Misa Morikawa is an exchange student here at Monmouth College. She is from a large area in Japan called Osaka. Misa enjoys movies and theater, and is studying to have a career as a film company buyer someday. She has been greatly influenced and encouraged by her parents and her older sister throughout her childhood, and one of her favorite childhood memories was learning how to ride a unicycle at age twelve. Misa is a rather soft-spoken person, and she is also very hardworking, but says she can be lazy at times. She is also interested in this project and meeting new people, which made her a great candidate for my intercultural encounter. In this paper, I would like to look at some preconceptions and stereotypes that were transformed as a result of our interview, and the reduction of barriers. I am also going to analyze the similarities and differences between Misa and myself regarding we as people as well as our communication styles. Finally I am going to look at my intercultural sensitivity as well as what I have learned through this intercultural experience.

The reason why I picked Misa for this encounter was because I recognized her name from my Mass Media class when the teacher took role. Because I had not actually gotten to know her yet, I had some stereotypes and preconceptions in my head. I knew
that she was Asian, and I have always kind of had this stereotype in my head that they are very intelligent people, simply because when they have the national spelling bee on TV, one of them usually wins. This proved to be true in Misa’s case, because I could tell she was very intelligent just by talking to her. She had a pretty good knowledge of the English language, and was able to understand what I said to her. She also has the ambitious career goal of being a film company buyer someday, so she is willing to do what it takes academically to achieve that goal. I also thought that Misa was going to be really quiet with not a lot to say, but once I got her talking on certain subjects, this proved to be untrue. The more comfortable she felt around me, the more it seemed she wanted to share. For me personally, I noticed that the barrier of “high anxiety” was reduced as the interview went along. At first I was rather nervous because I was worried that she might not understand me, or maybe I would say something that would offend her. But as things went along, I kind of forgot about this nervousness. We even ended up sharing some laughs, and we found out that we had some things in common. This leads to the similarities and differences between Misa and myself as people.

Through this interview, I actually found that Misa and I have more similarities than differences, and this really surprised me. We both described ourselves as hardworking and goal-oriented people. When we were talking about who some of the major influences on our lives were, and I told her about my parents and my older sister, she seemed to be kind of excited. Her parents have also been very influential in her life, and she has an older sister that has been a really good friend to her. She also enjoys watching movies and films as one of her hobbies, and this is something I like to do as well. Because these similarities existed, I think both Misa and myself were more
comfortable around each other. As far as differences go, she comes from a largely populated area, and I am from a very small town. It was also kind of funny when we were talking about events from our childhood and I told her about when I first learned how to ride a bike, but she was able to top me on that one. When she was twelve, she learned how to ride a unicycle, which I thought was pretty amazing. Though Misa and I do have some similarities as people, I was able to notice some more differences in our styles of communicating.

Right from the start of our interview, I could tell that Misa and I had different styles of communicating. She talked rather quietly and it seemed almost like she was not completely confident with her English. At one point she did need to look up a word on her little electronic translator. I on the other hand talked a little louder, used more gestures, and kind of changed the tone of my voice as I spoke. She really did not gesture at all and her tone of voice remained pretty constant. She was a very intent listener though, and I could tell this through her non-verbal communication. She would kind of lean forward and also maintained eye contact. We also talked about some differences in styles that she had noticed, she said that here at Monmouth it is much more friendly and outgoing, and also fast paced. So this explained to me that she is just communicating using the methods that she has probably grown up using all her life. She says that where she lives, the whole lifestyle is a little more laid back. This was surprising to me, because I just assumed that since she was from a large area, her style of communicating might reflect that sort of atmosphere. This just goes to show that the way we might prejudge the way things are here in America may not be applicable in another country.
I would rank myself at the acceptance stage on the intercultural sensitivity scale. According to the handout taken from M.J. Bennett, “People at the acceptance stage enjoy recognizing and exploring cultural differences. They are fairly tolerant of ambiguity and are comfortable knowing that there is no one right answer (although there are better answers for particular contexts)”. I put myself at this stage because I feel that I am capable of accepting those of other cultures with different styles. I really have not had a lot of experience with intercultural communication in the past, but I am definitely open to it and enjoy learning more about it. I think this open-minded attitude helped the interview to go well and prevented anyone from feeling threatened or uncomfortable. I feel that it is probably necessary for all of the students in this class to be in the Ethnorelative stages because if you don’t go into a project like this with an open mind then all accuracy goes out the window. I think Misa could tell that I was not being judgmental of the things she was saying and I tried to share information about myself so she wouldn’t feel like she was in a one-sided interview setting, but more of a “making friends” type of setting. Finally I would like to look at what I have learned as a result of this intercultural encounter.

I believe that this intercultural encounter was a learning experience for both Misa and myself. Not only did we learn about each other as people, but we learned how each other communicates, and why our styles are different. I was able to check the correctness of my preconceptions as well as reduce the barrier of high anxiety. I also feel that my uncertainty level was reduced because I learned that just because Misa and I are from two different places does not mean that similarities will not exist between us. By the end of the interview Misa and I even decided that we should go have lunch or hang out
sometime because we had started to feel comfortable around one another and we were getting along well. I not only learned from this project, but I felt like I made a new friend.

I did my intercultural encounter with Misa Morikawa from Japan. Misa and I discussed various aspects of our lives, and I learned more about her culture and background. After our interview, I was able to analyze things such as my preconceptions or stereotypes. I also looked at what barriers might have existed going into the interview and how those barriers were lessened or eliminated. Then I compared our similarities and differences, not only in our lives but also in our communication styles. Lastly I ranked my intercultural sensitivity and reviewed what I have learned from this experience. Thanks to my time spent with Misa, I feel that I have less uncertainty when it comes to dealing with people of a different ethnicity, and I have also gained an eagerness to learn more about other cultures.