view of these authors, the empiricism in much ethnographic research is exaggerated by the widespread tendency to postpone theoretical reflection, if indeed theory comes into the reckoning at all. In Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory, the view of theory as an emergent product of an investigation is systematized. However, the positioning of theory at the outset of an investigation can also be regarded as retaining positivist elements, by virtue of 'theory' being envisioned as something which needs to be tested by recourse to an examination of the real world. The problem here is that, irrespective of whether theory is seen as something which precedes or succeeds the collection of ethnographic data, a basically positivist precept is being adhered to, since the world of the senses is the ultimate arbiter of whether a theory is acceptable or not. Thus the quest for a more explicit grounding of qualitative research in theory (which some writers have expressed – see Chapter 4) supplants the more obvious empiricism of waiting for the theory to emerge, with the positivist preference for being 'entitled to record only that which is actually manifested in experience' (Kolakowski, 1972, p. 11). It is the manner in which theory is conceptualized in relation to the collection of data that points to an affinity with positivism, and not simply whether theory comes before, during, or after the data collection phase.

Qualitative research may also allow the investigator to impute causal processes which bear a strong resemblance to the kinds of causal statements that are the hallmark of quantitative research (although without the precise delineation of cause and effect which quantitative researchers seek to generate). McCleary (1977) conducted participant observation and interviews with parole officers in a division of a state parole agency in Chicago. He notes that officers should report parole violations known to have been committed by their parolees, but frequently they do not. Through his research, he was able to identify five factors which result in officers' disinclination to report their parolees: full reporting cuts into the officer's time; it may reflect badly on the officer and result in a negative evaluation by his or her superior; the officer's options may be restricted as a result of reporting a violation; and so on. Thus, McCleary was able to identify causes of failure to report parolees, whilst retaining fidelity to the perspectives of parole officers themselves.

Quantitative Research and Meaning

The recurring theme within qualitative research of viewing attributes of the social world through the eyes of the people being studied has led to a convention that only methods like participant observation and intensive interviewing are acceptable in this light.

But quantitative researchers also make frequent claims to addressing issues relating to the meaning of aspects of the social world to the people being studied. Social science research on work provides a number of examples of such investigations. The classic study of a sample of adults in the USA by Morse and Weiss (1955) used a survey to discern the range of reasons why people work and what meaning work has for them. The authors found that work does not simply mean the ability to earn money, but has a number of other meanings for people. Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968) conducted a survey in Luton to examine industrial attitudes and behaviour. One of the study's central notions – the idea of 'orientation to work' – draws attention to the variety of meanings which work may have for industrial workers. Finally, in their monograph on social stratification which reports a large scale survey of white-collar employees, Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn (1980) draw attention to the tendency to treat clerks as an undifferentiated category in many discussions of their position in the class structure. By contrast, the purpose of their research was to show that 'the *meaning* of clerical work will not be the same for all engaged in it' (Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn, 1980, p. 112 – emphasis added).

Marsh (1982) has also drawn attention to the capacity of social surveys to provide insights into questions of meaning. For example, the widespread tendency among social researchers to solicit their respondents' reasons for their actions, views, and the like, provides the researcher with people's interpretations of a variety of phenomena. She also points to the research by Brown and Harris (1978), which examined the connection between critical life events (e.g loss of job, death of husband, childbirth) and depression. Marsh observes that the researchers went to great pains to establish the meaning of each life event to each respondent. For example: 'Childbirth was not normally rated severe unless it happened in the context of bad housing and shortage of money' (Marsh, 1982, p. 117).

The field of cognitive social psychology provides a contrasting example of a subject which is explicitly concerned with meaning but which relies heavily upon quantitative experimental research as a prominent data gathering procedure. Cognitive social psychologists are concerned with 'how people make sense of other people and themselves' and 'people's everyday understanding both as the phenomenon of interest and as a basis for theory about people's everyday understanding' (Fiske and Taylor, 1984, p. 17). For example, in the field of leadership research, a prominent interest has been leaders' perceptions of the causes of their subordinates' success or failure (Bryman, 1986). This level of analysis is concerned with everyday understandings of the meanings of success and

failure. Such research has proceeded by experimentally manipulating subordinate behaviour and then gauging leaders' perceptions of the causes of particular levels of that behaviour. Investigators have been particularly concerned to establish the circumstances in which good or poor subordinate performance is deemed by leaders to be a consequence of internal factors (e.g. subordinates' levels of ability or effort), or of external factors (e.g. task difficulty or luck). Thus such research is concerned with the meanings people ascribe to events and to others' behaviour.

It seems, then, that quantitative researchers also make the claim that their methods can gain access to people's interpretations and to the ways in which they view the world.

Participant Observation and Theory Testing

Quantitative research tends to be depicted as well suited to the task of testing explicitly formulated theories, whereas qualitative research is typically associated with the generation of theories. However, there is nothing intrinsic to participant observation, for example, that renders it inappropriate for the testing of preformulated theories. Becker (1958) provided a framework which would facilitate the examination of previously formulated theories by participant observation. He anticipated that his proposed approach would allow qualitative research to assume a more scientific character than that with which it is most closely associated. Other writers, like McCall (1969) and Campbell (1979), have argued along similar lines that the association of qualitative research solely with theory-creation does less than justice to its potential.

Indeed, one of the most celebrated studies using participant observation – Festinger, Riecken and Schachter's (1956) investigation of a religious cult – was designed to test a theory about how people are likely to respond to the disconfirmation of a belief to which they are fervently wedded. The authors suggested that a number of conditions can be envisaged which would allow the belief to be held with greater zeal even when it has been proved to be wrong. Festinger *et al.* learned of a millenarian group that was prophesying the imminent end of the world and felt that it would provide an ideal case for the examination of their theoretical concerns. As mentioned on p. 112, along with some hired observers, they joined the group as participants and 'gathered data about the conviction, commitment and proselytizing activity' (p. 31) of its adherents. More recently, as observed above, some writers have argued for a more explicit approach to the testing of theory by qualitative researchers (e.g. Hammersley, 1985; Hammersley, Scarth and Webb, 1985). Further, the view that qualitative research is compatible with a theory testing approach is implicit in the more

recent treatments of the issue of case study generalization which were mentioned in Chapter 4. It will be recalled that Mitchell (1983) and Yin (1984) have both suggested that the question of the generalizability of case studies (and thereby much qualitative research) misses the central point of such investigations, in that the critical issue is 'the cogency of the theoretical reasoning' (Mitchell, 1983, p. 207). The Festinger, Riecken and Schachter study is a case in point: the representativeness of the cult is not particularly important; it is its relevance to the theoretical framework which constitutes the most important criterion for assessing the study. Accordingly, the view of qualitative research which plays down its role in relation to the testing of theory may be missing an important strength that qualitative investigations possess. In other words, there is nothing intrinsic to the techniques of data collection with which qualitative research is connected that renders them unacceptable as a means of testing theory.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that there are a number of ways in which the posited connection between epistemology and data collection can be questioned: participant observation (and indeed unstructured interviewing) is not without positivist leanings; survey researchers frequently claim to be looking at the social world from their respondents' perspectives; and participant observation can be deployed within a theory testing framework with which the epistemological basis of quantitative research is conventionally associated. None the less, a recurring theme of this book thus far is that a prominent view of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research is that they are competing epistemological positions, each of which is associated with particular approaches to data collection and research strategy. How should we understand the apparent clash between the suggestion presented here that the link between epistemology and method is not clear-cut and the epistemological account of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research?

One of the most unsatisfactory aspects of the epistemological version of the debate is that it is unclear whether its proponents are arguing that there *is* a link between epistemology and method of data collection or whether there *ought* to be such a bond. If the argument is that there *is* such a link, the epistemological argument runs into difficulties. In addition to the points made in the previous section, which suggest that the bond between epistemology and method may be exaggerated, it is also clear that methods like participant observation and unstructured interviewing have been used