Research by Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) suggests that you might even start behaving differently. These investigators first had participants indicate whether or not they were motivated to make their mother proud. Some indicated that they were motivated, and others indicated that they weren’t. Several weeks later, the participants all came to a laboratory and completed a priming task. Half were asked to think about their mother, and half were asked to think about other things (e.g., the route they take to school). Finally, all of the participants were given a test of their verbal ability, in which they were asked to generate as many unique words as they could in five minutes. Fitzsimons and Bargh predicted that thinking about their mother would facilitate the performance of participants who wanted to please their mother but would have little effect on the performance of participants for whom this goal was of lesser importance. Figure 5.5 shows exactly this effect. This finding reveals that merely thinking about another person can influence people’s behavior (see also Shah, 2003a, 2003b).

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Processes of a personal nature also influence the way people think about themselves.

1. Introspection

Introspection occurs when people peer inward and directly consult their attitudes, feelings, and motives. Suppose, for example, I want to know whether I’m a sentimental person. I can look inward and ask myself how I feel during weddings, tearjerker movies, and other occasions relevant to sentimentality. If I feel soft and warm