The Sociology of Everyday Life

What does the structure of everyday social life look like?
What are the “building blocks” of society?
What are the social forces that shape our behavior?

We can begin with understanding (1) STATUS and (2) ROLE

1. a. Status:
   A recognized social position that an individual occupies.
   Status is passive and static. We APPROPRIATE status.

b. Status Set:
   All possible statuses that a person can move between over time;
   for example, 
   businessman boss 
dance partner Harley club member
athlete fan 
father friend
c. How statuses are obtained?

i. Ascribed status: involuntary positions
   for example,
   - male or female (sex), skin color (race), daughter or son (familial relation)

ii. Achieved status: voluntary positions
   for example,
   - college student/professor, athlete, officer, criminal

   Note that the two types of status work together: what we are ascribed often helps/hinders us to achieve other statuses.

2. a. ROLE
   The behavior expected of someone who fills a particular status. "Role" is active and dynamic.
   We REPLICATE status in our role behavior.

   b. ROLE SET: A number of roles attached to a single status;
   for example, Status = Mother
   Role Set = disciplinarian, cook, caregiver, 'doctor', maid, 'chauffeur'
3. Social Roles demand a person’s time and energy
   a. Role Conflict
      Involves conflicts between two or more statuses
      (what role do I play?)
      For example:
      Conflict between role expectations of a police officer who catches her
      own son selling drugs – mother and police officer
   b. Role Strain
      Involves a strain from a single status
      (who should I satisfy?)
      For example:
      Manager who tries to balance concern
      for workers’ needs with task requirements from bosses
   c. Role Exit = (becoming an “ex”)
      Disengaging from social roles can be very traumatic if not
      properly prepared.
      For example:
      - Ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-husband or wife, ex-worker (retiree),
        ex-student (graduate), ex-con (criminal), ex-patriate (traitor), etc.

   Berger and Luckmann, 1968
   How we collectively act and react in social situations
   defines our roles and our social lives.
   a. Reality is constructed out of the meanings and values of the
      observer. Understanding this allows one to see through the
      “façade” of society.
      (cf. *The Matrix*: Red Pill or Blue Pill?)
   
   PERCEPTS = SENSES
   CONCEPTS = THOUGHTS
   Our conception of the world is more than mere sensory stimuli – we make
   sense of the world using the mental tools offered to us by our culture.

   b. In the social world, what we agree is real becomes real.
   For example, TERRITORY
   In what way are the borders between states or countries made “real” if they
   don’t have any geographical or cultural “markers”??
   Another example: MONEY
   We all agree on a value for the symbol-filled paper that we call “money” –
   without such agreement, money is worthless (e.g. Germany 1920s: "PEK").
   A third example: TIME
   What we measure as time for social purposes (one hour lunches, 50 minute
   classes, daylight savings time, etc.) does NOT conform to the nature and
   experience of time (time flies when you’re having fun and drags when
   you’re bored). Different cultures have different calendars and different days,
   weeks, months, etc. (not just different names but different time spans).
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4. The social construction of reality

c. We can study this “socially constructed reality” by examining how “common sense” social behaviors create the social structure. Harold Garfinkel developed a technique called **ethnomethodology**, which involves “breaching experiments” - breaking the rules to evaluate people’s responses as a test of the strength of social norms. Examples: standing in line, riding an elevator, taking the subway.

d. **The Thomas Theorem**, (from W. Thomas, 1931, Chicago School of Sociology)
   “A situation defined as real is real in its consequences.”
   Socially constructed realities have **real implications** for individuals’ lives and welfare.

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Using the Thomas Theorem, we can see that life is a drama played out by individuals reacting to situational definitions.

e. **Goffman: Presentation of Self in Everyday Life**
   “Dramaturgy”;
   Examines social interaction in terms of theatrical performances
   Shakespeare: “All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.” (As You Like It)

i. **Presentation of self**
   Impression management - making oneself appear in the best light possible

ii. **Role performance**
   Real life stage "regions", use of props, and scripts define social expectations
   Example: Doctor’s office - what “regions”, “props” and scripts exist in that social setting?