



Power, Character, and the Junior Officer

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Abstract

French and Raven's venerable taxonomy of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1992, 2008), and in particular their construct of referent power, are presented here as useful tools for building the character of the junior Air Force officer. Referent power has theoretical links to major leadership theories, but also contains distinctions from this literature that bear further investigation. Definitions of power and character are offered, and a strong relationship between the two is proposed, in which referent power appears to be the power construct from French and Raven's taxonomy most uniquely tied to character. Links between leadership theories and referent power are addressed; referent power is acknowledged as conceptually tied to transformational leadership, but also different because it is situated in a taxonomy of alternative power sources. Referent power is recommended as a parsimonious and productive tool for investigating and building character in the junior officer, who is identified as belonging to a somewhat vulnerable population.

“The foundation of leadership is character.”

-Major General Alexander Patch

Introduction

Character development is crucial to fostering the leadership growth of our junior Air Force officers. To emphasize the importance of this goal to our service, Air War College Professor Dr. James Toner (1998a) asked the rhetorical question: “Is it true that one can have a ‘character defect’ but still be a good commander, a good leader, or a good professional person?” In an earlier issue of this journal, Basik and Keller (2011) emphasized the critical role of a leader's character in an increasingly complex environment of drawdowns, tighter budgets, and informational overindulgence. Conversely, character's absence can have a devastating impact on organizations. From the world of sport, the recent scandals at Penn State and Syracuse University are two of many

disturbing reminders of the painful costs of lapses of character—lapses which (1) occur in leadership positions; and (2) notably involve abuses of power. A few days after beginning this article, members of a unit at a CONUS Air Force base had chosen, in shockingly bad taste, to post on the Internet a photograph of themselves in uniform in which one of them was playing a corpse with a noose around his neck inside a military-issue cargo coffin. Where is the character? Where is the leadership?

As Doty and Sowden (2009), Goldman (1996), Toner (1998a), and others note, it is no easy task to select the best, most coherent approach to the character development of officers. The author's modest contribution to this crucial developmental goal is to call for scholarly attention on two issues:

(1) the definitions of, and relationship between, character and power in the leader; and (2) how contributions from the power literature can help the character development of junior officers. If, as the author argues, it is accurate to say that power is the medium with which a leader works¹, then new research on power, specifically social power, should serve as a productive tool for the investigation of character in the military leader—a means of unpacking more of character’s nature and mechanics. In turn, this same tool also ought to be able to enhance our efforts to develop character in the junior officer.

In this vein, the author offers definitions of power and character in the following article, also proposing a strong theoretical link between the two, such that a better understanding of the nature of power could lead to enhanced character development in the junior officer. Specifically, it is suggested that when leaders, in the process of selecting from various available sources of power, consciously emphasize and consistently reinforce their own modeling of exemplary behavior and demonstration of selfless concern for others, their own character development is a natural consequence. Based on an examination of the power literature, referent power (French & Raven, 1959)—briefly defined as the capacity of a leader to cause others to willingly identify with and emulate the leader—is put forward as the most accurate and helpful construct to capture this leader behavior. It is also suggested that referent power’s potential to build character stems from its ability to operate as a check on the use of power. In other words, a leader who seeks to build and

maintain strong referent power will naturally be inclined toward the use of socialized power (power for the good of the organization or of society) rather than personalized power (power for the promotion of self or satisfaction of selfish needs). Due to the relationships between certain leadership theories and the issue of character, referent power’s connections to transformational leadership theory are examined—strong links do exist. However, the author finds that referent power offers a distinct contribution because it is situated in a taxonomy of alternative power sources that better illuminates the array of choices available to leaders prior to an attempt to influence the behavior of others. The article concludes with a discussion of the benefits of a leadership research program on power: its merits as a concise response to the developmental needs of the junior officer, and its applicability to the task of character development.

A Scholarly Definition of Power

It is suggested that a study of character and the junior officer can be enhanced by an investigation of power, despite a commonly held reticence to approaching the topic of power in a positive sense. Open discussion of power in a prosocial context is not only warranted and desirable—it is essential to furthering leadership research. All leaders deal in power, whether they are effective or ineffective on the job, and whether they use it wisely, abuse it, or squander it. Part of the hesitation may stem from how we view power in our culture.

Western literary and historical heritage is peppered with sayings such as Lord Acton’s timeless axiom,

¹ To borrow an analogy from art regarding this idea of power as the “medium of leadership”: the leader is the artist; the power of the leader, seen in specific leader behaviors, is the paint; and the successful or disastrous outcomes of the leader’s influence are shown in the aesthetic quality of the painting. The goal of the leader’s activity, seen as the painting’s subject, may require bold or soft lines depending on the nature of the subject. Negative space (restraint) can be just as important to the painting’s quality as the bold strokes of decisive action.



“Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Unfortunately, such commentary can be a little misleading; or, at a minimum, its connotations are misunderstood. The author’s much less elegant restatement might at least be harder to misinterpret: “Power can be dangerous; power as an end for its own sake corrupts absolutely.” Winston Churchill described power’s dualistic nature—and benefits when used for the right reasons—to David Lloyd George in this way: “Power, for the sake of lording it over fellow creatures or adding to personal pomp, is rightly judged base. But power in a national crisis, when a man believes he knows what orders should be given, is a blessing” (Churchill, 1948/2008).

Power defined at its most basic level is the capacity of an agent to exert change in the attitudes or behavior of a target (French & Raven, 1959).² Any human relationship involves the exercise of power; this includes married couples, parents and children, and neighbors—even when the use of such power is implicit (Secord & Backman, 1976). Social power, which is “power manifested in interaction between two persons or among the members of small groups” (Secord & Backman, 1976, p. 207), is the sub-branch of the power literature most well suited to leadership-related research, and is ideal for studies on the junior officer as a frontline leader whose authority over very large organizations is still several years away.

This social power research is also ideal for extending a definition of power. This body of literature provides three additional elements that go beyond the traditional view that power is merely a capacity to compel behavioral change: (1) a map of the sources

of power available to leaders; (2) methods and evidence (e.g., Student, 1968; Yukl & Falbe, 1991) for evaluating the relative quality of impact from these sources; and (3) theoretical work emphasizing the importance of shared identity to the use of power. While power has persisted as a scholarly topic of interest for centuries, social power research as a branch of social psychology has been around for at least 70 years, beginning with the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. The social power literature also has much to offer to military leadership researchers. However, power studies such as one on Army officers (Johnson & Marcum, 1968) and another on Army ROTC cadets (Thomas, Dickson, & Bliese, 2001) have been sporadic.

According to Lewin, *power* is the amount of force that can be imposed on a person divided by the amount of that person’s capability to resist (Bruins, 1999). Power for some time after this was viewed primarily as a force to be wielded over others, and power relationships were seen as a matter of dependence of the target on the agent—for resources, job security, or other such goals. However, this was not to last. At the end of the decade following Lewin’s original work, French and Raven (1959) published their classic, definitive, and still highly regarded work on social power which included a more diversified theory than Lewin’s.

French and Raven’s formulation specified five possible bases of social power available to the leader: issuing or implying threats (coercive power), granting or promising rewards (reward power), use of formal authority granted from a higher authority (legitimate power), displays

² In the parlance of the social power literature, the agent is the person seeking to use power and the target is the intended recipient of this effort. Notably, the agent need not be the leader in a formal sense; attempts to use power occur in all three directions in the context of dyadic relationships—sideways and up as well as down (French & Raven, 1959; Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2006; Secord & Backman, 1976).

of the leader's expertise (expert power), and the desirability a subordinate has to emulate the leader (referent power). These same bases, or sources, of power reflect varying degrees of dependency on the leader. Generally speaking, four of the five bases—coercive, reward, legitimate, and expert—cause the target to remain dependent on the leader even as the relationship matures in other ways. For example, in uses of coercive power, the subordinate's change in behavior and access to goods are wholly dependent on the leader's moment to moment use of the threats, implications, and statements that typically accompany this power basis.

However, the process of building and maintaining referent power is markedly different—the behavior of the subordinate can take on a life of its own. The junior person freely identifies with and chooses to emulate the leader, eventually following the example of this model without the need for continual reference to the model itself. The leader's physical presence and the target's observation of the leader's day-to-day behaviors are no longer required—the process has become independent of the leader. There is also a big price to be paid by the leader seeking to build and maintain this power source. He or she must present him- or herself as worthy of emulation—deep commitment to high standards and a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others along with consistency in these endeavors go hand-in-hand with referent power (Yukl, 2002). French and Raven's work has withstood the test of time in the literature, even though to some extent their theory retained an understanding of power as fundamentally compulsory in nature. Over time, other researchers have questioned this interpretation, seeking to identify conditions in which an understanding of power is not restricted to its being a mere imposition of force.

For example, McClelland provided an expanded view of power that came out of his influential theory of human needs, which identified the power, achievement, and affiliation needs (McClelland, 1965, 1987). According to McClelland, the power need can express itself as a search for special status, personal gain, or power for its own sake (personalized power), or as a means of seeking the organization's ultimate good and serving higher objectives or principles, in which power is seen as a resource to be shared (socialized power). Among French and Raven's bases of power, referent power bears the most similarity to McClelland's articulation of socialized power. Both approaches to power call for a subordination of one's personal desires for the sake of something greater, and both encourage the leader to view power as (1) a resource to be shared not hoarded; and (2) a means rather than an end. Finally, both approaches incorporate the idea of viewing others with respect, as independent actors whose commitment and willing participation, and not just their compliance, are valued. Based on these similarities to socialized power, referent power appears as a forerunner to much of the follow-on work on social power which sought to rise above traditional, dependence-based theories (Connelly, 2012, in press).

Other social power theorists who steered away from a dependent view of power include Mann (1986), who articulated two meanings of the term social power: (1) mastery exercised over others; and (2) a collective effort in which groups use joint power over other parties or over nature. Building on the work of Mechanic (1962), who emphasized the informal power lower-level employees can direct upwards, Keltner and colleagues (e.g., Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008; Langner & Keltner, 2008) focused on the target's social power over the



agent and developed what they called the *reciprocal influence model of social power*. These researchers argued that alliances formed by subordinates place demands on the agent, and that social power derives from the desire to satisfy those alliances. In short, subordinates also grant social power to the agent, which redefines power as bidirectional.

Simon and Oakes (2006) have presented the most forward-leaning theoretical work on social power, advancing the prospects for a fruitful scientific investigation of power as a prosocial tool with their reconceptualization of the meaning of social power. They argue that power is based on conflict and consensus, and that power should be seen as a method for accomplishing goals and not simply a hammer to be wielded over others. Calling their new model the *identity-based model of social power*, they specifically see social power as hinging on how the subordinate chooses to relate his or her self-identity to the group (Festinger, 1950). Even while the leader is affecting the subordinate as an outside influence, from the beginning of the relationship the subordinate is engaged in a process of forming a “social identity,” e.g., “is my self-identity shared with or different from the group?” How the subordinate answers this question from day to day directly affects responses to displays of power, and has little to do with resource dependency on the leader. Hence, the use of social power always involves the issue of social identity, and the degrees of conflict and consensus in the leader–subordinate relationship depend on how much of the subordinate’s social identity is shared with the group. At root, Simon and Oakes’ work represents a challenge to move the literature beyond a “dependence-based” view of social power

(Connelly, 2012, in press). The expanded meaning of social power they offer emphasizes power’s potential as a nonexploitative tool for prosocial ends—respect for all parties is maintained, subordinates have room for independent action, and power is shared.

Interestingly, though, Simon and Oakes’ (2006) groundbreaking work is in some ways a restatement of referent power, due to both theories’ shared emphasis on a process of identification with the leader. In the author’s recent work on junior leader development (Connelly, 2012, in press),³ he found tight links between referent power and Simon and Oakes’ new identity-based model. Despite its age, referent power offers benefits that recommend it as a very significant potential tool for leaders. The construct does not reflect a zero-sum attitude toward power, induces voluntary cooperation from the target, and does not keep the target dependent on the leader, as opposed to the effects of reward and coercive power, for example (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008; Yukl, 2002). Referent power also offers the opportunity for a concise synthesis of the social power literature, uniting French and Raven’s taxonomy to the various subsequent attempts to reconceptualize social power as an identity-based process.

The original authors saw referent power as having the broadest range of all the bases in terms of affecting desired change in the target across multiple domain areas of behavior. In a military context, for example, referent power might affect change in the target in such diverse areas as dress and appearance, fitness, and customs and courtesies all the way to quality of communication, self-sacrifice, and demonstration of

³ In his synthesis of the literature, the author examined relevant social psychology and organizational psychology research and identified referent power as a highly useful concept for developing junior leaders with two major advantages: 1) it is measurable and thus suitable for empirical studies; and 2) it captures the best contributions of the social power literature to leadership growth.

high-order thinking. In contrast, the authors argued that bases such as expert and legitimate power have a narrower scope, i.e., one's expertise and span of legitimate authority are heavily prescribed by law, personal limitations, etc. Furthermore, when a leader attempts to use these other bases of power in contexts in which they do not apply, the influence attempt usually backfires,⁴ e.g., the leader who claims an undeserved expertise or flaunts authority he or she does not possess by law or regulation will experience a "net loss" of that power basis.

In summary, the literature supports the idea that power in the hands of a leader is always "social power," and that social power for our purposes is defined as the capacity of a leader to exert change in attitudes or behavior manifested in interaction between two persons or among small groups. In addition, the social power literature has contributed a taxonomy of available power sources that provides important insight into where a leader's power comes from and how successful each of these sources may be, depending on the context of the influence attempt. Finally, this branch of research reveals the importance of shared identity with the leader as a crucial vehicle in the successful use of a leader's power. This idea was best captured within French and Raven's (1959) referent power construct and validated with decades of research using the associated taxonomy of social power. The literature also made an important distinction between socialized and personalized power, the former being power exercised for a higher good and the latter being used for the personal benefit of

the leader. Referent power was shown to be related to socialized power due mainly to both concepts' emphasis on self-sacrifice and seeking the good of the other—both place heavy demands on the leader. Referent power is also most closely aligned with the latest advances in social power research, especially that of Simon and Oakes, because it was this concept that was the first in this branch of the literature to link the importance of social identity to changes in the target's behavior, following up on Festinger (1950).⁶

Although Simon and Oakes (2006) also offer a major contribution in the direction of breaking the conflict-laden and compulsory nature of the traditional power theory paradigm, there is no empirical evidence yet to support their model, and much of what they demonstrate regarding the impact of shared identity is reflected in the conceptual makeup of referent power. On the strength of these conclusions, the author offers referent power as a standout concept from social power with unique relevance not only to leadership growth, but also to character development. However, to establish the connection to character, the term character requires its own thorough definition.

A Working Definition of Character

Terms like this are often difficult to define. For instance, consider the work of Edgar Puryear Jr., who wrote two of the classic texts on character and the military officer, *Nineteen Stars: Studies in Character* (1981) and *American Generalship:*

⁴ In the social power literature, power is considered the agent's *capacity* to influence the target, and an *influence attempt* is described as the agent's use of that power (Hughes et al., 2006)

⁵ The use of expert power also tends to tax the leader. It is not self-sustaining, requiring continual demonstrations of proof. As French and Raven (1959) also point out, this power can defeat itself. A leader claiming expertise he does not possess will tend to weaken any future ability to use expert power; "an undermining of confidence seems to take place" (p. 164).

⁶ Festinger (1950) specifically argued that the individual in an ambiguous situation needs a "social reality," and will tend, for the sake of a sense of security, to adopt the cognitive structure of another person or a group with which he identifies.



Character is Everything (2000). These works comprise decades of research and hundreds of interviews with military leaders including Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and Carl “Tooyey” Spaatz. “High character,” Puryear (2000) wrote, is “necessary to leadership” (p. 361) and “permeates throughout all the qualities essential for leadership success” (p. xv). Puryear makes a well-documented, persuasive case for the vital importance of character as a quality that both explains our military successes of the past and offers the best opportunities for fixing the present and securing the future. However, for those of us preoccupied with the “problem of character” and how to encourage it or increase its relevance, there is a problem. In 800 pages devoted to the subject, Puryear refused to define the word “character.”

Instead, he insisted, one can only describe it. There is at least one daunting reason for character’s elusive quality: Character is strongly related to but not precisely synonymous with the combined weight of personality and experience in the individual. As a result of this grey area, people in general can run into trouble when they work with character as a concept. For example, reflect on the following oversimplifications. When we speak of someone having “strong character” or a “lack of character,” we tend to ascribe to the term the same qualities we often use in regard to one’s personality: Character is seen as fairly stable, even static—“you either have it or you don’t.” In the same breath, we may point to a crucible experience in one’s past as an explanation for strong or weak character—now character appears fluid, but as primarily a function of outside circumstances. So which is it? For an in-depth account of character, neither approach

seems adequate—nor does a murky stew of both ingredients. We must go further in our collective discussion of character, go beyond a vague likeness of personality or experience in our effort to identify and examine character as a research area. If we cannot distinguish character from personality, experience, and other concepts, then the word cannot be said to exist in its own right.

The author contends a third possibility exists in our attempt to make progress with the scholarly treatment of character, and that this approach offers a way out of the above dilemma. We must embrace the idea that a working, if not final, definition of character is possible and that it is worth the investment of effort. We must also be willing to acknowledge that character in the individual person is capable of being changed and that such change is, to a considerable extent, that individual’s responsibility. Finally, we must extend our understanding and investigation of character to include its relation to other factors. For instance, some of the harder concepts in science (e.g., the personality, the electron) and philosophy (e.g., morality, violence) are made much more approachable by examining their relationships to other factors: their effects on other things and how other things affect them.

One means of making progress on a definition is to sift through the contributions of others. An interesting place to start is a comment by St. Paul in one of his epistles,⁷ in which he describes a human interior growth process that leads from suffering to endurance and then to proven character, e.g., a mature response to suffering, including internal anguish, builds endurance to withstand future trials, and this preparedness plays out in demonstrations

⁷ Rom 5:3-4

of character that can clearly be seen in one's actions and in the outcomes of one's influence.

Another ancient source, Aristotle (1947), reinforces these themes of endurance and of character in action and extends these ideas a bit by introducing the notion of habit. He wrote that "good" character is a habit of daily selecting right from wrong. Aristotle also saw this character as the possession of a person who is continent—or in his words "temperate and brave"—meaning one capable of moderating his passions, of directing the rational and irrational impulses of his soul in line with reason. In this approach to character, he was likely influenced by his mentor, Plato. In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato (described in Toner, 1998b) wrote of a charioteer called Reason (a faculty bequeathed to each human) guiding two horses. One, represented as the Will, is the seat of our "better" nature and inclined toward temperance and virtue, and is easily mastered by the charioteer. The other, the Appetites, is the seat of our desires for goods, whether physical or financial, and tends to be undisciplined and directed towards our passions, and thus requires the whip. Now, to our collective consensus on character, we have added the notions of character as a habit integral to each person's daily life and as a practice involving self-restraint, or mastery over one's own impulses.

Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) offer a critical link between character and power in their treatment of transformational leadership and the makeup of a leader's character. Borrowing from McClelland (1965, 1987), they see the nature of a leader's power need as a critical component of his character. The connection to character is due to McClelland's previously addressed socialized versus personalized power dichotomy, such that the exercise of socialized power naturally induces restraint, consideration for others, and the suppression of selfish inclinations.

Former Air Force Chief of Staff General John Jumper (2004) captured several of these themes in his simple statement that character "is not merely knowing the right thing to do, but also having a firm conviction and the courage to act on such knowledge" (p. 176). He also embraces Doty and Sowden's (2009) call for cultivating military personnel capable of individually taking moral action, as opposed to merely reflecting moral intention. Taken together, then, character is seen as: a process rather than a product (see also Toner, 1998a, p. 46); a learned and habitual response to trials; a daily practice of choosing right, with real consequences and a requirement to take up the mantle anew each day; a prosocial use of power, whether it is power exercised outward over others or inward over the self and its passions; and finally, it is about taking moral action and not mere moral intention.

This is an impressive list of attributes; one that in the author's view captures most of the key ingredients in the nature of character, but one that requires a restatement to be more useful to research and practice. The author's prefatory statement on the nature of character in general is that *character* is who you are, shown in what you daily do, when matters come up requiring action and when morally right and morally wrong outcomes are both possible. To fine-tune this working definition in the direction of military leadership, it is essential to note that power, as argued here, is the medium with which leaders work. Therefore, the author defines character in the *military leader* as the daily practice of unselfish restraint, and the appropriate application of power toward prosocial ends.

This definition is intended to be useful to researchers, educators, and practitioners in several respects: (1) character is revealed as a process and not a

product that occasional training “booster shots” can achieve; (2) character is seen as both internally and externally manifested, and in particular the latter expression can be observed and empirically measured in some respects; and (3) a conceptual link between character and power is proposed, such that a leader’s character in action is said to occur in the medium of power, and power itself can also be measured to provide new insights on character. Most importantly, if there is any substance to this conceptual link, then researchers of character would find the extensive scholarship on power, especially social power, to be fruitful for their theoretical and empirical research.

Based on the above working definition of character, the author now submits that an investigation of referent power also has much to offer regarding the development of the junior officer’s character as a military leader. Referent power has previously been suggested as a useful means of developing leadership at the junior level, or at any level, because the leader who is able to consistently exercise a large amount of this basis of power, which is to say a leader who is widely respected and admired, is bound to be more effective than the leader who is simply feared and who makes others dependent on him or her (Connelly, 2012, in press). The author’s new proposal begins with two questions: (1) What happens inside the junior officer who has worked hard at building his or her referent power? (2) Is there an internal psychological process relevant to the issue of character development? To answer them, it is helpful to briefly review the context of the junior officer.

The Junior Officer and the Challenges of Character Development

Today’s junior military officers are experiencing some significant challenges; they represent a vulnerable population in some respects. These officers lack seniority and may not have a great deal of relevant experiences to aid them in their current job. Their authority and power are often significantly curtailed by current practice and military tradition; meanwhile several authors have noted a recent spike in the junior officer’s responsibilities (Haynes, 2007; Raybourn, 2007; Wong, 2004). When asked, these men and women often report a lack of consistent high-quality mentoring (Martin, Reed, Collins, & Dial, 2002). Layoffs in various guises have become increasingly common at these grades in the last several years. Chronic budget-cutting drills pinch people, training, and equipment, and the threat of more cuts adds to the tension of the work environment.

In the context of the social power literature, one of the biggest of these challenges to junior officers is the small amount of access these leaders have to most of the bases of social power. In the words of Burke and Wilcox (1971), the junior leader “acquires the ‘legitimate’ right to expect obedience but he is only given a limited amount of power to reward obedience and to punish disobedience. What [junior leaders] feel they need is more power” (p. 192). In a specifically military context, where is this power going to come from? As Hughes et al. (2006) put it in their analysis of French and Raven’s (1959) power taxonomy, “Effective leaders intuitively realize they need more than legitimate power to be successful” (p. 116).

This power need for junior officers is valid, and an important step in their growth as military officers. For optimal development of one’s leadership potential, the author proposes that, in line with Yukl (2002), younger leaders need to experience

success in handling tough challenges. Tools such as referent power may be the best available options for this purpose because extending one's power in socialized ways is a potential gateway to a higher proportion of successes. Referent power is also the most feasible of the power bases for junior officers to extend.

After all, their access to legitimate, coercive, and reward power is usually heavily controlled and subject to extensive oversight and review by higher echelons, e.g., selecting a deputy, issuing a negative administrative action, or sending someone on a choice TDY. Expert power is also difficult for junior officers to apply or increase. The leader typically needs years of expertise and experience to back up this basis of power. These problems faced by the junior leader were identified years ago in industry (e.g., Burke & Wilcox, 1971); they are no less true today in both the private and public sectors.

In a specifically military context, junior officers seem to have more to do today, but in a resource-constrained environment they are usually left with fewer resources and less control over resources in general—this adds to the tension they already experience as new officers. As a likely consequence of these pressures, recent research (Deresiewicz, 2010; Kane, 2011; Steele, 2001) indicates a high level of frustration within this population. There is also concern that these younger officers do not consistently receive the tailored experiences, such as on-the-job mentoring and targeted developmental tasks, that they need to optimize their leadership potential (Connelly, 2012, in press). There are also indications some of those with the highest leadership potential may be more likely to leave the service (Kane, 2011). If something substantive can be done to retain all of our top talent as well as develop the character of all of our younger officers,

then we need to take action.

Education and training can certainly contribute to a solution. There is significant support in the literature behind the idea that lessons addressing character and ethics are appropriate and developmentally crucial for new accessions; however, some scholars believe the services can do more in their educational programs to meet the demand. According to Goldman (1996), for example, the services lack a means of developing character in recruits who do not hail from a “values-rich environment.”

Goldman also argued that for over fifty years the tendency has been to address character development weakly and from the periphery, submitting the force to isolated, brief, surface-scratching “injections” in response to a variety of socially unacceptable behaviors. “We continually assume that secluded enterprises in the ethics, morals, or values arena are consequential just because they give the impression that we are going somewhere. This fallacious faith in new, detached projects does more harm than good by diverting the attention of those in leadership (who have the authority to cause real change) away from genuine solutions.” According to Goldman, “our military culture has become accustomed to a variety of unrelated efforts to help people treat one another with dignity” (p. 2).

Doty and Sowden (2009) agree, addressing the weaknesses of a compartmentalized approach in their review of Army training programs. They also point to what they call a “competence–character mismatch”: They propose that a strong, continually reinforced institutional emphasis on competence becomes a problem when it also stifles the existence of a similarly robust focus on character development. In their view, unless we engage in a radical overhaul in the way we develop character in the military, we



will not reduce the frequency of embarrassing and costly ethical misjudgments that continue to plague our operations and damage lives.

Approaching character development in new, change-creating ways will not be easy. As Toner (1998a) warns, on this topic “there is no ‘magic bullet’” (p. 49). Toner advocates the teaching of moral reasoning itself to get away from the compartmentalized, checklist mentality; Doty and Sowden (2009) want to see programs that cultivate the ability to take moral action. The desired outcome here is men and women who not only recognize the right thing to do (which is, they argue, often the case in any event), but who have the courage, discipline, and integrity to do it rather than fall subject to temptations such as misplaced loyalty.

None of this can be achieved overnight. The good news is that, as Toner (1998a) argues, it is not necessary to start from scratch. Junior and senior military personnel, like anyone else, have a fundamental sense of right and wrong, an innate faculty for making ethical judgments. In the same breath, no one ever completes this developmental journey: “None of us, not one, is ever done with ethics education—until the moment of death. We know that when we fail to exercise our bodies, we begin to lose our physical ‘edge.’ Why should we think it is any different with learning? Our ethical development is lifelong” (p. 46).

Our junior officers, like everyone else, are neither ethical infants nor are they ethical geniuses. So those who are mentors, senior leaders, and institutional stewards must actively seek to develop character, to instruct on ethical judgment and moral reasoning, and to challenge officers to make the taking of moral action habitual. At the same time, we need

not “reinvent the ethical wheel” (Toner, 1998a, p. 46). The clarion call voiced by Dr. Toner makes our course, at least in general terms, very clear:

We must realize that men and women enter the Air Force with some fundamental understanding of right and wrong; that there is still a need to deepen that understanding and to provide for it in an Air Force context; that leaders of competence are also leaders of character who teach by deed, if not necessarily by word; that leaders must be able to act in circumstances of moral ambiguity when simple slogans offer them precious little advice; that the ability to reason well morally is critically important; and that using traditional military training techniques in ethics instruction will not work. (p. 50)

But where to begin? The author suggests we start with referent power as a standout concept from the power literature that is uniquely related to character as defined in this article.

Referent power: A natural character-builder

If, as Puryear (1981, 2000) argues, in military leadership “character is everything,” then the whole range of leader outcomes, from small successful day-to-day interactions with others to catastrophic failures, are to a considerable extent a function of character on the job. When a leader rehabilitates a distracted and poorly performing subordinate, or when a leader’s organization slides into chaos due to repeated condoning of inappropriate behaviors, character is involved. Similarly, if power is the raw material of leader actions, a significant connection between power and character must exist on some level. The author has submitted that character in the military leader is seen in his or her ability to flexibly and optimally use power and its inverse, restraint, in accordance with higher principles than

mere personal gain. Of course, restraint is itself an example of power, the kind of power one exerts over the self and its passions—in short, *self-mastery* (Toner, 1998b). In simpler terms, leaders display their character in the way they relate to, or handle, power. Hence, an in-depth examination of character in the military leader cannot be separated from a treatment of the leader's relation to power, and it is specifically anticipated that a better understanding of power could lead to methods of enhancing junior officer character development.

French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy at its most practical becomes a tool set for leaders, once the power bases and some of the research validating their effects are understood. Not only can leaders evaluate the quality of their own past or ongoing influence attempts by considering the bases of power they selected and attributing outcomes, but they can also plan future influence attempts more carefully, according to which bases seem best suited to the context and desired outcomes (Hughes et al., 2006). None of the literature calls for any of the power bases to be ignored, or calls for one that can be used in pure isolation—all five belong in a leader's repertoire (Yukl, 2002). However, in many cases a leader will want to achieve results by showing selfless concern and modeling the kind of exemplary behavior that includes examples of subordinating personal desires for the sake of higher principles—this is referent power in action. The research supports the success of this basis of power across a range of desirable organizational outcomes including productivity, motivation, job satisfaction, and less absenteeism (e.g., Burke & Wilcox, 1971; Student, 1968, Yukl, 1981).

Referent power also contains the possibility of providing a habitual check on how and why a leader is using power. Referent power requires deep

commitment and unquestioned consistency from the leader; not only is referent power a function of these investments of effort, but slip-ups have the effect of creating “negative referent power,” in which a lack of consistent, exemplary modeling will cause a distance between leader and follower identity (Yukl, 2002). Based on the definitions examined in this article of referent power, character, and socialized power, the leader who builds and maintains referent power will naturally avoid the use of personalized power, and will incline toward the kind of restraint and use of socialized power that one expects to see from a leader of strong character.

Regarding connections between referent power and transformational leadership, such ties need to be addressed because much of the transformational leadership literature implies or encourages similar exemplary behaviors, requirements for consistent modeling, and the exacting of a heavy toll on the leader, such as would be indicated for a leader exercising referent power. However, as it turns out elements of referent power are found in most of the major leadership theories of the past several decades, and a brief review of these connections including referent power's links to transformational leadership is warranted.

Beginning with the period following the leadership behavior studies of the 1950s, Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1967) emphasized the importance of relationship-oriented leadership. The theory stresses, and evidence indicates, that leaders exhibiting a high degree of success in maintaining quality relationships with others are more likely to produce positive outcomes across a greater range of contexts. Because junior leaders may have less control over task structure and the power inherent in their own position than they do over the quality of their relationships, the theory suggests that



working on the strength of relationships provides the most consistent opportunity for such leaders to make adjustments to achieve situation favorability. This conclusion indirectly endorses referent power as a crucial vehicle for junior leaders.

Two other major leadership theories somewhat related to contingency approaches are path-goal (House, 1971) and expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). Path-goal theory asserts the importance of leaders experiencing and communicating an “internal locus of control,” which refers to a sense of empowerment to shape one’s environment as opposed to being controlled by the environment. Expectancy theory calls on leaders to model successful behaviors as a means of spurring follower expectations; their own performance will lead to successful outcomes. Referent power shares elements with both approaches in the case of the junior leader, at least indirectly. First, junior leaders who have sought to extend their effects on the unit through increasing their capacity for referent power may have more likelihood of sensing internal versus external locus of control, as opposed to other junior leaders who may feel constrained by their limited access to coercive, reward, legitimate, and expert power. Second, expectancy theory centers on modeling success—a leader’s behavior is likely to be strengthened if the use of referent power has increased the inclination of subordinates to align themselves with the attitudes and behavior of the leader.

The well-known LMX (Leader–Member Exchange) Model (Graen, 1995) also seems to bear significant connections to characteristics of referent power. For one thing, the point of the model is the quality of leader–follower relationships. Successes of the subordinate are a critical factor that can steer the relationship towards a series of positive

exchanges; in turn these successes are facilitated by certain factors including “perceived mutual similarity” and “level of interpersonal attraction” (Jex & Britt, 2008, p. 321). Strong LMX ties are characterized by reciprocity, not dependence, and high-quality coaching and communication. Referent power suggests itself as a precursor highly capable of inducing such factors and consequently enhancing LMX relationships.

In the author’s view, transformational leadership theory (see Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003, and Sosik & Jung, 2010 for thorough reviews of this research) bears the strongest connections to referent power. Transformational leaders reach out to subordinates’ values and their sense of a higher purpose, uniting these features to a common cause articulated by the leader. The goal of the transformational leader is to develop and inspire followers to achieve extraordinary levels of success. A skill such leaders frequently use is *reframing*—changing followers’ perception of the environment and the opportunity for change (Hughes et al., 2006). Another key aspect of transformational leadership is the ability to practice self-sacrifice (Burns, 1978). The literature also asserts the significance of personalized leadership as essential; these leaders pay attention to subordinates’ emotional cues and create the context for positive experiences that foster their tendencies to be self-confident and to embrace the leader’s vision (Hughes et al., 2006). This personalization allows the leader to influence others as a model of exemplary dedication and performance (Judge & Picolo, 2004). Finally, the empirical research shows that transformational leaders need to sustain high-quality relationships if they are to be effective (Jex & Britt, 2008).

The evidence-based Full Range Leadership Model

(FRLM), developed and refined by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio in the 1990s and evolved from Burns' (1978) original work, may be the best attempt yet to make key transformational leadership concepts adaptive and actionable. The FRLM's power comes from its success in identifying seven specific leadership styles and providing guidance on strengthening diverse leader skills. The model's four transformational styles are individualized consideration (focused concern for others), intellectual stimulation (innovation-based orientation), inspirational motivation (proactive verbal coaching, mentoring, and visioning), and idealized influence (exemplary modeling). Two transactional styles (contingent reward and management by exception) provide a foundation for the four transformational styles based on a series of exchanges in which leader and follower relate to each other through task-oriented communication and extrinsic rewards. The seventh—laissez-faire leadership—is never advisable and is defined as the avoidance or absence of leadership (Sosik & Jung, 2010).

The FRLM, like referent power, is behavior-focused in its approach to the agent or leader, as opposed to attribute-focused. Also, both concepts are attuned to and driven by consideration of the target or follower (Sosik & Jung, 2010). Of the specific leader behaviors covered under the FRLM, two of them are especially closely connected to referent power: individualized consideration and idealized influence. Individualized consideration calls on leaders to identify and provide what their followers need on an individual basis to perform and grow. This is a demanding task, compelling leaders to invest many of their own resources, act supportively, and make self-sacrifices to demonstrate concern—behaviors also associated with building referent

power (Yukl, 2002). It is incumbent on leaders to get to know their people well enough that each of their developmental needs becomes clear; then leaders have to structure their supervision of each follower's day-to-day activities so that these needs can be met.

Idealized influence is even closer conceptually to referent power. This leader behavior places a powerful call on leaders to go beyond self-interest. Such selflessness allows leaders to present themselves as models worthy of emulation; these leaders gain respect from others the hard way, their devotion and consistency instill pride that others will have in being associated with them. As Sosik and Jung (2010) explain: "Transformational leaders gain attributions of idealized influence from their followers the old-fashioned way: they earn it. They earn it by behaving in ways that reflect virtues and character strengths that are perceived as such by their followers" (p. 98). This role-modeling is the central behavior associated with referent power—presenting yourself as a desirable model of exemplary behaviors. Yukl (2002) described this element of exercising referent power, showing that a leader who is admired "can have considerable influence over others by setting an example of proper and desirable behavior for them to imitate. When identification is strong, imitation is likely to occur even without any conscious intention by the agent" (p. 150).

Authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004) is closely related to transformational leadership. Authentic leaders are deeply invested at the personal level in their unit mission and people. The leader's authentic behavior, reinforced by consistency and transparency, triggers subordinates to personally identify with the leader. Leaders who consistently exhibit positive emotional states inspire others to match those



states, indirectly enhancing performance and job satisfaction.

These major leadership theories clearly contain common elements that are, in turn, strongly associated with the behaviors researchers attribute to a leader exercising referent power: strong personal connections, self-sacrifice, and in many cases the necessity for the subordinate or other party to identify with the leader. In that these shared qualities are embodied in the leader exercising referent power as a significant part of his or her power strategy, one can conceive of referent power as a gateway to many of the goals common to the kind of leadership that transforms followers to be able to reach new heights of achievement and consistently exceed expectations: strong relationships, internalization of vision and organizational values, positive change, and the willing commitment of others.

However, none of these theories, including transformational leadership and the influential Full Range Leadership Model, offer a taxonomy of power which, as realized by French and Raven (1959), can be a useful tool for weighing alternative power sources, and for understanding and tracking one's internal (personally based) and external (position based) leader resources. Developing and using a transformational leadership style and choosing to extend referent power as part of a power strategy are two very different processes. For example, a leader may choose to embrace, verbalize, and reinforce a vision for an organization during such events as unit huddles, weekly staff meetings, and informal conversations—a classic transformational strategy. However, success is hard to measure here, as are the effects of this strategy in the context of the leader's relationships with others. If instead a leader seeks to extend referent power by cooking meals for subordinates that are

new parents, sacrificially supporting people during a crisis, and always following up on promises of assistance, these measures can be weighed against a decision to use one's reputation of expertise, the power of one's position, or perhaps the rewards or threats within the leader's scope—depending on the people, the context, and the desired outcome, even creating effective combinations of these power sources as required. Leaders can evaluate the results, and formulate revised approaches, over time learning to more effectively employ power as exactly what it is—an indispensable leader resource to cause changes in others.

In addition, referent power is distinguished by its inherent ability to serve as a check on the use of power, guiding its users to practice socialized power and to refrain from personalized power. Researchers (e.g., Yukl, 2002; Hughes et al., 2006) point out that leaders trying to maintain and extend referent power will lose power if they fail to demonstrate consistent selfless concern for others and for higher principles than merely their own personal benefit. Transformational leadership literature discourages personalized power, but its separate theories do not necessarily contain such an explicit self-correcting feature. The charismatic leadership literature warns against the effects of a narcissistic and self-promoting charismatic style (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), but does not include a feature within the theory by which these destructive tendencies are restrained.

Specifically, leadership research in general suggests that a lower frequency of overt displays of power is more conducive to leader effectiveness, and is a sign of an effective leader (Yukl, 2002)—and referent power is what can get you there. That is the secret to referent power's ability to inspire followers in a way that induces them to take ownership of their

own performance and of organizational missions and values. As a leader influencing others through referent power, you operate on the strength of others' positive personal knowledge of you (Hughes et al., 2006), rather than relying on your own direct influence, which can easily become self-interested and overbearing. This positive personal knowledge shared by others, when it consists of reinforced demonstrations of integrity and strong character in the leader, of setting the example, leads to willing identification with the leader and internalization of what the leader stands for (Yukl, 2002). It is worth noting that these behavioral choices would seem to be desirable for any leader to make, not just the leader who wishes to extend referent power. At bottom, the following outcome expressed by Hughes et al. (2006) may be the result: "Followers embrace change requests as their own and often go the extra mile to make sure work gets done" (p. 417). The kind of restraint required here by referent power—the need for consistency, the subordination of self-interest, the respect for followers, and the imperative to cultivate followers' willing commitment versus coerced compliance—marries up extremely well with both the working definition of character offered earlier in this article, as well as the vision embodied in this paper of the military leader of strong character.

Conclusion

Referent power is suggested as the basis of a new research program on the character development of junior officers for three reasons. First, it is the one basis of power continually available to any leader; junior officers can always use and attempt to increase their referent power. Second, referent power offers a means of synthesizing the contributions of the literature on leader development. Third,

referent power may be a natural character-builder, enhancing the ability of younger leaders to make ethical judgments and use power appropriately in the course of developing their capacity to lead.

Referent power is offered as a related concept to the extensive research on transformational leadership, but one that is also distinct from this research. Transformational leadership, in particular the Full Range Leadership Model, does emphasize the benefit of a leader's ability to consider and select from a range of behaviors and adapt to the context of the influence attempt. However, French and Raven's taxonomy of power sources allows the leader to consider which type or types of power are best for a situation from among several alternatives which, in combination, also equate to a definition of power in its various forms as seen in human relationships. Such a review of possible leader behaviors by the leader may significantly contribute to subsequent choices when the leader's goal is to induce internalization of organizational goals and higher principles as opposed to forcing compliance in followers. This review would also logically serve as a check on the leader's choices, fostering the employment of socialized power by, for example, encouraging restraint when it is desirable, or by inducing the leader to carefully consider uses of coercive or even reward power. Over time, uses of power that emphasize dependency on the leader can debilitate a unit, promoting a compliance-only attitude and discouraging the kind of innovation and commitment that transformational leadership theories promote.

Referent power is self-sustaining, rather than requiring constant reinforcement (French & Raven, 1959). Once a leader develops a track record of admirable qualities, this record takes on a life of its own, and tends to breed the desire of others

to emulate these same qualities (Puryear, 1981). When others make the decision to accept the leader as a model to follow, this decision is often internalized—a crucial step. Because the point of reference becomes the follower's perception of the leader's identity he or she wishes to share, this follower is no longer dependent on the leader as long as the leader does not betray his own example. More importantly, referent power is not bounded by organizational rules or by rank. Peers and supervisors as well as subordinates may be equally moved by a leader's example, especially because, as Secord and Backman (1976) point out, the target's desire to identify with the agent can be implicit versus conscious.

As the author has previously stated, referent power is also capable of synthesizing a diverse collection of research in the fields of social and organizational psychology (Connelly, 2012, in press). From social psychology, in the context of leader performance on a personal level, power is offered as an agent's capacity to influence, and influence causes behavioral change in others. However, when the nature of the relationship is based on dependency on the agent, the changes are found to be less than ideal and the advantages short-lived. In contrast, an alternative to this one-way type of relationship is based on willing identification with the agent. Under this alternative, compliance may give way to commitment, emulation to shared vision, and desire for resources to internalization of organizational values. With the roots of this process of identification in French and Raven's (1959) taxonomy, referent power as a social power concept captures the best of the earlier research while strongly relating to the most promising new research, including Simon and Oakes' (2006) identity model of social power.

From organizational psychology, research programs

on leadership consistently address the advantages of a self-sacrificing, other-oriented style, and often point to the very same process—identification with the leader—as a primary feature of such a style. From transformational (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003) and authentic leadership theories (Avolio, 2005) to the LMX Model (Graen, 1995) and expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), these approaches require leaders to pursue strong personal connections, selflessness, and the facilitation of modeling by others through exemplary behavior. Referent power sets the stage for all these agendas, recommending it as the most versatile concept for uniting themes across social and organizational psychology that are useful to leadership researchers, leaders, and especially junior leaders. Of course, for referent power to accomplish all this for a leader, it must surely impose some special requirements on the leader himself.

It is the cost of referent power that illuminates the third reason for choosing this concept over others. Several researchers have outlined the demands of using or increasing referent power. Hughes et al. (2006) discuss the time a leader must invest in building it, especially for the sake of forming strong relationships and establishing credibility through consistency in behavior. Vital to this credibility is the perception of targets that the leader is motivated by more than personal gain—therefore selflessness is also mandatory. Yukl (2002) offers a list of attributes the leader seeking to extend referent power must embody, which includes acceptance, supportiveness, providing top cover, unsolicited gestures of help, self-sacrifices, and the keeping of promises. The key to extending referent power, it turns out, is character. "Referent power," Yukl (2002) writes, "ultimately depends on the agent's character and integrity"—which is exactly the point (p. 150). Character extends referent power, and seeking to

increase referent power becomes, organically, a call to develop one's character.

In this article a means was sought to initiate a research program aimed at empowering junior officers to develop into ethically sound, confident leaders of strong character, and found in social psychology's concept of referent power. This concept was demonstrated to be suitable to the context in which the junior officer lives, and ideal as a mechanism for guiding the development of this officer in that it clarifies the relationship between leadership, power, and character. Specifically, referent power is helpful in how it underscores the need for leaders to exercise restraint, self-mastery, and the appropriate application of power as a means toward prosocial ends. It is also hoped that by emphasizing power as a means only—never a worthy end in itself—attention on referent power may reduce the likelihood of abuses of power in the future. The way ahead is not to minimize discussion of power or pretend it is not the stuff of leadership, or that power can only be thought of as the tool and goal of tyrants. Instead, a much better aim is to mentor, train, and educate our younger leaders on how to use power responsibly, wisely, and in a way that allows them to prove and grow their character. As Kemp (1994) has pointed out, "when time is short, we will do what we have habituated ourselves to do. But what we have habituated ourselves to do depends in part upon our previous reflection about principles" (p.9). Kemp's wisdom here should provide extra impetus within the services to prioritize the character development of junior officers through substantive, meaningful programs that target and stimulate this crucial reflection. Additionally, there are several research programs and instruments investigating social power through French and Raven's (1959) taxonomy that can provide the basis for a productive series of empirical studies focusing

on referent power and employing junior officers as participants (e.g., Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989).

To return to the issue of a definition of character, the literature makes it quite clear: Leaders wishing to acquire referent power must display consistency in their use of power, self-sacrifice, restraint, selfless concern for others, and a willingness to offer oneself as a model for exemplary behavior. These requirements sound a lot like the author's proposed working definition of character in the military leader, and are explicitly or at least implicitly involved—the daily practice of unselfish restraint, and the appropriate application of power toward prosocial ends. At the core, the leader who consistently sets the example, who repeatedly demonstrates a regard for goals far beyond personal gain, and whose exemplary behavior successfully facilitates in others a voluntary process of identification with the leader, in short, a leader using referent power—is this not simply the kind of leader we all want to see and want to be? In other words, a leader of strong character.

"There may be many areas where we are weak, lots of things we may not be particularly good at, we will survive all of these, what we cannot do without, is character."

-Squadron Leader Chris Webb, Royal Air Force



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