About the author

I was born in 1978 in Rotterdam (The Netherlands) to Jeanne Overzier-Koppers and Harry Overzier. After attending the Erasmiaans Gymnasium, I decided to study Astronomy (“Sterrenkunde”) at the University of Leiden in order to pursue further one of my biggest childhood fascinations. Despite some transitional difficulties in the beginning, I nonetheless managed to obtain my “propedeuse” at the end of the first year. My interest for research started through my first undergraduate research project (“klein sterrenkundig onderzoek”) with Dr. Huub Röttgering. We analysed spectroscopic observations of a distant radio galaxy obtained with the Very Large Telescope in Chile. Our results lead to my first scientific publication, and I presented the results at a conference on Isla Mujeres (Mexico), supported by a travel grant from the Leids Universitair Fonds (LUF). For my graduate research project (“groot sterrenkundig onderzoek”), under the supervision of Dr. Huub Röttgering and Dr. Roeland Rengelink, I studied the large-scale, cosmological structure as probed by extragalactic radio sources. By studying the statistical distribution of hundreds of thousands of radio sources in the sky, we were able to study their gravitational clustering to unprecedented detail. I obtained my Master degree in November 2001.

In January 2002, I started as a Ph.D. student (“promovendus”) working with Prof. George Miley on the study of galaxies in the environments of distant radio galaxies. I made two observing visits to the Very Large Telescope (Chile), and spent the month May both in 2002 and 2003 at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge (United States) working with Dr. Daniel Harris on the analysis of X-ray observations of distant radio galaxies obtained with the Chandra satellite. The main part of my Ph.D. project was based on observations by the Science Team of the Advanced Camera for Surveys (ACS) on the Hubble Space Telescope (HST). This superb camera was installed during an upgrade of the HST by astronauts of the space shuttle Columbia’s 27th flight (STS-109) in March 2002. The results of these research projects are presented in the current thesis, parts of which have also appeared as separate publications in Astronomy & Astrophysics, The Astrophysical Journal, and Nature.

During my Ph.D. I spent one and a half years working with the ACS Science Team in Baltimore (United States). I further participated in the 21st winterschool on galaxy formation in Jerusalem (Israel) and in meetings, conferences or workshops in London and Edinburgh (United Kingdom), College Park and Aspen (United States), Poelgeest and Dwingeloo (The Netherlands), Granada (Spain), and Heidelberg (Germany).

At Leiden Observatory (“Sterrewacht Leiden”) I was a teaching assistant for the course Galaxies (“Sterrenstelsels”) given by Dr. Jan Lub and Prof. Marijn Franx. I was a member of the Social committee, the Public Outreach committee, and the Annual Report committee.

In September 2006, I will continue my research in astronomy through a joint postdoctoral fellowship at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (USA) and the Max Planck Institute for Astrophysics in Garching (Germany).
Acknowledgments

Congratulations! You have found the most important page of this thesis. I can finally set aside all frustrations and express gratitude towards those whose help and company I treasured along the way.

I am grateful to Leiden Observatory for providing the means and a friendly environment to carry out my work, from my start as an undergraduate research student to the end. I owe great gratitude to the institute manager, Dr. Jan Lub, and the secretarial and computer support staff. I would also like to thank the support staff at the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in Baltimore, in particular Sharon Busching and Alex Framarini whose personal dedication made my many visits to JHU run smoothly.

I thank Rychard Bouwens, Nick Cross, Dan Harris, Simona Mei, Bram Venemans, Wei Zheng and Andrew Zirm for the interesting projects we shared. I further thank the entire Advanced Camera for Surveys Team for their support, the Aspen meetings, and the research that came to be my thesis. I have very much appreciated the extensive, and - most importantly - always positive feedback that I received on each draft paper or proposal. I hope that I will be able to do the same for future colleagues and students. In addition I would like to thank John Blakeslee and Gerhardt Meurer for their pipeline support, and Prof. Myang Li for the exciting experiments. In the Leiden ‘cosmos’ group I have had the good fortune of working with Carlos, Laura, Jaron, Bram, Richard, Andrew, Michiel, Cyril, and Huib, who proved to be good colleagues both professionally and personally.

My greatest thanksgo to my friends and family. Suzanne, Eefje, Marije, Maurits, Bartel, Rogier, Laura, and Isa, I have been lucky to have you as my friends. I hope you will forgive my periods of ‘seclusion’ when overwhelmed by work or other circumstances. I have very much appreciated the warmth and hospitality of Matthijs, Yvonne and Jacob in Zutphen, and of Mario & Deisy in Leiden. I have never had so many nice friends as I had at JHU in Baltimore. I will never forget the lunches at the BMA, Levering and the president’s garden, the insightful friday afternoon teas at the Eisenhower library, the squirrels (they are just like the universe: cute and furry), and the many adventures and parties with our ‘United Nations’: Ricardo, Michele, Boryana, Valentin, Nick, Manu, Victor, and Isa: thank you! My dear parents, my brother Marnix, Natasja, and Isa, thank you for your never-tainting support of my academic ‘extravaganzas’. It would not be worth it without having that.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to an important group often missed in the acknowledgments: the galaxies, without which this thesis could not have been written. Your light has always been there for me in the darkness. Some of you will have ceased your flickering long by now, while others have yet to acquire their luminous wealth. Millions of civilisations have come and gone within the tiny stretch of space that I spied on during my research. Despite the impossibility of direct contact due to the laws of physics, some of them were perhaps even aware of the likeliness that others, as myself, watched them laboriously from our astronomical observatories. May your galactic homes become immortalized by the images in this thesis, a family portrait of the deep, deep space.