16 Evaluate one of the studies listed below in terms of ecological validity.

 Mann, Vrij and Bull (lying)

Loftus and Pickrell (false memories)

Tajfel (intergroup categorisation)  (10 points)

Sample essay:

            Psychologists attempt to make their experiments as true to life as possible.  If the procedure resembles a real-life experience, it is said to be ecologically valid.  In the Mann, Vrij, and Bull study on high-stake liars and videotape, an attempt was made to assess the behavior of real people in a natural setting.  By using videotapes of real suspects during police interviews, the experimenters attempted to maintain ecological validity while coding the behavior of the suspects using two raters.  In terms of the actual interviews, there was high ecological validity.  These were real high-stakes situations with real consequences for lying or telling the truth.  The crimes for which they were accused (rape, felony theft, arson, etc.) were real.  The suspects were well-known to the police. There were no actors or “stooges” in the interview room and no reason to believe that the suspects were yielding to demand characteristics, given the fact that they wouldn’t have known that the videotapes would later be used in a psychological investigation.

            On the other hand there were weaknesses in ecological validity. The actual experiment involved two raters watching video segments of the suspects that had been edited.  The police department helped in the editing to make sure there were segments that included lying and truth-telling.  Some truths and lies had been edited out, such as name and  address. The coders were trained on sample video segments in order to insure inter-rater reliability.   This part of the procedure was very low in ecological validity.  Coders watching  pre-selected video segments  is not a true to life way of observing behavior that might indicate lying vs. telling the truth.  The range of behaviors was pre-determined and only those behaviors were coded in the procedure.  It may be that in real life there are other behaviors that would indicate lying or telling the truth.