Much of human behaviour is learnt through the ongoing process of socialisation. Humans learn from agencies of socialisation throughout their lives both at the primary and secondary stage. However, there are other factors which also contribute to human actions and behaviour. These are often ideas explored by psychologists and biologists alike to understand how humans behave and act in certain situations.

**Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that human behaviour is socially constructed. (20 marks)**

The term socially constructed means something which is shaped and defined by society. Many sociologists believe that human behaviour is a direct result of the socialisation process and the influence of institutions. However, there is also evidence to show that some behaviour is a result of biology and genetics. This debate is often referred to as the nature versus nurture debate.

Primary socialisation takes place in the first few years of life and it is in this period that children learn basic skills such as walking and talking from those around them. This process shows the importance of human interaction in order for the child to develop. Further proof can be seen through examples of feral children: wild, unsocialised or abandoned children. Case studies such as Oxana Malaya and Genie Wiley clearly show the importance of the primary socialisation process. If a child does not learn basic functions from its parents, then it’s development is seriously impacted. The findings from these studies have shown the importance of learning communication, empathy and self-recognition and that these skills must be taught during a critical stage.

Secondary socialisation is also further evidence of human behaviour being socially constructed. As stated in Item B, this process continues throughout the life of the individual. At the secondary stage humans learn from agencies such as friends, religion, education and the media. These combine to shape our intelligence, our views, our accents, our values and so on.

However, the more scientific approach to understanding human behaviour suggests that biology or nature also takes a significant role. One such example is our physical appearance which is determined by genetics. We, as humans, can change certain characteristics but factors such as height, body shape and hair colour are determined by our genetic make-up. This is important because how we look influences our behaviour. A
person who is very tall and attractive, for example, may exude more confidence.

Functionalists discuss the idea of the organic analogy, and Parsons states that all the agencies in society work together like the organs of a human body. He believed that it is this interconnection of the institutions all working together that shapes human behaviour. We are continually learning from a range of sources and it is this process that forms social norms, values and consensus. However, it must be noted that much of Functionalist theory is now considered rather outdated.

Marxists such as Bourdieu also believe that human behaviour is socially constructed, but they see this in a negative sense: they feel that the system of capitalism causes humans to become greedy and fixated on money and materialism. Carvel gives the example of pester power whereby the media is so powerful in convincing children they need a toy or piece of technology that often parents give in to this. Gramsci said the process of capitalism is maintained through human socialisation and the desire to consume, therefore a human is not born with greed, but they learn it through socialisation.

Interpretivist sociologists consider a wide range factors such as race, which is biological. Race is distinct from ethnicity as it looks specifically at the biological make up of our colouring. Race is therefore an important factor as it is out of our control. Society does not shape our skin colour. Goffman notes that our race can often relate to our master status, meaning that it can often be the most important and defining factor in shaping our identity. Although our master status is taught, it is often based on a biological characteristic.

Liberal and Marxist feminists believe that human behaviour is constructed via the system of patriarchy. One such example of this is canalisation or sex role theory, whereby parents treat their children differently based on their sex. McRobbie believes that having distinctive colours, toys and names for each sex simply reinforces gender differences and inequalities through social construction.

Whereas liberal feminists highlight the social construction of gender, radical feminists look at issues relating to our sex. Sex is biological, and for theorists such as Dworkin this determines the power imbalance between men and women, as males can use their physicality to dominate females through threat and fear. McKinnon believes that the physical threat of violence is what drives the system of patriarchy.
There is clear evidence that much of our behaviour is a direct result of the society, people and institutions around us and that human behaviour is a result of learning, mimicking and conformity. However, alternative factors such as disability and age are also important factors that are out of the control of humans and society. They are biological factors that shape our lives, and can be seen as further evidence of the genetic influence on human behaviour. For example, an older person cannot be as physically active as an adolescent even if they had the same desire to be so.

It is therefore evident that although society clearly shapes us as humans, much of our behaviour is also determined by nature. Our sex, race and age are all factors out of the control of nurture and society. The reality is that a combination of factors from both nature and nurture combine to shape our attitudes, characteristics, personalities and our overall individual behaviour, rather than one being the overwhelming determining factor.

This paragraph shows strong evidence of A03 skills by evaluating evidence on both sides of the debate, whilst making sure it links directly back to the question.

A strong conclusion which again analyses both sides of the debate, ending with a clear to link to what is asked in the question.

[~900 words]

Examiner Style Comments: Mark Band 4: 17-20

This essay would fit comfortably within the top mark band, although this level could be achieved in slightly fewer words under timed conditions. The candidate’s breadth of knowledge was impressive, having used a wide range of sociologists from a variety of sociological perspectives in order to demonstrate their A01 understanding.

The candidate made sure that they have built on the ‘hooks’ in the item of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ socialisation, with a paragraph addressing each. They also analysed ideas from ‘biology’, but paid less attention to ‘psychology’.

The essay shows a breadth of knowledge by incorporating ideas from across the A-level course. Whilst many candidates limit the question of social construction solely to gender, this essay also considers ethnicity, race, age and disability. The classic sociology of Parsons and contemporary ideas such as Carvel’s ideas on pester power are covered.

This answer demonstrates A03 (Analysis and Evaluation) skills by comparing two opposing approaches to social construction. This presented an opportunity for lively debate by bouncing back and forth between these two arguments, which was not taken. Some possible ways of doing this include evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each approach at the end of a paragraph.

In a definitive conclusion, the candidate attempts to consider both sides of the debate, before making the last of the many references to the title which appear throughout the essay.
1. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that human behaviour is socially constructed. (20 marks)

2. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that our leisure and consumption choices are the most important factors in shaping our identity. (20 marks)

3. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the different types of cultures that may exist within a society. (20 marks)

4. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the primary stage is the most important stage of socialisation in shaping human behaviour. (20 marks)

5. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that ‘many societies are losing their individual identities due to globalisation’. (20 marks)

6. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate to what extent ethnicity is the most important factor in shaping identity. (20 marks)

7. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the interactionist approach to understanding the self and identity. (20 marks)

8. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the movement towards gender equality continues to improve in the contemporary world. (20 marks)

9. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that attitudes towards sexuality have changed significantly in the postmodern era. (20 marks)

10. Applying material from Item B and your knowledge,.Evaluate the view that social class is declining in importance in forming identities. (20 marks)