



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# KOMMERS OCH KONTROVERS

## Preventivmedelsmarknaden i Sverige 1910–1979

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### Akademisk avhandling

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## **Titel**

Kommers och kontrovers: Preventivmedelsmarknaden i Sverige 1910–1979

## **Abstract**

This thesis analyses the development and transformation of Sweden's contraceptive market between 1910 and 1979, a period marked by restrictive regulations (1910–1970) and intense moral contestation. The aim is to generate new knowledge about the historical evolution of the contraceptive market and to shed light on how a controversial market, characterised by strong moral and political stances, can become socially accepted over time. The thesis focuses on the role that companies played in this transformation, how they navigated the rules and norms surrounding the market, and how the production and sales methods of contraceptives have changed throughout the period.

The study combines two analytical frameworks: *The Architecture of Markets* – which examines how markets are created, shaped, and change over time – and *Hostile Worlds* – a framework for understanding how boundaries between commerce and intimacy generate controversy. In doing so, the thesis analyses the mechanisms through which the controversial market both expanded and gained legitimacy. Drawing on scholarship from business history, consumer history, and the history of sexuality, the thesis explores the interplay between shifting sexual norms, state regulations, and commercial strategies in shaping market dynamics. By analysing sexuality and gender norms as constituent elements in the architecture of the contraceptive market, the thesis also provides insights into the bidirectional relationship within sexual markets. It demonstrates how these markets are shaped by, and in turn help shape, broader cultural and moral values.

The study addresses three key questions: What factors enabled or constrained the development of the contraceptive market between 1910 and 1979? How and why did the production and retail of mass-produced contraceptives change during this period? How did controversies arise within and around the market, and how did businesses navigate these tensions? While previous studies on the business history of contraception have primarily focused on countries with large-scale contraceptive manufacturers, this study shifts attention to Sweden, where the market expanded largely through the activities of retailers and importers rather than domestic producers.

Based on a wide range of archival sources, including business records, advertisements, government reports, parliamentary and legal documents, letters, newspapers, descriptive statistics, and photographs, the findings demonstrate that Swedish businesses employed both provocative and legitimising strategies to navigate legal and social market restrictions. Mail-order services and vending machines, for example, allowed companies to balance discretion with accessibility. Marketing strategies deliberately framed contraceptives as medical necessities or as products tied to sexual well-being, adapting to prevailing moral discourses while also challenging norms on sexuality, gender, and consumption.

This thesis argues that the expansion of the contraceptive market was not exclusively driven by governmental reforms, shifting sexual norms, or political activism; it was also significantly influenced by business strategies that pushed the boundaries of what was perceived as acceptable sexuality and legitimate business. It further demonstrates how market controversies were not only shaped by the symbolic values attached to commodities but also by notions surrounding distribution methods, sales practices, and consumer demand. By situating Sweden's contraceptive market at the intersection of commerce and sexuality, this study contributes to broader discussions on how controversial markets gain legitimacy over time and how businesses contribute to shaping societal attitudes towards consumption and morality.

## **Keywords**

Economic History, Business history, Consumer History, History of Sexuality, Controversial Markets, Contraceptives, Regulations, Sweden.

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