Evaluate **ONE** of the following studies below in terms of ecological validity:

1. Thigpen & Cleckley (Multiple Personality Disorder)
2. **Rosenhan (Being Sane in Insane Places)**
3. Tajfel (Intergroup Categorization)

The study by Rosenhan is very high in ecological validity because the study was done in a real life setting (in the field).

Ecological validity is said to be high if a study is done in the subject’s natural environment. In this particular study the study was conducted in real hospitals across the east and west coast of the USA.

This is important because the subjects will behave normally, especially if they do not know that they are being studied. Demand Characteristics is the tendency that subjects will behave in accordance with what they think the experimenter is looking for, a trait that is common in lab experiments.

However one problem associated with high ecological validity in field experiments is the ethical problem of informed consent. The researcher cannot obtain informed consent from the participants (in this case the staff of the hospitals and the real patients could not give consent as this would have made the study invalid).The study could also be accused of invading the privacy of the participants in this case both the hospital staff and the real patients. This was done by observing their behaviour and taking notes on what they did especially on the part that they noticed that the patients threw or flushed off the medicine in the toilet . The study would not have measured the validity and reliability of the diagnostic systems in psychiatric hospitals which is the main aim of the study.

Although the sample of the pseudo-patients was mainly made up of professionals (3 psychiatrists, 3 psychologists, a painter and a house wife), who comprised 5 men and 3 women, Rosenhan might have used a bigger sample of the pseudo-patients to help increase the validity and generalizability of the study. Probably the influx of pseudo-patients would have made the hospital staff detect the pseudo-patients.

However, the main patients; the hospital staff and the real patients, were adequate in terms of sample and thus we can generalize the findings to most hospitals both public and private in the USA. However, Rosenhan could have used an opportunity sample ince the study does not say exactly say what method he used to obtain his sample of hospitals. This is indeed a weakness of this study in terms of ecological validity since opportunity sampling in most cases are not representative of the entire population they are mostly based on convenience.

The hierarchy of mental hospitals cannot go unnoticed, where the Doctors are aloof and unavailable and are only seen in the ward rounds, and the nurses are locked in the “staff cages” (offices). This seems to be true in reality where staff avoid patients making them feel depersonalized.

Another thing that comes out clearly in the study is the stereotyping / labelling noticed in this study e.g. “patient engages in note taking behaviour” and “the patient engages in the “oral acquisitive type of behaviour”, when found near the dining hall at lunch time. These are just some of the behaviours that are realistic in psychiatric hospitals.

Lastly, I think the fact that Rosenhan was among the pseudo-patients himself, this might have lowered the ecological validity based on what he might expect in the hospital (experimenter expectancy) thus either overlooking or exaggerating some issues.

