

Our story hurt people

Acknowledging that we have fallen short, *UU World* is committed to sharing in appropriate and respectful ways the inspiring and powerful stories of trans and gender nonbinary people within our faith community.

CHRISTOPHER L. WALTON | 3/6/2019 | SPRING 2019



The “[Progress Pride Flag \[1\]](#)” by Daniel Quasar adds new stripes to acknowledge the push for full inclusion by transgender people, with the white, pink, and light blue stripes, and people of color, with brown and black stripes. (© Quasar Digital, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Transgender and gender nonbinary leaders in the Unitarian Universalist movement, along with their allies and other UUs, are expressing alarm and sharing their pain at reading an essay in the Spring 2019 issue of *UU World*, “After L, G, and B [2]” by contributing editor Kimberly French. I am profoundly saddened and deeply sorry to have caused pain to people who matter to me and whose dignity and worth I had thought we were promoting with the piece. As the magazine’s editor, I was wrong to decide to publish this essay and I apologize for the pain it has caused.

In consultation with the steering committee of TRUUsT (Transgender Religious professional UUs Together, an organization of trans leaders), we are keeping the essay on our website rather than taking it down, but are adding a preface that points to and quotes from this apology. My apology will appear in the original essay’s place in the online Table of Contents.

Many have asked why we published this article. My intent was to model, through a personal essay about one family's experience, ways for the majority of our readers to engage respectfully with trans and nonbinary people; the impact, however, was to hurt and alienate trans and nonbinary people. I can point to three editorial mistakes: I planned an approach to the important topic of trans and gender nonbinary experiences within Unitarian Universalism without enough input from people who identify as nonbinary or trans. We did not model respectful engagement. Additionally, it was hurtful to put a straight, cisgender person's experience in the foreground, especially as one of the first major articles in the magazine on this topic. We should have developed another kind of story in such a prominent spot that centered trans and nonbinary voices. Finally, when we reached out to Alex Kapitan, a leader in the trans and gender nonbinary community, while researching the story and ze urged us [3] against the approach I had picked, I erred in failing to grasp the important cautions ze offered: a story told from a cisgender perspective would cause harm. I believed, falsely, that we could address the concerns within the framework of the story I had commissioned. It was a mistake to disregard this caution, and I apologize.

Several readers have also pointed to specific language in the article that is painful if not traumatic to encounter in the magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Association. These include a reference to jokes at a high school in the 1970s that involved a homophobic slur, a reference to "so-called corrective surgery," and alarming statistics about violence against transgender people that one colleague told me felt "grim without hope." As editors, we did not have enough experience with trans issues to notice the microaggressions throughout the essay that our trans readers are calling to our attention. These specific editorial choices added pain to injury, and for that I apologize.

Acknowledging that we have fallen short, I want to reiterate that *UU World* is committed to sharing in appropriate and respectful ways the inspiring and powerful stories of trans and gender nonbinary people within our faith community. I am committed to listening to and learning from you. To that end, the magazine is making the following commitments going forward:

- We will expand our copy editing and fact checking process to include sensitivity readers who can help us spot what the editors cannot.
- We will redesign the editorial process to invite more input earlier in the planning phase so we can ensure that we are working from plans that will aid rather than harm. We are also looking at ways to evaluate the potential impact of a story as it nears publication.
- We will redouble our efforts to commission essays, reporting, and artwork from trans and nonbinary people, and from a wider set of contributors from marginalized communities.
- We commit to doing more to develop stories that center the voices and experiences of trans and nonbinary UUs.

I work with an amazing team of dedicated people. We want *UU World* to inspire and enrich the lives of its readers—and that’s why we are heartbroken, too, that our work has fallen far short of the mark and hurt many of you. I much more fully appreciate that it is the impact of an act, not its intention, that matters. I am sorry, and you have my commitment that the magazine will do better to live up to our shared Unitarian Universalist values and honor the trust of our readers.

Selected responses to “After L, G, and B”:

- “[What It Takes to De-Center Privilege: The Failure of This Week’s UU World Article \[3\]](#)” by Alex Kapitan
- “[Putting the ‘T’ First: Public Statement on This Week’s UU World Article \[4\]](#)” by TRUUsT Steering Committee
- “[Centering the Marginalized: Symphony and Triptych \[5\]](#)” by CB Beal

Correction

3/7/19: This statement has been modified to use the correct pronouns in reference to Alex Kapitan.

Source URL:

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/apology-spring-2019>



Links

[1] <http://quasar.digital/shop/?v=7516fd43adaa>

[2] <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/after-l-g-b>

[3] <https://rootsgrowthetree.com/2019/03/06/what-it-takes-to-de-center-privilege/>

[4] <https://transuu.org/2019/03/06/putting-the-t-first/>

[5] [https://medium.com/@jpc_cb/centering-the-marginalized-symphony-and-triptych-9dabc93cd461?](https://medium.com/@jpc_cb/centering-the-marginalized-symphony-and-triptych-9dabc93cd461?fbclid=IwAR3nKRgX6eQO5dw9udUQPYUTu_Rp3nm7Ck1T2nBEUQAiJets4X3cs_C-MK0)

[fbclid=IwAR3nKRgX6eQO5dw9udUQPYUTu_Rp3nm7Ck1T2nBEUQAiJets4X3cs_C-MK0](https://medium.com/@jpc_cb/centering-the-marginalized-symphony-and-triptych-9dabc93cd461?fbclid=IwAR3nKRgX6eQO5dw9udUQPYUTu_Rp3nm7Ck1T2nBEUQAiJets4X3cs_C-MK0)