

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to show my greatest appreciation to my supervisor Univ.-Prof. Dr. Florian Kronenberg, who guided and supported me continuously invaluable during the last 4 years. He always gave me constructive comments and warm encouragement. Without his knowledge, persistent patience, help and empathy this thesis would not have been possible.

Special thanks to Ass.-Prof. Barbara Kollerits, PhD. I have greatly benefited from discussions, constructive comments and persistent help with statistics. Without this great teamwork the publication of my PhD thesis data would not have been possible. Furthermore, I always felt accompanied and supported on both an academic and a personal level, for which I am extremely grateful.

Further, I would like to thank my thesis committee, ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Hans-Georg Kraft and ao.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Kiechl for their encouragement and insightful comments.

I would particularly like to thank the whole team of the Division of Genetic Epidemiology for supporting me, especially Margot Haun for all her help in laboratory concerns. I also like to thank all collaboration partners and researchers who were involved in the planning and conducting of the studies included in my PhD thesis.

My deepest appreciation goes to my parents and their partners, my grandparents and my sister. It is not just that they taught me everything I know about endurance, but they always caught me if there was a risk to fall. They provided me a safe home and gave me their unequivocal support throughout my studies.

I also want to express my gratitude to my friends, who have often had to bear the brunt of my frustration and rages. Special thanks also to my beloved godchild Pia, who always managed to make me laugh.