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

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Pages 213-232 | Published online: 11 Jun 2007

🗨️ Cite this article 🔗 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459790701387667>

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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.

Acknowledgements

The research on which this paper is based has been financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. The paper was presented at the 13th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking, Lake Tahoe, Nevada, 22-26 May 2006. I owe thanks to the two anonymous reviewers at IGS for their valuable remarks and suggestions.

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