Proposal to enable gender inclusive emoji representation

To: Unicode Consortium
From: Paul D. Hunt
Date: 24 October 2016

Proposal abstract

Although UTR #51 requests that emoji generally be presented in a gender neutral way, current practice is to provide humanized, gendered appearance for a rather large set of characters. Unfortunately, the only options currently available in a majority of these situations are exclusively feminine or masculine presentations. The purpose of this proposal is to suggest emoji mechanisms for portraying gender expression in emoji in a more inclusive way. For purposes of emoji presentation, *gender inclusive* should be interpreted as a humanized appearance that employs visual cues that are common to all genders by excluding stereotypes that are either explicitly masculine or feminine, as can currently be observed in the MAN/BOY and WOMAN/GIRL emoji.
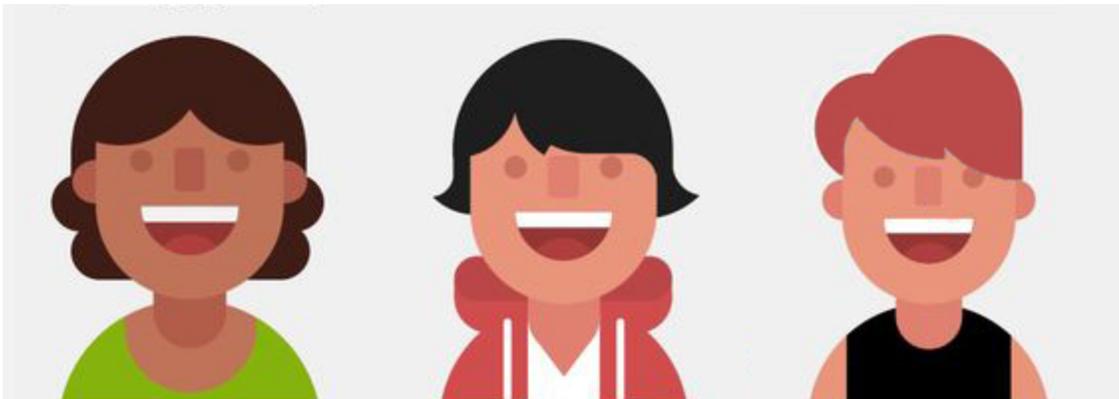

Fig. 1: *Human depictions that can readily be interpreted as gender inclusive, designed by Gregory Hartman for Duolingo*

These mechanisms can be summarized as follows:

1. The addition of **three new emoji characters** depicting persons with gender inclusive visual attributes. These should be designed so that the resulting appearance of the emoji glyph shall be open to interpretation in terms of gender without implying masculine or feminine gender explicitly. The suggested names for these characters are:
   - ADULT (to correspond with MAN/WOMAN)
   - CHILD (to correspond with BOY/GIRL)
   - OLDER ADULT (to correspond with OLDER MAN/OLDER WOMAN)
2. **One character with Emoji property values set to Yes** in the data files for TR #51 v5.0, and be added to StandardizedVariants.txt in Unicode 10.0. This is needed in order **to be used in ZWJ combining sequences** with emoji people characters to denote gender inclusive

representation. A list of possible candidates is provided below in ranked order based on the perceived relative strengths of each option.

- ☿ (U+263F, MERCURY)
    - pros: Already in Unicode. Distinctive appearance. Long history of symbolic usage in mythology, philosophy, and biology to indicate inclusion of both feminine and masculine gender characteristics corresponding to ♀ and ♂ .
    - cons: ?
- ⊕ (U+2641, EARTH)
    - pros: Already in Unicode. Distinctive appearance. Long history of symbolic usage in mythology, philosophy, and biology to indicate inclusion of both feminine and masculine gender characteristics corresponding to ♀ and ♂ .
- cons: ?⚲ (U+26B2, NEUTER)
    - pros: Already in Unicode. Somewhat distinctive appearance.
    - cons: Devoid of cultural history and symbolism afforded to ♂ and ♀. Carries negative connotation of having been neutered. More accurately conveys the meaning of complete exclusion of gender attributes instead of gender inclusiveness.

Rationale

This proposal is a logical extension from Google's proposal for 'Expanding Emoji Professions: Reducing Gender Inequality'. Whereas that proposal focuses primarily on improving the representation of women, this document advocates for basic options for inclusive gender representation in emoji.

Current Unicode standards only allow for masculine or feminine gendered emoji representations. This becomes problematic when the gender of the referent does not conform to MAN or WOMAN or is otherwise unknown. If an author desires to refer to a doctor using emoji today, they must choose one of the following sequences:

1. man health worker: (U+1F468 U+200D U+2695 U+FE0F) □
2. woman health worker: (U+1F468 U+200D U+2695 U+FE0F) □

There is no health worker emoji with inclusive gender representation. As proposed, an ADULT character as an alternative base to MAN or WOMAN would provide one way to illustrate this. While this proposal seeks to provide inclusive gender options for emoji presentation, it does not address avoiding gendered representation entirely. The author's 'Proposal for mechanisms for opting out of gendered emoji representation, 1.02' addresses these concerns.

Factors for Inclusion

A. Compatibility

The compatibility argument for including of the proposed characters are actually forward-looking. The impetus for proposing these characters is to serve as gender inclusive alternatives to the current gendered and to serve as base characters for additional occupation emoji ZWJ sequences. As with

other humanized emoji forms, it is expected that these characters would be included as part of the set to which skin tone modifiers can be applied.

B. Expected Usage

1. Frequency

As with all topics gender-related, it is difficult to make assumptions about how people identify and how they would like to express themselves. Gender inclusive representations may be chose for a variety of reasons: gender is unimportant as part of communication, gender is unknown, gender does not correspond to either WOMAN or MAN emoji representations, &c. In order to make estimates in this regard with any degree of accuracy, an in-depth study would need to be performed.

2. Multiple usages

It is anticipated that adoption of this proposal's suggestions will provide desirable gender expression options for emoji users who would prefer to use personified emoji forms without explicit masculine or feminine visual attributes. Additionally, it is expected that the proposed characters would be used as emoji modifier bases for creating gender inclusive emoji for occupations.

3. Emotional Content

It is expected that the addition of gender inclusive representations of emoji people will generate a positive emotional response by people who desire to use humanized emoji representations without indicating specific gender.

4. Persistence

With increased scrutiny of gender expression in emoji, several correspondents have submitted feedback to Unicode highlighting current options as not being inclusive enough. The purpose of this proposal is to address these concerns.

C. Image distinctiveness 👩‍💼👤‍💼🧔‍💼
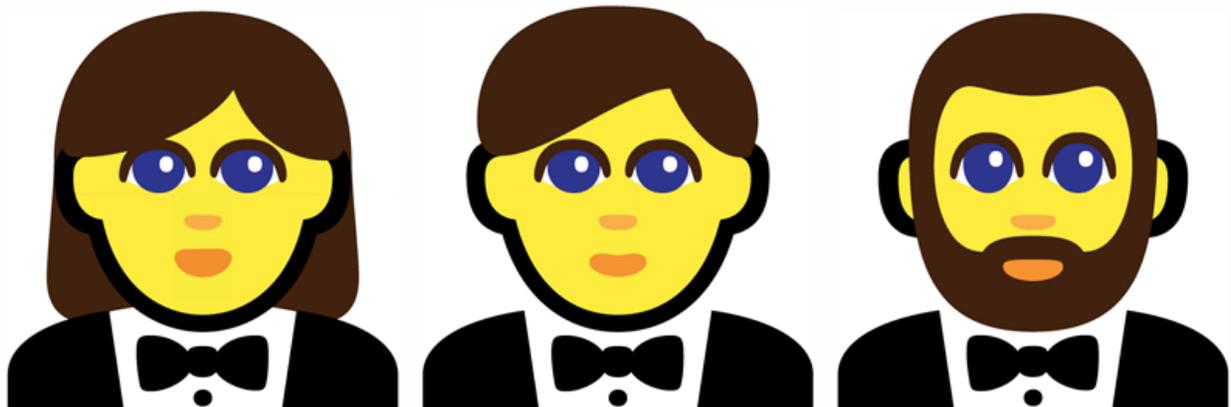
Fig. 4: *U+1F935 presented with typically feminine, gender inclusive, and masculine features, respectively.*

Interpretation of gender expression traits is already highly subjective, particularly across cultures. However, this proposal maintains that it is possible to utilize a set of shared visual gender cues to arrive at an gender inclusive emoji appearance.

D. Completeness

Gender inclusive representation, by definition in this document, seeks to represent all people using a minimal set of emoji characters that corresponds to already existing explicitly gendered forms. Additional gender inclusive emoji glyphs can be derived using the ZWJ mechanism described in the proposal abstract. As such, this proposal's request can be viewed as being finite and complete with the addition of the characters and ZWJ mechanism described.

E. Frequently requested

The following items of feedback regarding the lack of gender inclusive representation have already been provided directly to the Unicode Consortium:
- Accumulated Feedback on PRI #321
  - Re: PRI #321: UTS #52, Unicode Emoji Mechanisms – by KC Saff:
    - *'The neutral gender should also be added for the existing binary gendered emoji.'*
  - PRI #321 feedback: Gender_Base list – by Peter Edeberg:
    - *'It is probably not a good idea to use the neutral tag to produce generic ADULT or CHILD emojis without a particular gender presentation (since the neutral tag could be ignored). A better approach for those would be to encode separate characters.'*
- L2/16-169: Comment on Document L2/16-160 Concerning Emoji Gender Pairs for Professions – by Charlotte Buff:
  - *'Not all people are either entirely male or entirely female. Admittedly these so-called non-binary people make up a significantly small part of the population, however they are important to remember.'*
- L2/16-193: Another Comment on Gendered Emoji – by Charlotte Buff:
  - *'You simply cannot have full gender representation by only considering the two most common genders [man & woman]... Of course there is no way to distinguish all genders in emoji form because the set of all genders is theoretically endless. That is why the gender-neutral display is so important as a catch-all option for people who are neither male nor female, and of course for users who don't want to specify gender at all when they use emoji.'*
- Accumulated Feedback on PRI #330
  - Gender in Proposed Update UTR #51, Unicode Emoji (Version 4.0) – by E:
    - *'[Professions emoji] need a third gender option so they don't exclude genderqueer people.'*

- ○ PRI #330: Gender in Emoji – by Charlotte Buff:
  - *'Without gender options for all people emoji and without a third gender available Unicode will only further cement the wrong and discriminatory view that only two genders exist, and that gender stereotypes are not only true but also encouraged.'*

Factors for Exclusion

F. Overly specific

The three proposed emoji characters can hardly be construed to be more specific than any other encoded emoji character.

G. Open-ended

See section D above.

H. Already representable

While it can be construed that any of the smiley and stick figure emoji could be used to represent neutral gender, they are typically abstracted so far as to denote emotions (in the form of smileys) and actions (in the form of stick figures) and not depicted in the figure of human persons. Because existing gendered emoji are exclusively MAN/BOY or WOMAN/GIRL, the argument in this proposal is that gender inclusive representations are needed to be representative of all people.

I. Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

None of these factors apply.

J. Evidence of Frequency

All emoji users are people, but not all people have sufficient emoji presentation options to communicate their personal gender identity. Gender inclusive emoji representation seeks to provide a solution for this discrepancy.

ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2/WG 2
PROPOSAL SUMMARY FORM TO ACCOMPANY SUBMISSIONS
FOR ADDITIONS TO THE REPERTOIRE OF ISO/IEC 10646[1]
Please fill all the sections A, B and C below.
Please read Principles and Procedures Document (P & P) from http://std.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/principles.html for guidelines and details before filling this form.
Please ensure you are using the latest Form from http://std.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/summaryform.html.
See also http://std.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/roadmaps.html for latest *Roadmaps*.

A. Administrative

1. **Title:** *Proposal to enable gender inclusive emoji representation*
2. Requester's name: *Paul D. Hunt*
3. Requester type (Member body/Liaison/Individual contribution): *Individual Contributor*
4. Submission date: *31 October 2016*
5. Requester's reference (if applicable):
6. Choose one of the following:
   This is a complete proposal: *X*
   (or) More information will be provided later:

B. Technical – General

1. Choose one of the following:
   a. This proposal is for a new script (set of characters):
      Proposed name of script:
   b. The proposal is for addition of character(s) to an existing block: *X*
      Name of the existing block: *Supplemental Symbols and Pictographs*
2. Number of characters in proposal:
3. Proposed category (select one from below - see section 2.2 of P&P document):
   A-Contemporary   B.1-Specialized (small collection)   B.2-Specialized (large collection)
   C-Major extinct   D-Attested extinct   E-Minor extinct
   F-Archaic Hieroglyphic or Ideographic   G-Obscure or questionable usage symbols
4. Is a repertoire including character names provided? *YES*
   a. If YES, are the names in accordance with the "character naming guidelines"
      in Annex L of P&P document? *YES*
   b. Are the character shapes attached in a legible form suitable for review? *YES*
5. Fonts related:
   a. Who will provide the appropriate computerized font to the Project Editor of 10646 for publishing the standard?
      I intend to provide such a font
   b. Identify the party granting a license for use of the font by the editors (include address, e-mail, ftp-site, etc.):

6. References:
   a. Are references (to other character sets, dictionaries, descriptive texts etc.) provided? *YES*
   b. Are published examples of use (such as samples from newspapers, magazines, or other sources)
      of proposed characters attached? *NO*
7. Special encoding issues:
   Does the proposal address other aspects of character data processing (if applicable) such as input,
   presentation, sorting, searching, indexing, transliteration etc. (if yes please enclose information)?

8. Additional Information:
Submitters are invited to provide any additional information about Properties of the proposed Character(s) or Script that will assist in correct understanding of and correct linguistic processing of the proposed character(s) or script. Examples of such properties are: Casing information, Numeric information, Currency information, Display behaviour information such as line breaks, widths etc., Combining behaviour, Spacing behaviour, Directional behaviour, Default Collation behaviour, relevance in Mark Up contexts, Compatibility equivalence and other Unicode normalization related information. See the Unicode standard at http://www.unicode.org for such information on other scripts. Also see Unicode Character Database (http://www.unicode.org/reports/tr44/) and associated Unicode Technical Reports for information needed for consideration by the Unicode Technical Committee for inclusion in the Unicode Standard.

C. Technical - Justification

1. Has this proposal for addition of character(s) been submitted before?	*NO*
If YES explain	
2. Has contact been made to members of the user community (for example: National Body, user groups of the script or characters, other experts, etc.)?	*NO*
If YES, with whom?	
If YES, available relevant documents:	
3. Information on the user community for the proposed characters (for example: size, demographics, information technology use, or publishing use) is included?	*Emoji users*
Reference:	
4. The context of use for the proposed characters (type of use; common or rare)	*Very common*
Reference:	
5. Are the proposed characters in current use by the user community?	*NO*
If YES, where? Reference:	
6. After giving due considerations to the principles in the P&P document must the proposed characters be entirely in the BMP?	*NO*
If YES, is a rationale provided?	
If YES, reference:	
7. Should the proposed characters be kept together in a contiguous range (rather than being scattered)?	
8. Can any of the proposed characters be considered a presentation form of an existing character or character sequence?	*NO*
If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?	
If YES, reference:	
9. Can any of the proposed characters be encoded using a composed character sequence of either existing characters or other proposed characters?	
If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?	
If YES, reference:	
10. Can any of the proposed character(s) be considered to be similar (in appearance or function) to, or could be confused with, an existing character?	*NO*
If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?	
If YES, reference:	
11. Does the proposal include use of combining characters and/or use of composite sequences?	*NO*
If YES, is a rationale for such use provided?	
If YES, reference:	
Is a list of composite sequences and their corresponding glyph images (graphic symbols) provided?	
If YES, reference:	
12. Does the proposal contain characters with any special properties such as control function or similar semantics?	*NO*
If YES, describe in detail (include attachment if necessary)	
13. Does the proposal contain any Ideographic compatibility characters?	*NO*
If YES, are the equivalent corresponding unified ideographic characters identified?	
If YES, reference:	