A common finding in the research literature indicates that minority students tend to have higher levels of self-esteem when they attend schools with more individuals of their own racial and ethnic background. However, few studies to date have sought to explain this association. Using identity theory, this chapter develops and tests a serial mediation model to explain this well-established association. Specifically, this chapter proposes that universities represent intermediate social structures that provide the context in which social relationships develop. We argue that students in more racially consonant environments are more likely to develop satisfying social relationships with both faculty and students and in turn have more positive reflected appraisals of their abilities as a student and more positive self-evaluations. These positive self-evaluations are theorized to lead to higher levels of self-esteem. This chapter tests this serial mediation model using a sample of 863 minority students from universities across the US. Findings are supportive of our theoretical model and underscore both the importance of social structure for understanding the self-concept and the need to improve the racial climate of US universities.

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