The involvement of military psychologists in Behavioral Science Consultation Teams in the questioning of enemy combatants incarcerated at the U.S. Department of Defense facility at Guantanamo Bay began to raise ethical concerns in 2005. These concerns led to a resolution by the American Psychological Association (APA) reaffirming its position against torture (APA, 2007). A debate followed among psychologists about their role in national security; this debate especially affected operational psychologists.

Many people, including psychologists, are unaware of the existence of the field of operational psychology, much less what it is. Although one can find the roots of operational psychology as far back as World War I, the field is a relatively new one. Definitions of operational psychology have varied from narrow ones, such as applying psychological principles to a variety of military commanders’ decisions (Staal & Stephenson, 2006), to broader ones, such as the assistance provided by military psychologists in the theater of military operations (Williams, Picano, Roland, & Banks, 2006). In their current book Ethical Practice in Operational Psychology: Military and National Intelligence Applications, Kennedy and Williams define operational psychology as “the application of the science and profession of psychology to the operational activities of law enforcement, national intelligence organizations, and national defense activities” (p. 4).

Many would think that interrogation and torture would be the major ethical issues facing operational psychologists. As the editors of this book point out, there are four more common ethical issues that operational psychologists face: mixed agency, competence, multiple relationships, and informed consent. Mixed agency refers to struggles with divided loyalties. For example, operational psychologists may be evaluating people because of their specific military duties, but they also have an obligation to help the same people.

Because operational psychology is so new, the competencies required for practice are not clear. In some circumstances an operational psychologist trained in clinical psychology may be asked to evaluate tactics. Even if the psychologist claims lack of competence, military officers may respond that the psychologist is the only one available.

A similar problem occurs in multiple relationships. Being a lone mental health professional in a military unit may force the operational psychologist to counsel or evaluate superior officers and coworkers. Last is the need for informed consent. Although operational psychologists can obtain informed consent for evaluating assessment for security clearance, in times of danger operational psychologists cannot obtain informed consent of individuals such as hostage takers and terrorists.

In the first chapter Kennedy and Williams describe these ethical issues and the major job functions of operational psychologists, including assessment and selection of security personnel, security clearances, counterintelligence and
counterterrorism activities, consultation to interrogation and debriefing, and crisis and hostage negotiation. The authors of the remaining chapters have examined how the four main ethical issues apply to each of the above major job functions. This structure makes it easy for the reader to go through each of the chapters.

In the final chapter the editors discuss the topic of ethics itself. They note that the APA Ethics Code has evolved, as has the role of psychologists. However, emphasis on mental health within the APA has led to an ethical code similar to those in other health care professions. Some psychologists have complained that psychologists should not look to medicine for its identity.

_Ethical Practice in Operational Psychology_ is brief but satisfying. The editors have set forth a structure that their contributors have strictly followed. It is possible to read selected chapters in the book, but such readers should examine the first chapter before perusing others.

The book’s appeal may be limited. Military psychologists make up a small percentage of the APA membership. However, as noted in the definition of operational psychology that the editors use, many of the concerns that operational psychologists face are similar to those of forensic psychologists. _Ethical Practice in Operational Psychology_ is a valuable resource for those curious about this growing area. I will certainly use it when I teach military psychology.

**References**

