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race come from implicit as-
sociation tests, a window into
how our unconscious minds
work.

One finding is that we
unconsciously associate
"American" with "white."
Thus, in 2008, some Califor-
nia college students — many
of whom were supporting
Barack Obama for president
— unconsciously treated
Obama as more foreign than
Tony Blair, the former British
prime minister.

Likewise, Americans may
be factually aware that Lucy
Liu is an American actress
and Kate Winslet is British,
but the tests indicated that
Americans considered Liu as
more foreign than Winslet.

Yet we needn't surrender to
our most atavistic impulses.
Prejudice is not immutable,
and overall the progress in
America on race is remark-
able. In 1958, 4 percent of
Americans approved of black-
white marriages; today, 87
percent do.

There's some evidence that
training, metrics and policies
can suppress biases or curb
their impact.

In law enforcement, more
cameras — police car cams
and body cams — create ac-
countability and may improve
behavior.

When Rialto, Calif., intro-
duced body cams on police
officers, there was an 88
percent decline in complaints
filed about police by members
of the public.

Yet an uncomfortable start-
ing point is to understand that
racial stereotyping remains
ubiquitous, and that the chal-
lenge is not a small number of
twisted white supremacists
but something infinitely more
subtle and complex: People
who believe in equality but
who act in ways that perpetu-
ate bias and inequality.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Actor/comedian Robin Williams and his wife, Marsha, attend a movie premiere in Beverly Hills in 2002. Williams, who suffered from depression, committed suicide earlier this month.

A response to the death of Robin Williams

By Jon Carl Lewis

Recently, I felt the need
to offer an apology
for Robin Williams,
as proxy for all those who
have chosen suicide rather
than stick it out another day,
another moment more. But I
won't apologize, exactly. More
like giving some context from
my perspective as someone
who has stood close to that
edge and wondered, "What if?"

Dealing with depression or,
more likely, bipolar disorder,
requires vigilance. One day at
a time sometimes feels way
too long; one needs to be vigi-
lant about choosing life hour
by hour, minute by minute,
when one of those moods
blows into town, leaving one
to wonder what caprice of
emotional storm, what whim
of divine madness has chosen
this moment — this time — to
make an ever-awaited yet ever
unpredictable onslaught.

Even under the blessed
influence of the wonderful
pharmaceuticals — prosthe-
ses for the brain, I call them

— one can feel the regular,
sudden shifts in one's own
temperament. They come as
a reminder to offer a prayer of
gratitude that there are armies
of researchers and caregiv-
ers who have crafted such
aids through their God-given
talents just to keep me on keel
enough to want to stay alive
and be a similar blessing to
someone else through my own
God-given craft.

But human emotions are
strong and unpredictable, and
sometimes a sudden swell
washes over us and causes us
to lose our bearings; we forget
or downplay the value of our
own lives and our own special
niche in God's cosmos, where
we are meant to thrive.

The unguarded or under-
supported brain can some-
times be taken by surprise,
leaving one feeling momen-
tarily topsy-turvy, disoriented
or lost. It is at those times one
can forget all one's blessings
and seek to end it all.

For me, there is that little
voice, that insidious, all-too-
familiar-sounding voice one

hears deep below the sound
of the storm calling one to
sleep, to rest, to quit, to ... to
just stop. To dare to face what
dreams may come, as did
our poor, fallen and hypertal-
ented brother — and countless
others like him. Yet I need
to speak directly to those for
whom these remarks resonate
like the voice of a dear friend.
And what I need to say is this:

Don't try to be strong. Strive
to be weak. Rigid strength will
snap you like a dead tree in a
megastorm. Ask for help. Stay
on your meds — or find some-
thing that works for you. Get
out of your head. Get into your
body. Stretch. Go outside. Cry.
Cry in public, if necessary. Let
yourself fall into loving hands.
Turn to One who can give
you a moment's rest and then
strengthen you with resis-
tance to weather the storm.

The storm will pass. It al-
ways does. Be here for the blue
skies to come.

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