

The Fourth Comment on Gendered Emoji

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1. Introduction

After submitting two separate documents to the registry (16-169, 16-193), as well as commenting on PRI 343, this is now the fourth time that I have to write to the UTC about gender and emoji, not to mention the other people who also offered helpful advice.

Now that the latest draft for TR 51 has been released and nothing I've said or done so far had any apparent effect whatsoever, I will once again bring the UTC's attention to some glaring gaps in the Emoji 5.0 repertoire. I will not reiterate the reasons because I've already done so three times.

I apologize in advance that some of the following passages may sound quite hostile, but it is hard to stay professional when one's pleas have been ignored on so many occasions. However, I also want to state very clearly right from the beginning that the UTC got only themselves to blame for this situation. None of this would have been necessary if emoji had simply remained genderless as they had always been. I do not want to do this, but my conscience forces me to not stand by idly while trans and non-binary erasure takes place.

2. General Observations

From an outsider's perspective the UTC's behaviour appears quite erratic and unstructured.

If a third gender option is not wanted – as must be the case for the UTC's decisions to make any kind of sense – why did ADULT, CHILD and OLDER ADULT get approved for Unicode 10? If ADULT is primarily meant to be used in sequences for professions, why do these sequences still not exist in the draft data? If the UTC does not want to prescribe ZWJ sequences but rather focus on documenting those already in common use, why did they add dozens of profession sequences to the list even though nobody except four Google employees showed any interest in their existence? Why can the fictional ZOMBIE and GENIE be male or female but all PERSONs WITH HEADSCARF are inevitably women?

Is there still any formal, organized decision making and review process involved in the approval of new emoji? Because it certainly does not feel that way from the few bits of information that are made public.

Until the UTC makes a formal announcement about what in the world their stance on gender actually is, I am going to continue to operate under the assumption that the UTC still wants to realise a third gender option and full gender inclusion for all human emoji. Any other possibility would be unacceptable and quite frankly disgusting.

3. Proposed Emoji

In total I propose 3 new emoji characters and 78 new ZWJ sequences (not accounting for sequences with emoji modifiers).

Where there exist two separate emoji characters that represent the same concept, just with different gender, I propose adding a third character that represents the same concept without any gender connotations. This includes:

-  PERSON DANCING, to complement DANCER and MAN DANCING
-  PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT, to complement FATHER CHRISTMAS and MOTHER CHRISTMAS
-  PERSON WITH CROWN, to complement PRINCESS and PRINCE

While it would in theory be possible to implement all these as sequences of Unicode 10 characters, this is definitely not something I recommend. Doing so would imply that the neutral option is some kind of weird, unimportant hack awkwardly stacked on top of the “real” default representation (either male or female, and who is going to decide that?), rather than being the default state itself as is the case with all other emoji. On the same note it should not cost more characters to *not* explicitly specify gender. Therefore encoding separate characters is the only sensible option in my opinion, even if it means that these three emoji won’t be available until at least June 2018.

PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT is an unfortunate compromise since the personification of Christmas has always been male-only in Western culture and traditionally no genderless or gender non-binary derivative exists to my knowledge. However, because Christmas is now explicitly gendered as of Unicode 9, this character must nevertheless exist.

Where two existing characters form a gender pair even though they represent different concepts, and where a character has been restricted to one single gender only with no options available, I propose adding ZWJ sequences using FEMALE SIGN and MALE SIGN respectively, and redefining the affected characters as genderless. This affects:

- MAN WITH GUA PI MAO
- BRIDE WITH VEIL
- MAN IN TUXEDO
- MAN IN BUSINESS SUIT LEVITATING
- PREGNANT WOMAN
- PERSON WITH HEADSCARF
- BEARDED PERSON
- BREAST-FEEDING

The third group of emoji is Family, Kiss and Couple With Heart sequences using ADULT and CHILD. This includes:

- Kiss (Man, Adult)
- Kiss (Woman, Adult)
- Kiss (Adult, Adult)
- Couple with Heart (Man, Adult)
- Couple with Heart (Woman, Adult)
- Couple with Heart (Adult, Adult)
- Family (Man, Child)
- Family (Man, Girl, Child)
- Family (Man, Boy, Child)

- Family (Man, Child, Child)
- Family (Man, Man, Child)
- Family (Man, Man, Girl, Child)
- Family (Man, Man, Boy, Child)
- Family (Man, Man, Child, Child)
- Family (Man, Woman, Child)
- Family (Man, Woman, Girl, Child)
- Family (Man, Woman, Boy, Child)
- Family (Man, Woman, Child, Child)
- Family (Man, Adult, Girl)
- Family (Man, Adult, Girl, Girl)
- Family (Man, Adult, Girl, Boy)
- Family (Man, Adult, Girl, Child)
- Family (Man, Adult, Boy)
- Family (Man, Adult, Boy, Boy)
- Family (Man, Adult, Boy, Child)
- Family (Man, Adult, Child)
- Family (Man, Adult, Child, Child)
- Family (Woman, Child)
- Family (Woman, Girl, Child)
- Family (Woman, Boy, Child)
- Family (Woman, Child, Child)
- Family (Woman, Woman, Child)
- Family (Woman, Woman, Girl, Child)
- Family (Woman, Woman, Boy, Child)
- Family (Woman, Woman, Child, Child)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Girl)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Girl, Girl)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Girl, Boy)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Girl, Child)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Boy)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Boy, Boy)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Boy, Child)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Child)
- Family (Woman, Adult, Child, Child)
- Family (Adult, Girl)
- Family (Adult, Girl, Girl)
- Family (Adult, Girl, Boy)

- Family (Adult, Girl, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Boy)
 - Family (Adult, Boy, Boy)
 - Family (Adult, Boy, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Child, Child)
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- Family (Adult, Adult, Girl)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Girl, Girl)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Girl, Boy)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Girl, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Boy)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Boy, Boy)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Boy, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Child)
 - Family (Adult, Adult, Child, Child)

4. Justification

Factors for Inclusion

A. Compatibility

FATHER CHRISTMAS is a compatibility character for Japanese carrier emoji. With the addition of MOTHER CHRISTMAS – which wasn't needed for compatibility – the UTC has demonstrated that Christmas is a concept that needs to be gendered. Therefore, PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT is needed as a gender-neutral representation of 'a person associated with Christmas'.

DANCER is a compatibility character for Japanese carrier emoji. With the addition of MAN DANCING – which wasn't needed for compatibility – and the subsequent remodelling of DANCER as a female-only character the UTC has demonstrated that dancing is a concept that needs to be gendered. Therefore, PERSON DANCING is needed as a gender-neutral representation of dancing.

PRINCESS is a compatibility character for Japanese carrier emoji. With the addition of PRINCE – which wasn't needed for compatibility – the UTC has demonstrated that royalty is a concept that needs to be gendered. Therefore, PERSON WITH CROWN is needed as a gender-neutral representation of royalty.

MAN WITH GUA PI MAO is a compatibility character for Japanese carrier emoji. The UTC expressed the goal of allowing gender-specific variants for human emoji. This character depicts a human and therefore must have gendered ZWJ sequences as well.

BRIDE WITH VEIL is a compatibility character for Japanese carrier emoji. The UTC expressed the goal of allowing gender-specific variants for human emoji. This character depicts a human and therefore must have gendered ZWJ sequences as well.

MAN IN BUSINESS SUIT LEVITATING is a compatibility character for the Wingdings/Webdings set. The UTC expressed the goal of allowing gender-specific variants for human emoji. This character depicts a human and therefore must have gendered ZWJ sequences as well.

B. Expected usage level

The origin of MAN IN TUXEDO is difficult to track down, but since it was added to Unicode without being required for legacy mappings the original proposal must have proven the usefulness of this character. It is a human emoji and must therefore have gendered variants.

The origin of PREGNANT WOMAN is difficult to track down, but since it was added to Unicode without being required for legacy mappings the original proposal must have proven the usefulness of this character. It is a human emoji and must therefore have gendered variants.

The usefulness of PERSON WITH HEADSCARF was proven by Rayouf Alhumedhi, Aphelandra Messer, Ayisha Irfan, Alexis Ohanian, and Jennifer 8. Lee in document L2/16-284. It is a human emoji and must therefore have gendered variants.

The usefulness of BEARDED PERSON was proven by Craig Jones in document L2/16-260. It is a human emoji and must therefore have gendered variants.

The usefulness of BREAST-FEEDING was proven by Rachel W. Lee in document L2/16-280. It is a human emoji and must therefore have gendered variants.

ZWJ sequences representing gender-specific glyphic subsets of FAMILY, COUPLE WITH HEART and KISS were documented by The Unicode Consortium because of their widespread usage on iOS and later Windows devices where they originate from. Currently all possible combinations using Unicode 9 characters are documented. My proposal simply extends the set to also use the new Unicode 10 characters ADULT and CHILD.

C. Image distinctiveness

The only difference between male and female emoji variants in most existing fonts is hair style and the general shape of the face. These subtle differences can be very hard to make out, especially at small font sizes. Genderless emoji variants would likely be no exception to this rule. Vendors are probably going to base their gender-neutral emoji on their design for ADULT, the same way their male and female emoji are based on MAN and WOMAN. Hopefully they will be able to create distinct appearances.

D. Completeness

The holes in the current Emoji 5.0 draft repertoire are very obvious by simply looking at a list of all available emoji. The omissions appear to follow no regular pattern; variants are missing seemingly at random. The singular, male-only MAN WITH GUA PI MAO for example is surrounded by a whole army of themed gender pairs on an emoji keyboard. Clothes like the turban or bunny ears are available for two genders, even though they are traditionally primarily worn by only men or women respectively. One would expect the same to be true for the guā pí mào, however this specific item cannot be worn by pictographic women. How does this make sense?

This proposal simply seeks to fill those random holes and establish a coherent, complete set of symbols.

E. Frequently requested

As mentioned earlier, this is already the fourth time that I made this request in some way or form. In addition to that, several people provided feedback on various public review issues, stating their support for a third gender option and for additional gender options for single-gender characters:

- PRI 312: one person (Rainer Seitel)
- PRI 321: one person (KC Saff)
- PRI 330: two people (E., Alex Dunn), not counting myself

Furthermore three gender-neutral emoji were part of a successful proposal by Paul D. Hunt (L2/16-317). While that specific proposal only requested the addition of ADULT, CHILD and OLDER ADULT, it also laid out more general arguments for full gender inclusion.

Factors for Exclusion***F. Overly specific***

The genderless emoji proposed here are actually *less* specific than their already existing, gendered counterparts.

While gendered variants of pictographs representing simple activities indeed are overly specific, the UTC has decided that this overspecification is wanted, so this point is mute.

G. Open-ended

The neutral gender option is meant to be used for all genders that aren't male or female, and for use cases where gender information is not required. Thus, the number of gender options for emoji will always be limited to 3. However, as a consequence of this the UTC is going to have to add two separate emoji sequences for every human-like character they may add in a future update, with the only exception being infants as explained in my very first comment (L2/16-169).

H. Already representable

The explicit gendering of every single human emoji as is currently practised by the UTC makes it completely impossible to convey certain concepts in pictographic, plain-text form without also needlessly specifying gender in some cases (dancing, royalty). It also makes it impossible to specify the correct gender in other cases (pregnancy, wearing hats, levitating etc.).

Ever since the UTC started documenting ZWJ sequences vendors have been cautious to implement special rendering for sequences that aren't also acknowledged by Unicode, mostly adding ligatures as hidden easter eggs that aren't actually obtainable through standard input methods. Many vendors likely won't support the missing sequences if they are not part of Unicode.

I. Logos, brands etc.

Wearing a Chinese cap, getting married, wearing a tuxedo, levitating in a business suit, being pregnant, wearing a headscarf, having a beard, nursing a baby, dancing, being a personification of a Christian holiday, being of royal status, kissing, being a couple and being a family are all generic concepts that aren't associated with any particular brand, don't feature branded or copyrighted imagery, and aren't associated with specific real people or deities – with the possible exception of Christmas, obviously, but the approval of FATHER CHRISTMAS and MOTHER CHRISTMAS set a precedent that this specific case is acceptable.

J. Transient

Gender has been a part of human culture for several millenia and – despite widespread belief otherwise – so have non-binary genders. All emoji proposed here are variations of existing ones which already must have been proven not to be of faddish, short-lived popularity.

K. Like compatibility emoji

The whole point of this proposal is to add slightly different variations of existing emoji to fill certain gaps. However, the UTC evidently approves of this as long as it involves gender, see the many ZWJ additions in Emoji 4.0.

5. Data

The properties of PERSON DANCING, PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT and PERSON WITH CROWN shall be identical to those of the original characters they derive from. In collation order they should appear before their two gendered counterparts since they represent exactly the same concept, just more generic.

Data for ZWJ sequences is contained in the separate text file that has been submitted together with this document. Sequence names have been chosen as to avoid collisions with the characters' formal identifiers.

Don't forget to change the CLDR short names of the eight characters that this proposal adds ZWJ sequences for from "man/woman doing X" to "person doing X".

Also don't forget to add the profession sequences using ADULT that aren't explicitly listed in this proposal to the list. I assume that these entries already exist in some internal draft data file since said sequences have been discussed for quite a long time.

6. Sample Images

No coloured sample images of the proposed ZWJ sequences exist at the moment because I am not an artist.

Glyphs for the three newly proposed characters have been based on existing code chart images.

