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The Good, the Bad and the Unhappy: The Cultural Meanings of Newspaper Reporting on Jackpot Winners

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Abstract

Accounts of jackpot winners and big gambling wins are common in Swedish newspapers. Analysis of over 2000 such newspaper articles reveals that their content is structured according to specific themes and cultural topics. Four such topics are identified: wealth as a test of morals and character, the social impact of wealth, the just and good world, and luck and the occult. Culturally structured narratives like these—which elaborate on mythological and moralistic schemes of good and evil, rewards and punishments, and which concern questions of human nature and social values—have a long history in folk tradition and in Christian moral teachings. Jackpot wins provide a discursive realm for moral and existential questions that, to some extent, fills a void left by the decline of traditional folklore and formal religion. Apparently, this discourse

stimulates interest in games and constitutes one of the cultural roots of contemporary gambling.

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