schools, such samples may be reflective of what is valued as legitimate research and desired research outlets (cf. Mandard, 2022). Indeed, in their commentary, Rasheed and Priem (2020, p. 159) noted that they “don’t typically send doctoral students performing literature reviews to look in lower-tier journals.” This focus on top-tier or A-ranked journals when performing literature reviews can be regarded as one reflection of the “an A is an A” mentality. In other words, a sole focus on A-ranked journals when researching extant literature may signal that all other research is unworthy of either review or inclusion in literature reviews. Consequently, a sole focus on top-tier journals in systematic reviews published in top outlets for review articles in management research such as the *Academy of Management Annals* (AMA) or the *International Journal of Management Reviews* (IJMR) can be regarded as an artifact of the “an A is an A” mentality. In what follows, I therefore analyze how the affiliation of authors with North American or RoW business schools is related to the scope of review samples in systematic reviews published in AMA and IJMR.

My results indicate that the “an A is an A” mentality may be more pronounced in North America and less so elsewhere. This does not necessarily mean that this mindset is a North American issue only, but rather it signals that when searching for remedies to this proscriptive outlook, we might gain several insights from contemporary business schools worldwide. In addition, I suggest that the detrimental aspects of the “an A is an A” mentality may be addressed by making doctoral students aware of the relevance of research beyond A-ranked journals when they perform a systematic review as part of their PhD studies.

The rest of this Research Dialogue article is structured as follows. In the following section, I detail my methods for analyzing systematic reviews published in AMA and IJMR. Thereafter, I present some insights into how sample selection in these reviews is related to the affiliation of their authors. I conclude with some implications for the “an A is an A” debate.

METHOD

Sample

The sample that I draw upon for building the insights offered in this contribution was initially assembled for a

methodological literature review (cf. Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2023) on sample selection choices in systematic reviews of management research. Thus, for details on the methods, please consult Hiebl (2023). In short, I have focused on systematic reviews of management research published in the two most highly regarded outlets for such reviews: AMA and IJMR (Kunisch et al., 2018). Systematic reviews are a convenient way to analyze sample selection decisions because they are more transparent than traditional reviews in terms of what research items are included in their review samples and the reasons for such inclusion (Kunisch et al., 2023; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). In this article, I use the term “research items” to refer to scholarly works that can be included in systematic reviews, such as journal articles, book chapters, books, research reports, and working papers (Hiebl, 2023).

I first analyzed all 523 articles published in AMA and IJMR between 2004 and 2018. To select systematic reviews among them, I used the criteria of whether the articles (i) made their inclusion or exclusion criteria for selecting individual research items transparent and (ii) reported their findings in a narrative way (i.e., I excluded purely bibliometric studies). If an article met these two criteria, I regarded it as a “systematic review,” although some of the included articles are not “pure-play” systematic reviews (e.g., Wang & Chugh, 2014). Following these procedures, I identified 232 systematic reviews (56 from AMA, 176 from IJMR). For a full list, please see Hiebl (2023).

Measures

For the analyses offered here, I focus on six characteristics of the systematic reviews: (i) the affiliation(s) of their author(s), (ii) their principal approach towards sample selection, (iii) the number and (iv) rankings of journals searched for identifying research items, and (v) the number and (vi) rankings of journals where research items included in the systematic review have been published.

Authors’ affiliations

For each author of the selected review studies, I extracted the country where the author’s affiliation is situated as indicated in the published paper. If an author had various affiliations with institutions in different countries, I only coded the first affiliation’s country. Then, I categorized each article as either (i) North American, if all authors had affiliations with institutions in Canada or the United States; (ii) RoW, if all authors had affiliations with institutions outside of Canada and the United States; or (iii) mixed, if an article was authored by a team of scholars where at least one had their affiliation with a North American institution and at least one had an

affiliation with an RoW institution. Following this logic, 158 articles were classified as RoW, 47 were classified as North American, and 27 were classified as mixed.

Principal sample selection approach

In my article on sample selection approaches (Hiebl, 2023), I identified four principal search approaches and their application among the 232 articles: the journal-driven approach (applied in 65 articles), the database-driven approach (133 articles), the seminal-work-driven approach (5 articles), and the combined approach (28 articles). For one article, the principal search approach could not be identified due to missing information. For the below analysis, I grouped the four approaches into two clusters: the journal-driven approach versus other approaches. This is opportune because only the journal-driven approach closely resembles the “an A is an A” mentality. In this approach, scholars pre-select a group of—oftentimes elite and sometimes specialist—journals and then only search these journals regarding their topic of interest (Hiebl, 2023). In the other three approaches, such a sole focus on certain journals is not given. For instance, in the most often applied approach, the database-oriented approach, the identification of potentially relevant research items starts with a broad, keyword-based search in electronic databases without a pre-defined list of eligible publication outlets in mind.

Number of journals searched

For those review studies that have followed the journal-driven approach, I extracted the number of journals that have been searched in the identification of relevant research items. Fifty-nine of the 65 journal-driven reviews have disclosed this information. The number of journals searched ranges from two journals to 243 journals, with a mean value of 30 journals and a median of 18 journals.

Rankings of journals searched

For the journal-driven reviews, I also extracted the individual journals that were searched. Of the 65 journal-driven reviews, 50 disclosed this information and could thus be coded. To measure the ranking of the individual journals searched, I relied on the latest version of the Chartered Association of Business School’s (CABS, 2021) Academic Journal Guide. The sense or lack of sense of this guide and other journal rankings is a long-standing debate in management research (e.g., Rowlinson et al., 2015; Tourish & Willmott, 2015; Walker et al., 2019; Willmott, 2011), one that shall not be reiterated here. I simply use this specific ranking as it is widely used worldwide and, indeed, several journal-

driven reviews refer to it when explaining their set of focus journals (Hiebl, 2023). In total, the 50 analyzed journal-driven reviews collectively searched 225 individual journals, of which 38 (17%) were ranked as 4* and 37 (16%) were ranked as 4 in the CABS (2021) journal guide. These two highest ranks, and especially the 4*-ranked journals, in the CABS (2021) guide may be considered as reflecting the A journals discussed by Aguinis et al. (2020a).

Number of journals covered

In addition, for the journal-driven review studies, I also extracted the number of journals where the research items that have been included in the review sample have been published. Thirty-five studies included this piece of information. The numbers range from two journals to 55 journals, with a mean value of 16 journals and a median of 11 journals.

Rankings of journals covered

For the journal-driven reviews, I also extracted the individual journals where the included research items have been published. Again, I used the CABS (2021) guide to assign rankings to these individual journals. In the 35 journal-driven reviews that disclosed the individual journals included in their review samples, articles from 173 journals were included. Thereof, 23 journals (13%) were ranked as 4*, and 39 journals (23%) were ranked as 4 as of the CABS (2021) guide.¹

FINDINGS

Table 1 cross-tabulates the systematic reviews’ author affiliations and their chosen principal search approaches. Panel A in this table spans all years included in my analyses (2004–2018) and shows that journal-driven search approaches are much more prevalent in reviews authored by North American scholars or mixed author teams including North American scholars than in reviews authored by RoW scholars. This finding suggests that a journal-driven mindset, or even “an A is an A”-oriented mentality, is more pronounced in North America than elsewhere. The separation of these findings into an earlier time period (see Table 1, Panel B) and a later time period (see Table 1, Panel C) indicates that the reliance on

¹The fact that more grade 4 journals were included in the review samples than were searched for is because some journal-driven reviews did not disclose the individual journals searched, but rather those covered in their review samples (e.g., Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012; Wilson et al., 2017). That is, the 50 journal-driven reviews where I could extract the individual journals searched do not fully overlap with the 35 journal-driven reviews where I could extract the individual journals in which the research items included in the review sample were published.

TABLE 1 Descriptive findings on authors' affiliations and principal sample selection approaches ($N = 231$).

Panel A: All years (2004–2018, $N = 231$)			
Authors' affiliation	Principal sample selection approaches		
	Journal-driven	Other	Total
North America	19 (40%)	28 (60%)	47 (100%)
RoW	35 (22%)	122 (78%)	157 (100%)
Mixed	11 (41%)	16 (59%)	27 (100%)
Total	65 (28%)	166 (72%)	231 (100%)
Panel B: Years 2004–2010 ($N = 38$)			
Authors' affiliation	Principal sample selection approaches		
	Journal-driven	Other	Total
North America	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	8 (100%)
RoW	2 (7%)	26 (93%)	28 (100%)
Mixed	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)
Total	4 (11%)	34 (89%)	38 (100%)
Panel C: Years 2011–2018 ($N = 193$)			
Authors' affiliation	Principal sample selection approaches		
	Journal-driven	Other	Total
North America	17 (44%)	22 (56%)	39 (100%)
RoW	33 (26%)	96 (74%)	129 (100%)
Mixed	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	25 (100%)
Total	61 (32%)	132 (68%)	193 (100%)

journal-driven search approaches has increased in more recent years, supporting the notion that the “an A is an A” mentality is increasingly taking hold in business schools. Although the percentages are still higher for North America, the increase can also be observed in reviews authored by RoW scholars, which may indicate that the “an A is an A”-oriented mentality is increasingly spreading across the globe.

Table 2 hones in on those reviews that have followed a journal-driven approach. Because a few outliers distort mean values, I will focus my discussion of these findings on median values. Panel A in Table 2 shows that North American scholars have searched a smaller number of journals during their systematic reviews and have also included research items from a lower number of journals in their review samples as compared with RoW scholars. These results indicate that North American scholars may be more restrictive and may focus on A-ranked journals only when searching for relevant research. Similar to Table 1, I have also split up this information into two time periods.

Although the information on the earlier time period (see Table 2, Panel B) is based on a very small amount of information only, the table indicates that over time (see Table 2, Panel C), scholars in North America and elsewhere have increasingly drawn on a larger set of journals when searching for relevant literature for systematic reviews. This does not necessarily indicate that scholars

have become more relaxed in terms of including A-ranked journals only in their analysis. More recent journal-driven reviews in my analysis have increasingly focused on interdisciplinary topics, for instance at the intersection of management, accounting, economics, and finance (Ahuja & Novelli, 2017) or at the intersection of management and psychology (Jang, Elfenbein, & Bottom, 2018). Consequently, these reviews have not only drawn on A-ranked management journals but also on A-ranked journals from these other disciplines, and the “an A is an A” mentality seems to have guided their sample selection procedures, too.

This notion is reinforced by the findings presented in Table 3. To calculate the information summarized in this table, I first calculated the share of journals with the same CABS (2021) rank (i.e., 4*, 4, 3, 2, 1, not ranked by the CABS guide) for each individual review study. For instance, Glynn and Raffaelli (2010) only searched four journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, and *Leadership Quarterly*), of which three are ranked as 4* and one is ranked as 4 by the CABS (2021) guide. The shares of 4* and grade 4 journals searched for by Glynn and Raffaelli (2010) are therefore 75% and 25%, respectively. I then calculated the mean values for all these rank shares for the 50 journal-driven reviews that disclosed the individual journals searched. The results of this exercise can be found in Table 3, Panel A. The same logic was applied

TABLE 2 Descriptive findings on the numbers of journals searched and covered in journal-driven approaches ($N = 65$).

Panel A: All years (2004–2018, $N = 65$)								
Authors' affiliation	Number of journals searched				Number of journals covered			
	Median	Mean	Min	Max	Median	Mean	Min	Max
North America	18	22	4	62	9	11	4	28
RoW	23	42	2	243	19	19	2	55
Mixed	10	11	5	21	9	9	5	11
Total	18	30	2	243	11	15	2	55

Panel B: Years 2004–2010 ($N = 4$)								
Authors' affiliation	Number of journals searched				Number of journals covered			
	Median	Mean	Min	Max	Median	Mean	Min	Max
North America	12	12	4	19	4	4	4	4
RoW	15	15	9	21	10	10	9	10
Mixed	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	15	13	4	21	9	8	4	10

Panel C: Years 2011–2018 ($N = 61$)								
Authors' affiliation	Number of journals searched				Number of journals covered			
	Median	Mean	Min	Max	Median	Mean	Min	Max
North America	18	23	6	62	9	12	6	28
RoW	24	44	2	243	20	20	2	55
Mixed	10	11	5	21	9	9	5	11
Total	18	32	2	243	12	16	2	55

TABLE 3 Descriptive findings on the rankings of journals searched and covered in journal-driven approaches for all covered years (2004–2018).

Panel A: Journals searched ($N = 50$)						
Authors' affiliation	Share of Searched Journals with Journal Rankings According to the Chartered Association of Business School's (2021) Academic Journal Guide					
	4*	4	3	2	1	Not ranked
North America	60%	25%	10%	2%	0%	4%
RoW	45%	24%	23%	5%	1%	2%
Mixed	72%	20%	7%	2%	0%	0%
Total	56%	23%	15%	3%	0%	2%

Panel B: Journals covered ($N = 35$)						
Authors' affiliation	Share of Covered Journals with Journal Rankings According to the Chartered Association of Business School's (2021) Academic Journal Guide					
	4*	4	3	2	1	Not ranked
North America	65%	24%	7%	1%	0%	3%
RoW	38%	23%	31%	6%	2%	1%
Mixed	66%	27%	6%	2%	0%	0%
Total	50%	24%	20%	4%	1%	1%

to the journals covered in the final review samples and disclosed by the authors of the respective review studies. The latter findings are displayed in Table 3, Panel B. Note that because of the relatively small number of

review studies that have disclosed the specific journals searched (Panel A) and covered in their review samples (Panel B), Table 3 does not present a split between an earlier and later time frame.

The findings in Table 3 show that review studies authored by scholars affiliated with North American institutions concentrate more on highly ranked or A journals than review studies authored by RoW scholars. In turn, review studies authored by scholars affiliated with RoW institutions not only include a higher total number of journals in their searches for relevant research items (see Table 2) but are also more inclusive or pluralist (cf. Lee & Morley, 2021) in terms of journals they cover in their search. That is, the share of grade 3, grade 2, and grade 1 journals is higher for reviews authored by RoW scholars than for reviews authored by their North American counterparts (see Table 3, Panel A). Interestingly, the highest concentration of highly ranked journals can be found in review studies marked as “Mixed” in Table 3, Panel A, and thus authored by a team involving both North American and RoW scholars. In summary, Table 3, Panel A, underpins the notion that the focus on highly ranked journals in review studies, which can be viewed as reflective of an “A is an A” mentality, seems more pronounced in North America than in the RoW.

This assessment is also supported by Table 3, Panel B. The share of highly ranked journals included in the final samples of review studies (Panel B) authored by North American scholars is even more pronounced than their share among the journals searched (Panel A). In turn, and also from the covered journals in review samples, RoW authors appear to be more inclusive as they have included higher shares of journals ranked as 3, 2, or 1 in the CABS (2021) guide.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My analyses of sample selection in systematic reviews of management research add some early evidence to the discussion on the “an A is an A” mentality. As indicated above, a journal-driven approach to sample selection may reflect the “an A is an A” mentality or a focus on specialist journals known to be relevant to the topic of the systematic review. My results show that authors from different parts of the world rely on journal-driven approaches to varying degrees, with North American researchers relying more heavily on this approach. In addition, the higher share of highly ranked journals among the searched and covered outlets in reviews (co-) authored by North American scholars indicates that these scholars place a specific emphasis on primarily including A-ranked journals in their analyses. These observations underpin that the “enemy is us” (Rasheed & Priem, 2020) but also suggest that the ongoing discussion about the “an A is an A” mentality may have been too centered on practices that are widespread in North America but seemingly less so in other parts of the world. However, my findings also point to an increasing usage of journal-driven sample selection approaches not only in North America but also in the RoW (see Table 1). This

observation may point to the spreading of the “an A is an A” mentality outside of North America, a phenomenon similarly indicated by other recent research (Walker et al., 2019).

It thus seems all the more timely to think about and implement remedies that limit an overemphasis on A-ranked journal publications in business schools’ performance measurement systems and in educating PhD students. The articles by Aguinis et al. (2020a, 2020b); Aguinis, Archibold, and Rice (2022); Balkin and Bresser (2021); Bartunek (2020); Harley and Fleming (2021); and Rasheed & Priem (2020) have already suggested numerous tangible and promising measures. For example, several of these articles advocate for re-calibrating business schools’ performance measures to better align with their diverse and individual strategic objectives (Aguinis et al., 2020a; Balkin & Bresser, 2021; Harley & Fleming, 2021), including their “wider public responsibilities to engage with major concerns confronting society” such as climate change, inequality, and gender discrimination (Harley & Fleming, 2021, p. 144). In particular, these suggestions pertain to a more pluralist set of performance measures used for tenure, promotion, and incentive-pay decisions to be used in the future (Aguinis et al., 2020a). Another set of suggestions points to moving beyond A-ranked journals when defining desirable publication formats for business school scholars (Aguinis et al., 2020a; Rasheed & Priem, 2020) including scholarly books (Balkin & Bresser, 2021).

All these recommendations are promising and laudable but mostly look into history (Bartunek, 2020) or the future (Aguinis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Aguinis, Archibold, & Rice, 2022; Balkin & Bresser, 2021; Harley & Fleming, 2021; Rasheed & Priem, 2020). My above findings, however, suggest that potential remedies to the “an A is an A” mentality could also be found in contemporary practices performed in business schools outside North America (cf. Bartunek, 2020). Therefore, in the remainder of this article, I suggest two additional remedies. The first is related to moving beyond A journals in business school performance evaluations, and the second is related to PhD education.

First, my evidence on sample selection as part of systematic reviews shows that RoW scholars are less focused on journal-driven search approaches and include A journals in these reviews. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to look into some performance measurement practices in business schools situated in the RoW. For instance, although absolutely not free from criticism and downsides (e.g., Martin, 2011; Sivertsen, 2017), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the United Kingdom has, in recent editions (REF 2014, 2021), not only looked at publication track records but has also called for impact case studies, where scholars needed to demonstrate how their research has had impact—for instance, in practice or public discourse. Although this attempt has also seen criticism (e.g., Watermeyer & Hedgecoe, 2016), the

example at least indicates that performance metrics beyond counting A-ranked journal publications are practiced in many business schools already and also trickle down to these business schools' criteria for promotion decisions of individual scholars (Wilsdon et al., 2015).

Another example widespread in German business schools is the habilitation. Traditionally, an academic career in Germany was grounded on doctoral studies, followed by a post-doctoral qualification—that is, the so-called habilitation, which has long been a prerequisite for obtaining tenured professorial positions (Locke, 1985). Nowadays, a habilitation is not a necessary condition for a position as a tenured professor in Germany anymore (Jepsen et al., 2014), but many scholars still pursue it—not in the form of a monograph but as a collection of refereed journal articles. To be counted as part of a habilitation, many schools—including my primary affiliation—have introduced point-based calculation schemes. These schemes are not standardized, and thus, there is some variance in terms of which journals are counted and which weights are given to publications in individual journals. However, although many schemes in Germany require a minimum number of A-ranked publications, they do not only count in A-ranked publications but also B- or C-ranked publications. For instance, in my school, we currently require a minimum of one A-ranked publication for habilitations in business administration. That is, although post-doctoral scholars are required to show that they are able to conduct research that can be published in A-ranked journals, these schemes also reward other publications, albeit with lower point weights. Because the habilitation is still often seen as key to landing a tenured professorial position, these observations from Germany indicate that broader tenure criteria can be established than those inherent in the “an A is an A” mentality.

The second remedy I suggest is related to PhD education and is not only related to the “an A is an A” mentality but may also be relevant for conducting systematic reviews of management research more generally. That is, if we want to avoid business scholars taking on a strict “an A is an A” mentality, it may be useful to do so at the outset of their PhD studies. Many PhD students perform a review of related literature when beginning to work towards their doctorate. This makes intuitive sense to prevent their work from researching phenomena that have already been sufficiently studied (Petticrew & Roberts, 2012). In this exercise, as suggested by Rasheed and Priem (2020), it may be useful to look into well-published articles to see how rigorously performed research has recently addressed the PhD student's wider topic of interest. However, if we as PhD supervisors instruct our students to confine their searches to A-ranked journals when performing their literature reviews, this is likely to signal that only such articles “count” and are worthy of consideration. Consequently, one potential measure to avoid a strict “an A is an A” mentality is to

educate our PhD students that valuable research can be found, published, and cited outside of A-ranked journals, too.

This does not mean that we should consider just any published research to be of worth irrespective of its quality. Indeed, at the other end of the journal quality spectrum, thousands of so-called predatory journals have emerged in recent years that publish anything as long as the authors are willing to pay the publication fees (see Bartholomew, 2014; Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019; Rasheed & Priem, 2020). However, by providing proper methodological education to our PhD students, which also includes the analysis of prior literature, we can be expected to equip our students with the ability to judge research quality apart from the ranking of its publication outlet. In addition, various quality assessment frameworks have also been suggested that are not based on journal rankings and may be used when performing systematic reviews of the literature (e.g., Nguyen, de Leeuw, & Dullaert, 2018; Pittaway et al., 2004; Reay, Berta, & Kohn, 2009; Wong et al., 2012). Consequently, although we should continue encouraging our PhD students to ensure they include quality research items in their literature reviews (cf. Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), we may need to communicate more clearly that it is not only the A-ranked journals that publish relevant and valid research.

Finally, let me briefly acknowledge some limitations of my analyses. This short Research Dialogue article has treated the reliance on journal-driven sample selection procedures during systematic reviews as one reflection of the “an A is an A” mentality. Although there are good reasons to do so (see, for instance, Rasheed & Priem, 2020), the selection of a journal-driven approach in systematic reviews may be underpinned by other motives apart from this one. For instance, authors of systematic reviews may also be guided by past practices of literature reviews in the journal where they wish to publish their review, which may lead to the selection of a journal-driven approach. In addition, reviews conducted on the same topic but focusing on an earlier time period may also have relied on a journal-driven sample selection, which can instruct a more recent review in following the same route. Although these and other reasons may contribute to the selection of a journal-driven approach, such reasons, too, are probably rooted in a longer-standing mentality that comes close to the “an A is an A” manner of thinking, which may be particularly widespread in North America. In line with this notion, the additional analyses of the rankings of individual journals searched and covered in journal-driven reviews have reinforced the notion that an “A is an A” mentality is more pronounced in North America than in the RoW. For this analysis, I have relied upon one widespread but specific ranking of academic journals, the CABS (2021) guide. Consequently, a further limitation of the present article's findings is that they may look (slightly) different if other

journal rankings—of which there are many—were used. Despite these limitations, I hope that the insights provided in this article can be used to further the debate on the “an A is an A” mentality and that fellow scholars will find some food for thought in working against the detrimental effects of this kind of thinking.

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Data are available on request from the author.

ORCID

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