D. Attitudes Predict Behavior in Some People More Than in Others

Finally, attitudes are more apt to guide behavior in some people than in others. In Chapter 5 we discussed M. Snyder’s (1979) work on self-monitoring. High self-monitors regard themselves as highly pragmatic and flexible people who strive to be the right person for every occasion. When entering a situation, they do what the model person in the situation would do. Low self-monitors adopt a different orientation. They regard themselves as highly principled people who value consistency between who they are and what they do. When entering a situation, they look inward and use their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings to guide their behavior. Because they value being true to themselves, low self-monitors are more likely to act on the basis of their attitudes than are high self-monitors (M. Snyder, 1982; M. Snyder & Swann, 1976). This appears to be particularly true when attitudes are accessible and available to guide behavior (M. Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982).

E. Theory of Reasoned Action

The variables we have been considering up to this point have involved rather spontaneous behaviors, in which the behavioral expression of an attitude occurs without much planning or forethought. Attitudes also influence long-term, deliberate actions, such as when people decide to go to graduate school or take up golf. In the 1970s, Fishbein and Ajzen (1974, 1975) developed a theory of reasoned action to explain behavior in situations such as these (see also Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977, 1980). The theory, which is shown in Figure 6.7, makes several important assumptions.

First, the theory of reasoned action assumes that attitudes typically arise from a rational process in which a person’s beliefs about an attitude object are weighted by...