

= Criminal (Britney Spears song) =

" Criminal " is a song by American recording artist Britney Spears from her seventh studio album , *Femme Fatale* (2011) . The song was released as the fourth and final single from the album . " Criminal " was written and produced by Max Martin and Shellback , with additional writing by Tiffany Amber . After Spears first listened to the song , she felt it was different and unlike anything she had heard before . She posted a snippet of it online on March 2 , 2011 , prior to the album 's release . " Criminal " was chosen as a single by a poll on her Facebook page , as Spears explained it was a way to give back to her fans . The artwork for the single was released on September 14 , 2011 .

" Criminal " is a guitar and synth @-@ driven mid @-@ tempo pop ballad which incorporates a folk @-@ style flute melody . It is considered the only ballad on *Femme Fatale* , and is less aggressive than the other songs of the album . " Criminal " is influenced by the works of ABBA and Madonna . In the song , Spears sings about being in love with a bad boy and outlaw , and pleads to her mother to not worry about their relationship . " Criminal " received mostly critical acclaim , with reviewers praising its organic and refreshing feel in comparison with the rest of the album . After the release of *Femme Fatale* , the song charted on the South Korean International chart . " Criminal " has also charted in major markets such as Canada , France , Sweden , Switzerland and the United States .

The accompanying music video for the song was filmed at Dalston and Stoke Newington , London . It features Spears as a woman in upper society and follows her relationship with a criminal , played by her then real @-@ life boyfriend Jason Trawick . Prior to its release , London officials criticized Spears for shooting scenes with a replica gun and glamorizing violence . The video received a positive response from critics , with some calling it the best music video from *Femme Fatale* . Reviewers also noted the parallels between the storyline and themes of the video with Spears 's personal life .

= = Background and artwork = =

" Criminal " was written in 2008 by Max Martin , Shellback and Tiffany Amber , and was produced by Martin and Shellback . Spears told MTV News that after she first listened to the song , she felt it was different and unlike anything she had heard before . In an interview with *Rolling Stone* , Spears spoke about Martin 's productions on *Femme Fatale* , saying , " Max played a huge role on this album and he has been there since the beginning so there is such a huge level of trust . He gets exactly what I am saying when I tell him what I want and don 't want musically " . Spears recorded her vocals at Maratone Studios in Stockholm , Sweden . The track was later mixed by Serban Ghenea at MixStar Studios in Virginia Beach , Virginia . It was registered on Broadcast Music Incorporated under the legal title " In Love With a Criminal " . On March 2 , 2011 , Spears posted on her Twitter account a link to a 17 @-@ second clip of the song , describing it as " one of [her] favorites " .

On August 5 , 2011 , she launched a poll on her Facebook page asking fans whether her next single should be " Criminal " , " Inside Out " or " (Drop Dead) Beautiful . " After the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards , she revealed to MTV News that " Criminal " was chosen as the fourth single . On the British talk show *This Morning* , Spears explained that the song " was chosen by the fans . It was just cool to give something back to them and see what they would appreciate . " The " Criminal (Radio Mix) " , which was included on her second remix album , *B in the Mix : The Remixes Vol . 2* , was released a single on September 30 , 2011 and the song was added to the United States mainstream radio playlists on October 4 , 2011 . The artwork for the single was released on September 14 , 2011 . It features Spears looking out into the distance , with her wavy hair falling on her bare back . A mysterious hooded man is also featured on the cover . Robbie Daw of *Idolator* said that " it appears as if Camp Spears hired the best Photoshop expert \$ 15 could buy when it came to designing the art . Oh , just kidding ? we love red and blue ! Makes us think of sex and , uh , ice @-@ cold criminals . Or something . "

= = Composition = =

" Criminal " is a guitar @-@ driven midtempo track which incorporates a folk @-@ style flute melody . Erin Thompson of the Seattle Weekly said the song " takes a breather from aggressive , wall @-@ to @-@ wall synths , driven instead by a steady guitar rhythm and an oddly Asian folky @-@ sounding flute melody . " . The radio edit changes the drums to be louder , among various other instrumental changes . It is considered the only ballad of the album . Thompson compared it to her past ballads , saying it is not " sappy " like " I 'm Not a Girl , Not Yet a Woman " (2002) and not " teary @-@ sad " like " Everytime " (2004) . " Criminal " is reminiscent of the music of ABBA and Madonna , and the latter 's albums Ray of Light (1998) and American Life (2003) , according to David Buchanan of Consequence of Sound and Samesame.com.au , respectively . The beat was compared by Keith Caufield of Billboard to Madonna 's " Don 't Tell Me " (2000) . Carl Wilson of the Los Angeles Times said " Criminal " is " awkwardly pitched between rock and ballad " . The use of the flute was compared by Amy Sciarretto of PopCrush to the sample of " The Lonely Goatherd " from The Sound of Music (1959) on Gwen Stefani 's " Wind It Up " (2006) .

In the verses , Spears sings about being in love with a bad boy and outlaw , in lyrics such as " He is a hustler / He 's no good at all / He is a loser , he 's a bum , bum , bum , bum " and " He is a bad boy with a tainted heart / And even I know this ain 't smart " . During the chorus , she pleads to her mother not to worry in lines such as " But mama I 'm in love with a criminal " and " Mama please don 't cry / I will be alright . " Andrew Leahey of The Washington Times and Erin Thompson of the Seattle Weekly compared the lyrics to those of Madonna 's " Papa Don 't Preach " (1986) , while David Bunachan compared them to Coolio 's " Mama I 'm in Love Wit ' a Gangsta " (1994) . The words in the chorus end in ' al 's syllables , as evident in lyrics such as " And this type of love isn 't rational / It 's physical " . Keith Caufield noted that they were an unintentional nod to Supertramp 's " The Logical Song " (1979) . Thompson stated that Spears 's vocals are less processed than on the rest of the album , while according to Amy Sciarretto they are " heavily auto @-@ tuned and studio @-@ treated , [...] she delivers her lines in a monotone , robotic fashion . "

= = Critical reception = =

Criminal received positive reviews from music critics . Andy Gill of The Independent called it one of the highlights of Femme Fatale , along with " Till the World Ends " . Gill also said that the album sounds more programmed than natural , commenting that " indeed , such is the shock when the final track , ' Criminal ' , opens with a little folksong @-@ style flute and guitar figure that one 's immediate reaction is that a Midlake soundfile has been accidentally appended to Britney 's running @-@ order . " Amy Sciarretto of PopCrush gave the song four stars , explaining that " Only Brit can make a flute sound sexy . Seriously , few pop stars can pull off a flute and Brit does it with ease . " Aaron @-@ Spencer Charles of Metro said that " the verses , chorus and bridge all work perfectly for Ms. Spears , showing that she still has it from all those years ago . " Erin Thompson of the Seattle Weekly called it her best vocal performance of the album , and added that " it has a spark and a mischievous sass to it ? and these days anytime Britney shows even just a bit of her old liveliness and independence , we like it . " Rudy Klapper of Sputnikmusic commented the song " isn 't exactly the progressive stylings of a Janelle Monae [sic] , but damn if it ? s not catchy and interesting . " The A.V. Club 's Genevieve Koski claimed that the album " [i] s not all dance @-@ floor narcotics " , adding that " Inside Out " , " Till the World Ends " and " Criminal " " add texture to the wall @-@ to @-@ wall synth waves and booty bass . " Robert Copsey of Digital Spy said the production of Femme Fatale is " polished , intriguing and ? best of all ? fun " , exemplifying " Inside Out " , the piano breakdown in " Big Fat Bass " and the flute in " Criminal " .

No Ripcord 's Gary McGinley stated that Femme Fatale " is so synth @-@ led that hearing the simple guitar lines on Criminal and He 's About To Lose Me (from the Deluxe Edition) is refreshing . " Natalie Shaw of the BBC Online commented that " Criminal " " with its teenage lyrics [...] on top of a fairytale flute melody and a rhythm so summery it manages to completely set itself free from the rest of the album . " David Buchanan of Consequence of Sound found that Femme Fatale " is entirely rescued by backtracking to Circus @-@ style material , with Rihanna @-@ esque ' Gasoline

' , and the Ray Of Light @-@ era Madonna influence in closing song ' Criminal ' . Katherine St Asaph of Popdust said that " a bad @-@ boy track , it at least makes a bit more lyrical sense than ' Judas ' and is more vulnerable than her past few singles , which is probably a good career move . " Keith Caufield of Billboard commented that " while some of the lyrics are a teensy clunky at times ? [it] is a fitting closer to a nearly @-@ completely excellent album . " Los Angeles Times writer Carl Wilson stated that the album 's momentum " flags only on the closing ' Criminal ' , with its formless Renaissance fair flute line and a tempo [that is] joyless " . Thomas Conner of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times considered " Criminal " , along with " Inside Out " , " weak mid @-@ tempo fare " songs . Eric R. Danton of the Hartford Courant deemed the song as " an eye @-@ rolling homage to those oh @-@ so @-@ attractive bad boys that good girls lust for in spite of themselves . " Stephen Thomas Erlewine , senior editor of Allmusic , called it " a lousy song " .

= = Chart performance = =

Following the release of Femme Fatale , " Criminal " reached number fifty @-@ one on South Korea 's GAON International Chart , due to digital sales . On September 26 , 2011 , the song debuted at number forty on the US Billboard Pop Songs . On the chart issue of November 19 , 2011 , it peaked at number nineteen . On October 5 , 2011 , " Criminal " entered on the Bubbling Under Hot 100 Singles chart at number twenty @-@ one . Two weeks later , it debuted on the Hot 100 at number ninety @-@ two , due to sales of 12 @,@ 000 digital units . It then rose to a new peak of fifty @-@ five . According to Nielsen Soundscan , " Criminal " has sold over 279 @,@ 000 digital units in the United States as of June 2012 . The song also entered Canadian Hot 100 at number eighty @-@ three , reaching a new peak of sixty @-@ three a week later and eventually peaking at sixteen . In Brazil , the song reached number 1 on Billboard Hot Pop Songs , and on Hot 100 Airplay . " Criminal " also achieved moderate success in Europe , reaching the top @-@ twenty in Slovakia , Czech Republic , Finland and France , and the top @-@ forty in Switzerland , Sweden , Denmark , and both regions of Belgium .

= = Music video = =

= = = Development = = =

At the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards , Spears said to MTV News that she had thought of a " really cool concept for the video , just to make it interesting . You 'll have to see . " She then contacted Chris Marrs Piliero , who directed the music video for her previous single " I Wanna Go " , to work with her . She told him the basic story she had planned , which he described as a " fairy @-@ tale , sweet , knight @-@ in @-@ shining @-@ armor feel to it . I said let 's take that and make the fairy tale badass . " Spears also wanted her real @-@ life boyfriend Jason Trawick to play the criminal . Marrs Piliero was initially hesitant to cast Trawick feeling that a professional actor would do a better job , but did not talk to Spears about it . He told USA Today , " When you 're doing nudity , I don 't think it was at the top of Britney 's list to bring in some random guy while her boyfriend watches . [...] We definitely wanted to make some passionate , steamy scenes , but we also wanted it to be intensely beautiful . We didn 't want to go for raunchy . We wanted it to be sensual and steamy . " On September 6 , 2011 , Spears announced through her Twitter account that she had decided to shoot the video " in the streets of merry old England when I get there . " In an interview with AOL , she explained , " I 've never shot on location out of the country of America for a video . So , it should be very interesting . It was partly my idea ... to see if it could to happen , and they were like , ' Yeah , it 's a great idea , ' so we did it . "

= = = Synopsis = = =

The video begins at a formal party in which Spears seems to be looking for someone . The opening

shot of her was inspired by the scene of Jennifer Love Hewitt walking into the party in *Can't Hardly Wait* (1998) . Her boyfriend (Bradshaw) talks with two people next to her . He persuades her to smile to avoid embarrassment from the guests then verbally abuses her and grabs her face , after which she leaves to the restroom , where she wipes away a tear and puts on her fragrance *Radiance* . She comes back to the party and catches her boyfriend flirting with another woman ; Spears tells her " So you 're not working the street corner tonight I see ? " , making her boyfriend angry . He apologizes to the other woman for his girlfriend 's remark then grabs Spears by the arm and carries her outside the building . After he slaps her , one of the waiters of the party (Trawick) wearing a leather jacket punches her boyfriend several times . The waiter asks Spears if she is okay , and after she kicks her boyfriend in the crotch goodbye , she replies " Now I 'm okay . " She and the waiter climb on his motorcycle and leave the scene . When they get to his house , it is revealed by a newspaper that he is a criminal . She opens one of the lockers in his house and finds a gun , after which the couple kisses . This is followed by scenes of them having sex .

The next morning , the criminal brings Spears breakfast to the bed and kisses her on the forehead . He has several tattoos in his body , including one on his chest that reads " R.I.P. Goose " , a reference to the film *Top Gun* (1986) . They go to a convenience store where she steals vanilla candles and points the gun to the employee ; the criminal takes money out of the cash register and they escape by stealing a Citroën DS3 . The robbery is caught by the security cameras , and pictures of the couple appear on the local news . There are scenes of them having sex in the shower . As they change clothes , several policemen then appear outside the criminal 's house ; they start shooting it with Heckler & Koch MP5 's as Spears and the man embrace , kissing passionately . The policemen then enter the house , and one of them confirms that the couple escaped . The video ends with Spears and the criminal escaping on the motorcycle as the credits roll . One of them reads " No vanilla candles were harmed in the making of this music video . " The video also includes intercut scenes of Spears performing dance moves similar to voguing .

= = = UK controversy = = =

After pictures of Spears and Trawick carrying replica guns on set surfaced online , the Hackney London Borough Council criticized her for " promoting gun violence " , since the area had been badly affected by the 2011 England riots . The Council told *London Tonight* that they had not agreed to the use of replica guns at Stoke Newington Town Hall , and that they would be raising the matter with the production company . Councillor Ian Rathbone added that Spears should apologize and make a sizeable donation to a Hackney charity " for the rudeness and damage she 's done to this community . " When asked if she thought the council was overreacting , Hackney MP Diane Abbott insisted : " It is only a music video but it 's images like this , with popstars glamorising gangs , which means that some young people ... get drawn in . Britney should really know better . " Rae Alexandra of the *SF Weekly* explained that the United Kingdom " is not a place that readily embraces guns . Rather , it 's a place where guns are rare , gun licensing is tightly controlled , and the entire establishment has been in a panic about gun use on its streets for the last three years . " On September 26 , 2011 , Spears ' representatives released a statement to MTV News saying , " The video is a fantasy story featuring Britney 's boyfriend , Jason Trawick , which literally plays out the lyrics of a song written three years before the riots ever happened . " The production company apologized to the Council before the release of the video . Marrs Piliero stated about the controversy

' " Holding the gun became a controversial thing ' cause we filmed it in London , and they don 't have a lot of gun use out there . That doesn 't mean that there 's no gun use , so I did find it really interesting . For me , the thing is , it blew me away that members of [the British] Parliament were speaking about this . One , because it 's a music video , and two , because don 't you guys have television shows out there that show crime ? It 's really strange to me . I don 't understand why pop stars are put on such a high pedestal over other celebrities . Why do members of Parliament feel that they need to scrutinize her for having a gun , and ' She 's in the public , ' and ' She should know better , ' and ' She 's a role model , ' but what about every other celebrity out there ? What about

every other actor ? That 's very strange to me . I was really surprised at how much the gun use was scrutinized . [Trawick plays] a professional criminal , so it makes sense he has a gun . We shouldn 't censor ourselves . "

= = = Release and reception = = =

The video was ranked at number ten on a list of the ten most controversial music videos in pop music by AOL on September 29 , 2011 . Spears announced through her Twitter account on October 13 , 2011 , that the video would be released the following week . On October 17 , 2011 , she posted five GIF files with scenes from the video on her Tumblr . The video was released the same day on the iTunes Store ; it reached the top position on its chart within minutes . Becky Bain of Idolator called it " an epic mini @-@ movie , full of romance , intrigue [...] [with] a whole lot of unnecessary PDA between Brit and her beau . It was full of passion , joy and just a little touch of madness ? just like its star . " Bain also noted several influences , such as Alfred Hitchcock films and the music videos for Spears ' " Toxic " (2004) and Green Day ' s " 21 Guns " (2009) . A writer for Rolling Stone also compared it to a Hitchcock film and deemed the opening scene as " a tribute to Old Hollywood " . The reviewer found the scenes of physical abuse " surprising " and called the acting " stiff " , but said that " from there on out , we 're in the usual comfort zone of a Britney video ? sexy dancing , sexy vamping ? with the added bonus of gratuitous PDA between the pop star and her real @-@ life boyfriend . "

USA Today 's Ann Oldenburg described the video as sexy and " pretty personal . " Kenneth Partridge of AOL commented , " Packed with sex , violence and questionable acting , the new Britney Spears video , ' Criminal , ' has all the trappings of a midnight movie . " A reporter from the American edition of The Huffington Post said : " We can 't honestly remember the last time Britney Spears looked so gorgeous in a music video " and deemed it as the best video from Femme Fatale . Erin Strecker Entertainment Weekly also called it the best video of the album , and highlighted Spears ' look , the ending scene and the " fun story " . Katherine St Asaph of Popdust said it is " probably the best video of the Femme Fatale era . " Tom Townshend of MSN stated that although the video was not appropriate for Spears ' younger fans , " [it] is actually rather compelling and feels more like a short film rather than a pop starlet 's music video . " A writer for VH1 said that part of the reason the video works is the comic sensibility between Spears and Marris Piliero , explaining that " [it] point [s] to one of Spears 's greatest talents : giving the impression that although she takes her career extremely seriously , she nevertheless doesn 't take it too seriously . " The critic summarized the review by saying that the video is " entertaining [as] a bad @-@ girl adventure story , and her role here is essentially that of a (wait for it) femme fatale . "

Critics also commented on the Hackney controversy . Sarah Dean of the UK edition of The Huffington Post said : " If having a blonde , leather @-@ clad superstar brandishing a gun at a shop owner 's face isn 't glamourising violence , I 'm not sure what is " and added that , in essence , the video " seems more like an opportunity for her to live out her sexual fantasies than anything beneficial to music fans . " Amanda Dobbins of New York stated that " After viewing the final product , we 're guessing [the local officials] probably won 't be down with the shower sex , the regular sex , the domestic abuse , the armed robbery , or any of Britney 's other questionable activities , either . " Katherine St Asaph of Popdust joked about the situation , saying , " Britney Spears ' video for ' Criminal ' is out , and gang recruitment is already up 200 % since 8 a.m. ! This has not happened . " Marianne Garvey of the UK website of E ! Online said , " With the ' fantasy ' getting so hot and heavy and Britney stripping down to nothing , the guns are the last thing you notice . "

= = = Themes and analysis = = =

Alyssa Rosenberg of ThinkProgress said that although it is common to see pop stars being assaulted by men in their videos ? exemplifying Rihanna 's " Man Down " ? the public is aware of Spears 's vulnerability , explaining that " we believe she really would choose a guy who would do something like this to her . " Rosenberg also stated even though her bad behaviour once she leaves

her boyfriend is not directed at him , the fact that he treated her badly is a form of narrative permission for her to rob a store and have sex with the criminal . She also commented that the same narrative works on her previous video with Marris Piliero for " I Wanna Go " . The video received comparisons to Rihanna 's " We Found Love " , which was released two days after " Criminal " , on October 19 , 2011 . Among the similarities , critics noted that they were both filmed in the United Kingdom and arose controversy in the country ; both contain scenes of sex , violence and crime ; both feature bad boy archetypes and both evoke the personal lives of the artists . Katherine St Asaph found the opening line of Spears 's boyfriend (" Would you try smiling just once ? ") a subtle dig at the press . She explained that there is a tendency among writers and spectators to call " her every smile plastered on or conservator @-@ mandated " , and that the fact the line is delivered by her abusive boyfriend only makes it more evident . According to her , that there are two contradictory ways to analyze the relationship between Spears and Trawick as the criminal : it could be seen as him luring her into her life , but Spears is the one that kisses him and she is the first to pull the gun .

St Asaph explained that the only interpretation of the video lies on the opinion of each viewer about Spears 's personal life , and how active a role each person imagines she plays in it . It was noted by St Asaph that although most pop stars release videos that draw from their personal lives , they do not make the viewer uncomfortable . The same cannot be said for Spears and Rihanna , and it does not matter if they themselves have moved on from past situations , because the discussion around them has not . St Asaph also expressed that neither Spears or Rihanna said much about the parallels to their lives , but that they do not need to : their videos are much more effective than anything they could reveal in an interview . Rae Alexandra of the SF Weekly also compared it to " We Found Love " , saying that both videos feature an anti @-@ British sentiment . She wrote that all the villains in the video ? her boyfriend and the policemen ? are British , whereas her savior in the video is an American criminal . Alexandra noted that Spears and Rihanna chose to films their " grittiest videos " in a country with a lower crime rate than the United States , that is also so against guns that politicians felt the need to talk about it . According to her , the videos continue with a xenophobic portrayal of British people as villains by American pop culture .

= = Track listings = =

= = Credits and personnel = =

Credits adapted from Femme Fatale booklet liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = Radio and release history = =