On the one hand, gender relations appear to be in flux; on the other hand, they seem to have changed little. Institutional gender discrimination is supposedly a thing of the past in most parts of the Western world (Beck, 2002; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; Castells, 2000; 2004a; 2004b). As success at work is now allegedly based on individual abilities rather than gender, it is often asserted that gender matters less there. Most people talk about their work environment as gender egalitarian and downplay the importance of gender (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998b; Gill, 2002; Henwood, 1998; Jorgensen, 2002; Korvajärvi, 1998). Gender seems to be passé, and feminist claims appear to have been incorporated into the modern world. However, Gill (2007; 2008) analyses how feminist claims are not only incorporated but also repudiated and rendered ineffective by current media discourses. As I show in this chapter, this tendency can also be observed in the work context.

Although gender appears to have lost its binding power in some areas, it seems to be as important as ever in more popular presentations of gender differences (Gray, 1992; Pease and Pease, 1999; Tannen, 1990) and in workplace literature (Cook and Rothwell, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland, 2008). Cameron (2007) analyses how the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus has shaped and influenced linguistic research and fed the belief in gender difference. In the work context it has been argued that women and men speak different languages and that organisations need to become gender bilingual (Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland, 2008), but also that women are particularly suited to a changing work context (Rosener, 1990).

These competing interpretations have also been found in previous academic research. Managers and employees talk about flexible working
practices as if they were gender neutral, but then give examples of women using flexible working to combine their different roles, suggesting that gender does play a role in flexible working (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). In relation to technology design, people talk about women being either equally good designers as men or better designers than men because they understand customers better (Styhre et al., 2005). Nentwich (2004) illustrates how people adopt discourses around either gender sameness or gender difference when they talk about equal opportunities. That gender is simultaneously said to matter and not to matter does not seem theoretically conflicting to them.

In this chapter I look at the interpretative repertoires people had access to when talking about gender. First, I explore the strategies people use to account for the scarcity of women in ICT work. Second, I show why the scarcity of women is regretted. Third, I shift focus to the resources ICT workers have available to talk about gender discrimination, and, fourth, I trace why gender is said to be unimportant. In the accounts people shift between making gender relevant and making it irrelevant, indicating that gender is for most an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) where two truth claims about gender appear to co-exist in common knowledge.

‘I Don’t Know Why’: Accounting for the scarcity of women in ICT work

In the interviews I asked people whether they saw ICT work as a masculine environment. If people appeared hesitant in answering, I added that few women work in ICTs. In most cases people started their replies with ‘I don’t know’.

\textit{Günther:} I don’t know. I see that (-) there are few women. (-) Also at ETH\textsuperscript{1} etc. I don’t know why.

\textit{Elisabeth:} No idea?

\textit{Günther:} I thought, I don’t know (-) we discussed that sometimes at ETH as well, I don’t know. Because, it is not just informatics but engineering professions at large. I don’t know. (-) No clue, really.

Günther’s (32, Redtech) account is littered with ‘I don’t know’ segments. He appears aware that there are few women in ICT work and that this is somehow problematic, but he uses ‘I don’t know’ to indicate that he has no explanation for the scarcity of women in ICT work. ‘I don’t know’s were used strikingly often when talking about gender, and they