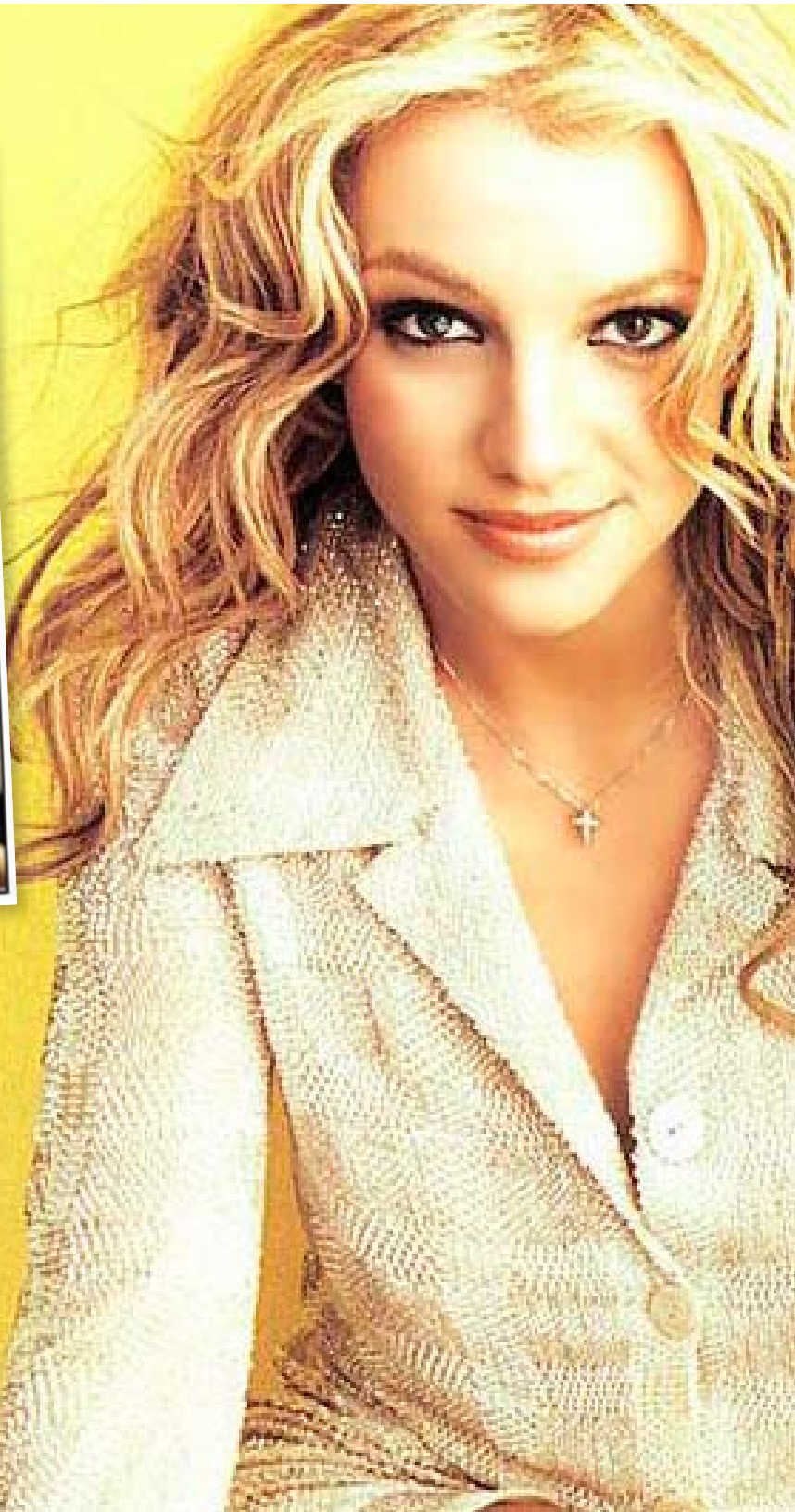


# Virtue In Action

Happiness: What Fortune and Fame Can't Buy

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION



**THEY HAVE MONEY. THEY HAVE FANS.  
THEY HAVE CELEBRITY. BUT AS THE ANTICS OF  
A NUMBER OF HOLLYWOOD STARLETS AND  
POPULAR SINGERS DEMONSTRATE, THEIR  
MATERIAL GAINS AND NOTORIETY HAVE NOT  
PROVIDED THEM WITH ONE VITAL ASSET:  
HAPPINESS.**

BRITNEY SPEARS

## VIRTUE IN ACTION

**A**t the height of their popularity, Britney Spears and Lindsey Lohan drew the adulation of fans, the fellowship of celebrities, and admiration for their good looks and talents. Sadly, as their most recent time in the limelight reflects, they have also experienced very public hardships. In the last two years, both young women have dealt with heartbreak and substance abuse. Why is it that fame, money and power don't by themselves make us happy, and may actually work against our attainment of true happiness?



In the book “Cultivating Heart and Character,” author Devine defines happiness as a journey that can be reached by achieving three things:

- Maturity of Character – using the talents and resources we have to become the best person possible
- Loving Relationships – establishing bonds with strong friendships, family and marriage
- Contributing to Society—Making a positive impact on the lives of others

When we think about these aspects of happiness, we see that it isn't a fleeting moment of enjoyment or fun, rather happiness is a lasting sense of satisfaction and peace that comes from fulfilling our true purpose, loving others and using whatever talents we have to make a real difference in the world.

In order to understand why happiness has **eluded** Spears and Lohan – along with other famous entertainers – let's examine how their lifestyles measure against Devine's definition.

### **Love: Money and Fame Can't Buy It**

Britney Spears represents a cautionary tale of success gone sour. In 2004, her marriage to former backup singer, Kevin Federline, was met with public **scrutiny**, but the young duo stuck it out and brought two sons – Sean Preston and Jayden James – into the world. The babies marked the third and fourth children for Federline, who has two other children with former girlfriend and actress Shar Jackson.

But two months after the birth of Jayden, Spears filed for divorce, and then made headlines with excessive partying and drinking alongside socialite Paris Hilton, in some cases, indecently dressed. Predictably, the fleeting feelings of pleasure and glamour that come with the Hollywood party scene didn't give Spears lasting peace or happiness.

The next act in Spear's public unraveling was when she, reportedly distraught, shaved off her blonde locks, and went to Federline's house where she lashed out at a reporter's car. “There she is, this pop princess, newly bald, dressed unglamorously in shorts and sweatshirt, rearing back with an umbrella, ready to give that car what it has coming,” syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts wrote for Tribune Media Services. “In that photo, there is something of the spoiled child lashing out. Something of the little girl, broken. Something of the baby crying for help.”

And she probably was crying for help as she confronted the reality that money, fame and partying can't heal the pain of a broken marriage and don't give us true happiness. After checking in and out of several rehabilitation clinics, Spears finally completed a 28-day stay at the Promises Clinic in Malibu. However, for Spears

to attain a true sense of happiness, it will take much more than a 28 day rehab program. Hopefully, Spears can now refocus her life on those aspects that will bring her lasting joy.

### Self-Destruction and Exterior Values

Lohan, a former child model and actress made famous by “The Parent Trap” and “Freaky Fridays” also has struggled with the transition into adulthood. In January 2007, at the age of 20, Lohan (below) checked into rehab, releasing the following statement to the media:



“I have made a proactive decision to take care of my personal health. I appreciate your well wishes and ask that you please respect my privacy at this time.”

But Lohan had been battling rumors of substance abuse, as well as **bulimia**, long before that admission. Just a year before checking into the Wonderland rehab facility, Lohan had railed against a Vanity Fair article which reported that her dramatic weight loss stemmed from an eating disorder.

But the second Vanity Fair allegation against Lohan was most shocking. Lohan had revealed that she had **dabbled** in drugs. Lohan told Teen People her words had been twisted, but she was not the only one in denial. Her mother, Dina Lohan, has been criticized in the press for being **oblivious** to her daughter’s problems. Dina also was reluctant to admit that her daughter’s constant presence on the party scene with other **tabloid** targets, including Spears and Paris Hilton, were cries for help. That is particularly tragic, as Lohan lacks a support system, aside from her mother. Michael Lohan, her father, spent much of his daughter’s childhood in prison.

Ironically, Lohan and Spear’s despair and even self-destructive behavior may stem in part from the negative

values they and segments of the entertainment industry promote. Much of the entertainment industry targets young fans with sexually explicit and provocative images to sell more CDs, concert tickets and movies. In a recent Fox News article by Lis Wiehl discussing the marketing of sex to young girls, Wiehl refers to a recent study by the American Psychological Association, all of this “third-wave” style of marketing may be taking a toll. Among the study’s findings was that the “sexualization of girls can lead to depression, eating disorders, and poor academic performance.”

### Some of the specific consequences, according to the report, include:

- Constant comparison between one’s own body and cultural standards, leading to feelings of inadequacy and shame.
- A tendency to focus more on a partner’s judgments of one’s appearance than on one’s own desires, safety, and pleasure.

When we define ourselves and focus our lives on exterior traits such as how we look, we set ourselves up for bitter disappointment as our exterior traits never provide lasting happiness. In fact one reason some people resort to self-induced vomiting to lose weight is that they come to the belief that their looks aren’t good enough compared to the celebrity icons promoted by the entertainment industry. In addition, by focusing our lives on how we look or how much money we can make, it is too easy to lose sight of what will give us lasting happiness: our beliefs, our relationships with others, how we contribute to others, and doing our best with the talents we have.

### Examples of True Happiness

Although there are many examples of celebrities with fame and fortune falling into despair, there are fortunately also examples of celebrities exemplify what it takes to achieve true happiness.

21-year-old “High School Musical” star Ashley Tisdale cites parental support as the reason she exercises self control in the face of temptation. In a recent issue of Blender magazine, Tisdale said she is against the **hedonism** – drinking, smoking and alcohol – so central in her generation of Hollywood.

“Personally, I don’t think that’s cool,” Tisdale told Blender. “My mom really instilled confidence in me, so I’m not somebody who’d be under peer pressure.”

Another stellar example of a young star bucking the

current trend is “American Idol” contestant-turned-Golden Globe and Oscar winner, Jennifer Hudson. Just before she won an Oscar for her groundbreaking role in “Dream Girls,” Hudson (right) assured her church family in Chicago that Hollywood would not turn her from her core values and belief system.

“I don’t do clubs. I don’t drink. I don’t smoke,” Hudson announced at the Progressive Baptist Church on Chicago’s South Side, according to the Associated Press. When asked why she wasn’t having an Oscar nomination party at a LA club like so many other Oscar nominees, Hudson replied, “I’m not having a club party; I better have a praise party” with her church community. Hudson and Tisdale both have the money and fame to engage in the supposedly glamorous life of the Hollywood party scene, but have instead remained true to their own core values: Hudson finding her happiness and joy within her relationship with God, and Tisdale finding her sense of self-confidence from values instilled from her family.

Idaho beauty queen Amanda Rammell, 21, offers us an example of someone focusing her life on contributing to others by being a positive role model. Rammell discussed with the Tribune how she is so disturbed by what she called “the Brit pack” that she is using her role as a pageant winner to offer a public alternative.

“The Internet photos, the partying, the drug abuse, just the level of sexual exploiting that they’re using – it’s out of control, and the way our girls are looking up to them isn’t changing, and that’s what’s scary,” Rammell, who represented Idaho in the Miss USA pageant told the Tribune.

Instead of appearing on the pages of a tabloid for being drunk or under-dressed, Rammell said her goal is to be visible in working to help solve some the world’s



problems. “I expect to be active in all the issues that a woman of the United States deals with every day – political issues in their state and federal government, the issues of the home and the family, morals, the peer pressure of youth...It’s critical to be a citizen and to be active.”

When we use our talents and resources to contribute to the lives of others, especially those in need, we have a greater sense of self-worth and a better perspective on our own blessings - both of which help establish a foundation for true happiness.

As Spears, Lohan and so many other celebrities demonstrate, happiness doesn’t come easily no matter how many handlers you have, autographs you sign, or red carpets you walk. If you are not comfortable with yourself and lack genuine emotional support, you can feel purposeless and **adrift**. In fact money, fame and a focus on exterior traits can work against attaining true happiness, in that these things can give us enough temporary pleasure that we ignore those aspects of our lives that will give us true happiness.

Happiness is not about what we have, it’s about what we offer our families and the world around us. As Hudson, Tisdale and Rammell demonstrate, to be fulfilled we must work hard with the talents we have, treat others and ourselves with respect, and measure ourselves by our own solid moral compass.

## VOCABULARY

**Conducive:** tending to produce

**Adulation:** show excessive admiration or devotion to

**Alienated:** to make indifferent or hostile

**Hedonism:** devotion to pleasure as the focus of one’s life”

**Scrutiny:** surveillance; close and continuous watching or guarding

**Proactive:** serving to prepare for, intervene in, or control an expected occurrence or situation

**Bulimia:** a habitual disturbance in eating behavior mostly affecting young women of normal weight, characterized by frequent episodes of grossly excessive food intake followed by self-induced vomiting to avoid weight gain

**Oblivious:** unmindful; unconscious; unaware

**Tabloid:** A newspaper of small format giving the news in condensed form, usually with illustrated, often sensational material immortalized: to bestow unending fame upon

**Antics:** A ludicrous or extravagant act or gesture

**Adrift:** lacking aim, direction or stability

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## Virtue In Action

www.virtueinaction.org  
Current Links in Education  
1126 Dartmouth Rd.  
Flossmoor, IL 60422  
708 922 1075  
info@virtueinaction.org

# Virtue In Action

## Happiness: What Fortune and Fame Can't Buy

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### Lesson Goals

- Develop understanding of the virtues of happiness, family support, charity and self-acceptance
- Help students see how valuing temporary pleasure over lasting happiness can bring harm
- Demonstrate how important a reputation is in and outside of the public eye
- Inspire students to become more discerning in evaluating the marketing of sexuality to teens in realizing both the self-interested profit motive driving this marketing, and the long term harm it presents to teens and our society
- Help students to develop a framework for evaluating the tabloid coverage of celebrity antics
- Inspire students to focus their lives on those aspects that bring true happiness: doing our best with our talents, developing loving and lasting relationships with family and friends, and contributing to others

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### Discussion Question Options

1. What are Devine's three tenets of happiness? Do you agree or disagree with his views?
2. Do you think society and/or the media pays more attention to those who are failing in life rather than those who are succeeding in achieving true happiness? If you think there is unbalanced coverage what do you think accounts for this, and what does this tell us about our culture?
3. In addition to the positive role models covered in the lesson, what other entertainment personalities do you think provide examples of true happiness?
4. In what ways does the American Psychological Association say the marketing of sexuality to teens affects them? Do you agree with those findings?
5. Do you feel that Hollywood peer pressure plays a role in the way individuals such as Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan and even Miss USA Tara Connors conduct themselves? How do you personally resist peer pressure? What factor does Asley Tisdale say helps her to resist peer pressure?
6. Does Idaho beauty queen Amanda Rammell make a good role model? How do her values contrast with those of members of the "Brit pack," as she described it?
7. How can fame and money actually work against our attaining true happiness? (Discussion tip: money can bring us enough temporary pleasure that it distracts us from focusing on our real purpose in life and those things that give us lasting fulfillment)

### Journal Writing Options:

1. Find a role model who has neither material wealth nor superstardom and explain how their lives are fulfilling. This can be a family member, a local hero, or even a friend of yours. Explain how this individual positively impacts society and what lessons that person has taught you about life and true happiness.
2. Do you think money would make you happy? What problems could money solve? What problems couldn't it solve? What problems can money bring?
3. How do you personally define your happiness? Write out what you think makes you happy and whether or not you possess it yet. If not yet, explain how you think you can achieve happiness.

### Extended Learning Activities:

1. Have the class review the executive summary of American Psychological Association report on the harm of early sexualization of young girls (<http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>), paying special attention to what the researchers say about the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media. Have students break into groups, some monitoring TV commercials, magazines, or bus/billboard poster ads for one week and come back with at least 3 examples that support this hypothesis. Have them explain how the images could have a negative effect, and as extra credit, suggest a way this media could have been appealing without resorting to using sex to sell.
2. Red Carpet Exercise: Have each student imagine they are a celebrity able to bring attention to an important cause. Ask them what cause they chose and why. For fun, take photos of each student on the "red carpet" and then add to a scrapbook along with their cause.
3. Break the class into small groups. Have each group choose a Hollywood hero, such as a Jennifer Hudson, Carrie Underwood, Ashley Tisdale, Bono or whomever they feel is making a difference using celebrity. Ask the students to do a brief presentation on how this person's contribution is important and why they are good role models for young people.

### Internet Resources

American Psychological Association Study

<http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>

- Link to executive summary of American Psychological Association report on the harm of early sexualization of young girls

"Britney Spears is no Laughing Matter," Detroit Free Press, March 10, 2007

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070310/OPINION03/703100325/1068/OPINION&imw=Y>

"Cultivating Heart and Character," Tony Devine Website

<http://www.iefintl.org/cultivatingheart/web/contents.shtml>

"Girls Gone Bad," Newsweek, Feb. 12, 2007

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16961761/site/newsweek/>

"It's Her Party and She'll Praise if She Wants To," Chicago Tribune, Feb. 26

[http://metromix.chicagotribune.com/news/celebrity/mmx-0702200228feb20,0,88337.story?coll=mmx-celebrity\\_heds](http://metromix.chicagotribune.com/news/celebrity/mmx-0702200228feb20,0,88337.story?coll=mmx-celebrity_heds)

"Miss USA Tara Conner talks sobriety, tattoos" Access Hollywood, March 16, 2007

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17650296/>

"Beauty Queen Targets Bad Girls," March 22, 2007

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0703220209mar22,1,3625119.story?coll=chi-homepagenews-utl>

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