Reicher and Haslam

How was the study conducted?

There were 15 male participants from different backgrounds selected through a volunteer sample (using advertisements in the national press and leaflets). For ethical reasons only people who were well-adjusted and pro-social, scoring at low levels on all social and clinical measures were included in the study. They were then randomly split into two groups of 10 prisoners and 5 guards. One prisoner was not involved at the beginning of the study. Each prisoner had their head shaved and was given then same uniform with a 3 digit number on the back. The guards were given a higher quality uniform that they also had to wear. The guards also had the authority to take away privileges from the prisoners as a punishment and could also put them on a bread and water diet. However the guards were told that they should observe the behaviour of the prisoners to see if anyone showed guard like qualities. If they did, they were told that there was provision for a promotion to be made on Day 3. After this promotion there where then 6 guards and 9 prisoners and it was announced that there would be no further promotions. This creates permeability as the participants are aware that they will be unable to change social class. Then on day 4 another prisoner is introduced whose profession is a trade union official. So it is expected that he will introduce a more balanced regime. This creates a cognitive alternative. These changes of permeability and cognitive alternative could be seen as the independent variables to this study.

How the Study could be improved?

If participants were unaware that they were being watched then they may act slightly differently depending on how they act being around cameras, also these participants are not in their natural environment so perhaps if the study were to be carried out with people who are supposed to be prisoners and guards there could be a further change in behaviour this would increase the ecological and the internal validity of the study. The same study could also be conducted with women to decide if there is any difference in how women act to men under these social groupings this would also increase the external validity.

Implications of the improvements?

Due to participants being unaware that they are being watched they would behave more naturally in their social groupings and perhaps act differently although this would be ethically wrong as the participants have not been given informed consent to be recorded by a video camera. If the participants were there because they should be the study would further increase in ecological validity although there could be further ethical issues as the prisoners may not participate or use physical contact or violence. Doing the same study with women would also give a stronger external validity and we would be able to determine if