

Experiential Activity: Ethnic Groups and Identities

Student Name

University

Course

Professor Name

Date

Experiential Activity: Ethnic Groups and Identities

In Orange County, California, the coastal city of Huntington Beach stands out for its dynamic rhythm and bustling life. The population here is diverse, which is associated with a highly developed tourism industry, surf culture, and neighboring immigrant communities. One of these is a significant representation of the Vietnamese-American community, which mainly follows from the Little Saigon area. This ethnic group has exemplified itself in business, language, cultural presence in public spaces, and food, carrying the Vietnamese heritage. This paper aims to explore the manifestations of ethnical identity in the urban environment. Manifestations of Vietnamese-American culture in Huntington Beach promote the concept of full belonging to the city and its people at all levels.

From the perspective of urban sociology, it is possible to explore how communities are interpreted and manifested in city locations through the emotional component. It aligns with the concept of sense of place, which refers to the meanings people assign to places and objects (Ravuri, 2025). Thus, they are united by shared experiences, traditions, customs, and activities that are subconsciously attached to specific areas. Representatives of ethnic minorities consolidate these senses by starting their own businesses, organizing events, supporting social networks, and freely displaying artistic elements as part of their heritage. Derived from this is the notion of symbolic interaction, which refers to the embedded ideas in physical objects through social interactions and relationships. It applies to native language signage, traditional decorations, food, or accessories. Communities like Little Saigon are rooted and thrive on processes of both business and everyday life that reinforce a collective cultural identity, adding to the concept of urban diversity (Ravuri, 2025). Thus, the concepts described above allow us to preserve conventional values while participating on an equal footing in the urban environment.

This study conducted the photo-based observation to comprehensively survey the presence of the Vietnamese-American community in the Huntington Beach area (Figure 1; Figure 2; Figure 3).

Figure 1

Vietnamese Restaurant in the Little Saigon Area



Note. Adapted from photographs on Google Maps (Ben Park, 2025).

Figure 2

Vietnamese Grocery Store with Vietnamese-Language Signage



Note. Adapted from photographs on Google Maps (Huynh Khiem Dinh, 2025).

Figure 3*Vietnamese Market Space*

Note. Adapted from Community Westminster Directory (2024).

These visuals serve as confirmation of the capture of these residents' manifestations in business and everyday life. Thus, the neighborhood demonstrates the strong and stable presence of the ethnic group's culture and customs, how they construct the environment, and how they manifest themselves in commerce. One of the hallmarks of community activity, both on a business and everyday level, is the operation of Vietnamese restaurants and bakeries. On the one hand, this demonstrates that Vietnamese Americans have favorable conditions and opportunities to engage in commerce while respecting and appreciating their heritage. On the other hand, there is evidence that this ethnic group cherishes traditions, while their representatives and other citizens willingly visit such establishments.

From the perspective of symbolic interaction, the visual cues present in places communicate distinctive meanings and acceptance. Immigrants often use linguistic representations and appropriate color schemes and symbols to create an atmosphere of familiarity (Ravuri, 2025). Vietnamese-owned restaurants, traditional markets, and specific service providers provide a correspondingly strong sense of place. When such locations

accumulate, merge, and develop, the community thrives and freely reflects its culture through food, music, clothing, and other forms of expression.

The manifestations of Vietnamese-American cultural identity in the urban domain of Huntington Beach organically fit into the overall picture and are evidence of individuals' complete belonging. The Little Saigon area, with its markets, restaurants, bakeries, shops, signs, and decorations, demonstrates a clear example of ethnic uniqueness manifesting through material means. Such buildings and objects integrate the ideas of sense of place and symbolic interaction, giving the locations deep meanings, expressions, and connections.

References

Ben Park. (2025). [Google Maps Photograph: Vietnamese restaurant in the Little Saigon area]. Retrieved April 9, 2026, from <https://surl.li/ntulob>

Community Westminster Directory. (2024). *Vietnamese market space* [Photograph].

Retrieved April 9, 2026, from <https://shoplocalwestminstercalifornia.com/exploring-little-saigon/>

Huynh Khiem Dinh. (2025). [Google Maps Photograph: Vietnamese grocery store with Vietnamese-language signage]. Retrieved April 9, 2026, from <https://surl.li/cbzbku>

Ravuri, E. D. (2025). *Displacing the “Ordinary” city: Gentrification in medium-sized American metropolitan areas*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.