

Revised Proposal to Fill the Gaps in the Emoji 5.0 Repertoire

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1. Introduction

It was unfortunate timing that I submitted my last proposal on the same day the ESC published its own document that addressed many of the same issues (L2/17-071). I have revised my proposal so that it only includes emoji that aren't already covered in 17-071 now.

Once again the issue is gender. Unicode must enable three visually distinct gender variants for **every** emoji that depicts an adult human being. Anything short of that would be an insult to the continuous effort of allowing better gender representation that started all the way back in Summer 2016 and would also be contradictory to many decisions the UTC and ESC have made in the intervening time. At the very least I expect self-consistency from a standardization committee.

Since I have already written to the Unicode Consortium on this issue before I will not reiterate the reasons for why these emoji are absolutely necessary. See documents 16-169 and 16-193.

2. Proposed Emoji

In total I propose one new emoji character and 70 new ZWJ sequences (110 when accounting for sequences with emoji modifiers).

All ZWJ sequences should be included in the emoji data as soon as possible. This is particularly urgent for the three characters U+1F931 BREAST-FEEDING, U+1F9D4 BEARDED PERSON, and U+1F9D5 PERSON WITH HEADSCARF. **Vendors must not have the opportunity to implement U+1F931 and U+1F9D5 as female and U+1F9D4 as male.** The whole reason why these characters were assigned a gender-agnostic name in the first place is to avoid gendering them by default. Nothing will have been achieved if vendors are forced to treat U+1F9D5 without any modifiers as a woman. These changes **must** happen before vendors have a chance to update their fonts to Emoji 5.0. It is not enough to reserve these additions for some undefined point in the future. "In the future" is too late. By that point major emoji platforms will already have employed these characters the wrong way.

Assigning the CLDR short name 'woman with headscarf' to U+1F9D5 was a terrible mistake and counteracts Unicode's own stated goals. Currently there are two possibilities:

- U+1F9D5 is female by default. Therefore, choosing the word 'person' for the identifier was completely pointless and did not affect anything.
- U+1F9D5 is genderless by default. Therefore, there currently does not exist an emoji of a woman with headscarf, meaning the original proposal by Alhumedhi et al. that resulted in the addition of this character was not fulfilled.

Changing the short name to 'person with headscarf' and adding two gendered ZWJ sequences as quickly as possible is the only way to solve this.

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

- 🎅 PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT, to complement FATHER CHRISTMAS and MOTHER CHRISTMAS

While it would in theory be possible to implement this as a sequence of Unicode 10 characters (ADULT + CHRISTMAS TREE perhaps), 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 code units to *not* explicitly specify gender. Therefore encoding a separate character is the only sensible option in my opinion, even if it means that this particular 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 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 if that is not already the case. This affects:

- PREGNANT WOMAN (currently only female)
- PERSON WITH HEADSCARF (currently only female)
- BEARDED PERSON (currently only neutral, but likely to be male in practise)
- BREAST-FEEDING (currently only neutral, but likely to be female in practise)

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)

- 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)

Yes, it's a lot of sequences but that is the prize one pays for equality. There are male and female people whose partners are non-binary. There are male and female children whose siblings are non-binary. There are male and female parents whose children are non-binary and vice versa. This is not any more or less unusual than the combinations that already exist in Unicode.

Emoji 4.0 added 623 emoji that were just gender and skin tone variants of already existing ones. The 110 proposed in this very document won't be much of a burden on implementers in comparison, considering that they can create all of these emoji by simply reusing designs they had already made or still have to make regardless for Emoji 5.0 support.

All the other emoji I consider crucially important in this context are already included in the ESC document mentioned earlier. The same arguments given here apply to those as well.

3. Justification

The UTC itself already justified the addition of all the emoji proposed in this document by approving gendered ZWJ sequences in Emoji 4.0 and three explicitly genderless emoji in Unicode 10.

Characters like MOTHER CHRISTMAS were added for the sole purpose of filling perceived gender gaps but without any noteworthy interest in their existence from anyone outside of Unicode. It would be unfair to hold the emoji proposed here to any higher standard than that, especially considering that – unlike MOTHER CHRISTMAS – **the people represented by my proposed emoji actually exist in the real world** and currently cannot properly express themselves through emoji. Withholding these emoji until “someone can demonstrate that they would be more than edge cases in terms of usage” is obscene and unacceptable.

Factors for Inclusion

A. Compatibility

Not applicable.

B. Expected usage level

The Consortium surely would not have approved gendered variants of existing emoji if there had not been strong demand for them. This proposal merely does the same for the few characters that were missed the first and second time around. Affected characters are either pure compatibility characters from legacy sets for which the expected usage argument does not apply, or were added after various proposals proved their usefulness and popularity.

C. Image distinctiveness

The only differences between male and female emoji variants in most existing fonts are hair style, breast size, the general shape of the face, and colour/design of clothing. These subtle differences can be very hard to make out especially at small font sizes (and don't have anything to do with gender, but that's another issue entirely). 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, female-only PERSON WITH HEADSCARF for example is surrounded by a whole army of themed gender pairs on an emoji keyboard. Clothes like the turban or bunny ears (or more recently even the *guā pí mào*) are available for two or more genders, even though they are traditionally primarily worn by only men or women respectively. One would expect the same to be true for the headscarf – which for all intents and purposes is just a rectangular piece of cloth –, however this specific item cannot be worn by pictographic men. How does this make sense?

E. Frequently requested

In addition to myself writing to the UTC numerous times, 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 Unicode Consortium has decided that this overspecification is wanted, so this point is moot.

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 or wanted. 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

In some cases, the explicit gendering of every single human emoji as is currently practised by Unicode makes it completely impossible to convey certain concepts in pictographic, plain-text form without also needlessly specifying gender. In other cases, it makes it impossible to specify the correct gender, which is probably even worse.

Ever since the UTC started documenting ZWJ sequences – especially those that weren't actually employed by anyone at all at the time of documentation – 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.

Not applicable.

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 – otherwise they wouldn't have been added.

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 Unicode Consortium evidently approves of this as long as it involves gender.

4. Data

The properties of PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT shall be identical to those of the original characters it derives from. In collation order it should appear before its two gendered counterparts since it represents 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 for convenience. 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 characters that are still explicitly gendered from 'man/woman doing X' to 'person doing X'.

5. Sample Images

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

6. Addendum: A Plea

Of all the messages I wrote to the UTC about emoji, the majority were concerning gender. I have honestly lost track of how many of my comments exist now between document submissions and PRI feedback, but believe me when I say that I would not be doing this if it was not important.

Unicode could do wonderful things with fully representative emoji, empowering millions of disenfranchised people around the globe. But every time Unicode makes another small step in the right direction it reluctantly stops just short of the finish line for reasons that are never adequately explained. Unicode refuses to add certain emoji “unless a major vendor pushes for them” while many other emoji that aren’t in any way, shape or form different get approved without much hesitation. And nobody explains why.

I am not trying to imply anything, but the reasons for rejecting the condom and sanitary pad emoji last year were never made public either. The only available pieces of information are short, single lines of text buried in the minutes for UTC 148, and they read identical to the rejection notice for the admittedly silly salt shaker emoji I proposed.

I want everyone involved in the emoji approval process to reflect thoroughly on their personal views of our world and the people living within before they make decisions that affect billions of electronic devices on all seven continents.

I wrote my first comment on gender back in May of 2016, followed by another only six weeks later. Both documents were discussed at UTC 148 in August. That is how long all of you have known about this issue. ADULT, CHILD and OLDER ADULT were proposed in October and accepted in November. Paul Hunt’s proposal made it exceptionally clear why gender inclusion is important.

And yet, despite all of that, I am sitting here in late March and still have to defend the existence of a funny little picture that shows a human who is not female *and* has a piece of cloth wrapped around their head at the same time.

I elaborated on this numerous times in the past but I will state it again for clarity: **Gender has nothing to do with physiology or appearance.** Nothing. Men can and do get pregnant. Heck, even *cisgender* men can get pregnant if they happen to have a uterus. Yes, that is possible. Mother Nature does not care about our human definitions and categories. And gendered emoji have always been about gender identity and not gender display, regardless of what some early draft of TR #51 might have said to the contrary. The ZWJ sequences are even called ‘man judge’, ‘woman judge’, ‘man pilot’, ‘woman pilot’ etc. That is unambiguously gender identity.

One of the few cases where there actually was any noteworthy interest in gendered variants from the public before the release of Emoji 4.0 was the female runner. Female athletes wanted a version of U+1F3C3 RUNNER that looks like the WOMAN emoji and they got one. Why can’t transgender people, non-binary people and gender non-conforming people get emoji that represent them? Somebody tell me a logical, objective, self-consistent reason why none of the emoji proposed here or in L2/17-071 were part of Emoji 4.0 or 5.0 months ago. And no, “vendors may not want to” is **not** a valid response.

If better gender representation is not your goal then stop pretending it is. And if better gender representation *is* your goal then please, for the love of God, **stop working actively against it.**