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Preface

Although the following book is about my research at Tinbergen Institute and University of Amsterdam, it represents not only my work, but also the energies of some others who have assisted me on my journey by providing their support, understanding and time. This Chapter belongs to them.

At the beginning there was University Carlos III de Madrid, in Spain, where I first started to study economics. Barbara Petrongolo drew my attention to the Labor Economics during the graduate lectures she taught. These lectures played an important role in stimulating my interest in this field.

The struggle of asking the right questions, searching through literature, solving the inherent problems is never easy. But the joy of finishing the work gives such a deep feeling of satisfaction, that in the end you can honestly say that it has been worth the pain.

I would like to thank my promoters Professor Joop Hartog and Associate Professor Hans van Ophem, for trusting me with this Ph.D. project. The first couple of years of my Ph.D. work were an experimental period. My promoters helped me switch from being a student to becoming a researcher. I could not have hoped for a more supportive pair of mentors. Joop has read innumerable drafts and contributed in major ways to the studies in this thesis with his seemingly infinite supply of original ideas. This thesis would not have been the same without him. In fact, it surely would not be there at all. Hans was always there, ready to review and provide inspiring comments in his fast and rigorous manner. There is no way I can express my gratitude for their help. I thank them both enormously.

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I wish to give my posthumous thanks to Prof. V. Craiu from the Department of Probabilities, Statistics and Operations Research at Bucharest University who supervised my Master's thesis in the field of Applied Statistics and who helped me to decide to pursue a Ph.D. education.

I would like to express my great appreciation and respect to all my colleagues at SCHOLAR: Erik, Edwin, Chris, Bas, Bas, Randolph, Justin, Auke, Dinand, Adam, Monique and Sandra.

On a more personal note, I thank my parents and my brother, Iulian, for their encouragement and unconditional support.

Many times it is true that behind a great man there is a great woman. Keeping the proportions, in my case, the reverse is true. Most of the things I have accomplished in my adult life, including this thesis, would not have been possible without the love and the support for better or for worse of my husband Ovidiu. As an expression of my gratitude for making me so happy, these lines belong to you.

Simona

Amsterdam, October 2005