**“The strongest predictor of criminality is age.”  
Do you agree with this view? (15 Marks)**

Official statistics show that the number of people arrested each year differs depending on age; in Britain the peak age of offending is 17. This suggests that age is a strong predictor of crime. However, other Sociologists might put forward other factors that might be stronger predictors.

One reason a sociologist might agree that the strongest predictor of criminality is age is because of labelling. Becker argued that labelling can cause ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’ in relation to young people: police prejudice and stereotypes about young people lead to labels that have long term impacts on their interactions with authorities. The sorts of crime younger people might commit (e.g. graffiti/anti-social behaviour) tend to be more visible crimes. Younger people also have less to lose (in terms of not being parents/home owners) and so might be less risk averse when it comes to deciding whether to commit crime. Therefore some sociologists would agree that the younger you are, the more likely to commit crime, so agreeing with the statement.

However, Marxist sociologists would argue that class is a bigger predictor of criminality than age. A person born into privileges of the bourgeoisie has less pressure to commit crime, less need, and a smaller chance of being around gang-cultures associated with crime. On the other hand, those born into the working class, might be more likely to commit crime regardless of their age, because they might have a need to or be caught up in an area with lots of gang crime. Therefore, Marxists would disagree with the statement and argue that it is actually class that is the biggest predictor of criminality.

Feminist sociologists might argue that gender, not age, predicts criminality the best. Heidensohn argues for ‘Control Theory’ and states that women are less likely to commit crimes because they face more social control than men. For example, parents of girls might be less likely to let them out on their own in an evening, which means they wouldn’t have as much opportunity as boys to commit crime. This is also reflected in the prison population, around 80% of prisoners in the UK are male. Therefore Feminists would argue that it is gender, not age which is the biggest predictor of crime.

In conclusion, although statistics do show that younger people commit more crime, they also highlight patterns of social class and gender too. Therefore, while some sociologists might agree that age is the biggest predictor of crime, it is clear that this is not a universally acknowledged view.