

Analysis of Emoji Proposals for Gender-Specific Additions

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1. Background

In November 2016, the UTC added gender to the Unicode standard. This was executed rather poorly, even though many people – including myself – offered helpful feedback and suggestions for improvements in advance. Despite repeated requests, the UTC has thus far been reluctant to correct the manifold of issues that arose as a consequence of the Emoji 4.0 update and subsequent releases. In particular, there are still at least 35 gendered emoji characters and sequences that remain unencoded.

The explanation for this glaring problem has always been that the need for the missing gendered emoji had not been sufficiently demonstrated. This implies that the UTC considers each gendered variant of the same base character an entirely different emoji, in contrast to skin tone variants which are always applied indiscriminately to all suitable symbols. So while the approval of *'Person Doing X, Fitzpatrick Type N'* is inherent in the approval of *'Person Doing X'*, a *'Man Doing X'* and *'Woman Doing X'* would need to be justified independently as if they were wholly separate concepts. This is the only logical conclusion that can result from the UTC's actions and statements regarding the missing gender variants.

That being said, I have looked at every single publicly available proposal document that resulted in the addition of gendered emoji to Unicode and I could not find even one single instance where the [selection factors for emoji proposals](#) had been fulfilled. Out of the 122 relevant emoji in Emoji 5.0, **2** were added without any proposal ever even mentioning them beforehand, **39** were only mentioned in documents that did not address why the pictographs in question were necessary, and the remaining **81** were only justified with a bare minimum amount of reasoning that did not even come close to the level of scrutiny that had been applied to many other emoji submissions in the past, gender-related or not.

If it is true that gender variants need to be defended in their own right – as must evidently be the case considering how often the missing ones have been rejected – then the UTC has thus far approved the addition of at least 122 new emoji without applying these criteria.

2. Detailed Analysis

This is a breakdown of every single gendered emoji and their corresponding proposals. Characters that solely exist for round-trip compatibility purposes and those emoji that are only available as one single gender have not been considered. The emoji submission process evolved over time, so I have tried to judge each emoji roughly according to the rules and guidelines that existed when they were originally proposed.

2.1. Emoji without Proposals

Female Person Climbing, Male Person Climbing [2]

Relevant document: [L2/16-247](#) (*Proposal for “Climber” Emoji*)

The author of L2/16-247 requested a generic climber emoji with no variants of any kind. Nothing gender-related was ever mentioned anywhere in the entire document. No other proposals for climbing emoji exist in the document registry.

2.2. Emoji without Justification

Male Office Worker, Male Health Worker, Male Scientist, Male Student, Male Technologist, Male Factory Worker, Male Mechanic, Male Farmer, Male Cook, Male Teacher, Male Singer [11]

Relevant document: [L2/16-160](#) (*Expanding Emoji Professions: Reducing Gender Inequality*)

L2/16-160 advocated for the addition of eleven female emoji, but did not once present an argument for male versions. The entire document was dedicated to female emoji and their alleged importance; their male counterparts weren't mentioned until page 5 where they occurred in an off-hand subclause without any further elaboration. The authors didn't even bother to draw representative glyphs of the male versions. None of the emoji selection factors were addressed.

Female Artist, Male Artist, Female Firefighter, Male Firefighter, Female Pilot, Male Pilot, Female Astronaut, Male Astronaut, Female Judge, Male Judge [10]

Relevant document: [L2/16-221R2](#) (*Additional ZWJ Sequences for Professions*)

L2/16-221R2 consists of nothing but a short introductory paragraph and a wish list. The author did not explain how these five professions were chosen, why they needed to be emoji, and why each one needed to be encoded twice (once male, once female). None of the emoji selection factors were addressed.

Female Fairy, Male Fairy, Female Vampire, Male Vampire, Female Zombie, Male Zombie, Female Mage, Male Mage, Female Elf, Male Elf, Female Genie, Male Genie, Female Merperson, Male Merperson [14]

Relevant documents: [L2/16-304](#) (*Fantasy Characters Proposal for Unicode v10*)

[L2/16-274](#) (*Mermaid Emoji Submission*)

L2/16-304 proposed the addition of FAIRY, VAMPIRE, ZOMBIE, MERPERSON (here called 'Mermaid') ELF, and GENIE as atomic characters with gender-neutral display and provided evidence of popularity. It also recommended these characters form sequences with FEMALE SIGN and MALE SIGN like previous Emoji 4.0 additions, but never said why. The possibility was solely mentioned in a one-sentence paragraph on the first page and never expanded upon in the rest of the document. The search data provided did not contain any reference to

gender, and the assessment of selection factors made no attempts at justifying gender variants of the proposed characters.

Female Mage and Male Mage were originally proposed as two sets of ZWJ sequences using the (rejected) emoji Magic Wand and Magic Hat. Other than that their situation is identical to the emoji mentioned previously, with nothing in the document speaking in favour of two differently gendered versions of each.

L2/16-274 also called for the addition of MERPERSON, albeit only for the female variant. While the proposal itself is well-formed, the author never explained why the emoji had to be female or any gender for that matter.

Female Person in Steamy Room, Male Person in Steamy Room [2]

Relevant document: [L2/16-197](#) (*Sauna Emojis Submission*)

Again, even though the proposal presented a compelling case for a sauna or steamy room emoji, there was no word about why male and female versions of it needed to be added as well. The possibility of gendered variants was mentioned numerous times throughout the document, but never explained. The Google search data did not reference gender in any way and none of the Twitter hashtags included talked about gender either.

Female Person in Lotus Position, Male Person in Lotus Position [2]

Relevant document: [L2/16-279](#) (*Proposal for PERSON MEDITATING Emoji*)

This proposal asked for a singular emoji representing yoga or meditation and nothing else. The option of providing gender variants alongside with it was only considered in one short paragraph at the very start as something that vendors may or may not implement if they so choose. Besides that the only other mention of gender in the document was a citation of a single tweet of someone asking for “a lil guy and gal doing yoga”.

2.3. Emoji with Insufficient Justification

MAN DANCING

Relevant document: [L2/15-054R5](#) (*Emoji Additions: Animals, Compatibility, and More Popular Requests*)

The author justified this addition with the huge differences in glyphic appearance of DANCER in the Japanese carrier sets. It is true that SoftBank’s dancer wore a dress and KDDI’s dancer was a featureless stick figure, which is exactly why the character is called DANCER and doesn’t make any reference to gender. DANCER is not nor has it ever been exclusively female; before Unicode 8 the code charts even used the same glyph that today belongs to MAN DANCING. The semantics of the character were retroactively tinkered with more than four years after it had been encoded just because Apple Color Emoji showed a flamenco dancer rather than a disco dancer. This was a font issue, not an encoding issue.

EXTRATERRESTRIAL ALIEN and FLYING SAUCER are entirely different concepts so a late disunification made sense. The difference between ‘dancing human who is female’ and ‘dancing human who may or may not be female’ is essentially non-existent and was not demonstrated at all in L2/15-054R5. PERSON WITH BLOND HAIR and INFORMATION DESK PERSON also had different gender displays on different platforms, yet we did not randomly decide on male or female at some point and then added the other one as a new character to Unicode 9. If MAN DANCING had been called DISCO DANCER instead, maybe there could have

been a stronger argument for disunification, but as it stands this was exclusively about gender. In any case no proof of the necessity of this character was given.

PRINCE, MOTHER CHRISTMAS [2]

Relevant document: [L2/15-054R5](#) (*Emoji Additions: Animals, Compatibility, and More Popular Requests*)

‘Missing gender pair’ are the only three words that were ever publicly written in support of the encoding of these two characters. Curiously, it is pretty much exactly the same justification that the UTC does not consider sufficient anymore nowadays. The author did not explain why PRINCESS and FATHER CHRISTMAS of all things needed counterparts with different genders, or why so called “gender pairs” needed to be completed at all. Furthermore, the document did not propose counterparts to emoji like MAN WITH GUA PI MAO, which had been very briefly discussed in a previous document ([L2/15-048](#)). Adding counterparts to *all* gendered emoji that existed at the time at least would have been systematically consistent, but this is just arbitrariness. The fact that other gendered characters were not considered for the same gender treatment indicates that there was no systematic selection process at play and that the four “gender-completing” characters in Unicode 9 were chosen more or less at random.

PRINCESS and FATHER CHRISTMAS are pure compatibility characters that would have been added regardless of their actual usefulness as pictographs, so their existence alone cannot be appropriated to legitimize the encoding of other, similar symbols. The proposal did not explain why another royalty and Christmas emoji were necessary when the previous ones already existed, who was asking for them, and whom they would have benefited. Mother Christmas or Mrs. Claus in particular is a pretty minor character in many of the stories she appears in and doesn’t enjoy nearly the same level of iconicity and popularity as her husband.

MAN IN TUXEDO

Relevant document: [L2/15-054R5](#) (*Emoji Additions: Animals, Compatibility, and More Popular Requests*)

Similar to PRINCE above, this character’s main reason to exist is the completion of “gender pairs”. The problem with that is that MAN IN TUXEDO is not a gender counterpart to BRIDE WITH VEIL; it is an entirely different entity. A male version of BRIDE WITH VEIL would have been GROOM WITH VEIL, and similarly a female version of MAN IN TUXEDO would have been WOMAN IN TUXEDO, both of which have been repeatedly proposed (and subsequently rejected) as ZWJ sequences. Sure, people often wear tuxedos to their weddings, but that is just one of many, many use cases. The proposal failed to complete a “gender pair” because BRIDE WITH VEIL and MAN IN TUXEDO are two barely connected concepts, so the character would have needed a proper proposal anyway regardless of policies regarding gender.

The only other argument in support of the character was a list of frequently requested emoji provided by Apple. This list was never published to the Unicode document registry and I cannot find it via web search, so I have no way of verifying its credibility. The author admitted that the emoji was only in “tier 2” of the list, so I assume it wasn’t even among the most popular ones to begin with.

Female Office Worker, Female Health Worker, Female Scientist, Female Student, Female Technologist, Female Factory Worker, Female Mechanic, Female Farmer, Female Cook, Female Teacher, Female Singer [11]

Relevant document: [L2/16-160](#) (*Expanding Emoji Professions: Reducing Gender Inequality*)

The vast majority of arguments presented by the authors of L2/16-160 – and frankly there weren't that many to begin with – boiled down to the perceived capabilities of explicitly female emoji to empower women and girls, which is debatable and probably not very relevant to the emoji approval process.

None of the emoji selection factors were addressed; search data and other proofs of popularity were sparsely provided for a handful of the proposed emoji but were otherwise not connected to the included repertoire in any way. Just because people want female emoji does not automatically mean that they specifically want a female office worker, a female health worker, a female scientist and so on. The only such example given was that of Michelle Obama campaigning for Female Student, while the couple of news articles about female emoji that were referenced showed a clear misunderstanding of pre-existing gender representation in Unicode, which is honestly understandable considering the state of emoji fonts back then and sadly still today. Nevertheless, it is not Unicode's job to fix problems that were caused by vendors discarding Unicode guidelines.

Statistics showing that there are more female than male emoji users were presented as supporting the necessity of gendered emoji. I consider this irrelevant trivia because a) people do not need emoji to have the same gender as them to accurately portray emotions and gestures, b) emoji can and do function perfectly fine without gender connotations, and c) the majority of emoji at the time weren't even human and thus had no connection to the concept of gender at all.

The emoji submission guidelines clearly state that proposals should not try to push a cause. While this disclaimer was added to the page after L2/16-160 had been published and Emoji 4.0 had been released, it is puzzling to say the least that the UTC would suddenly adopt this stance just a few months after wholeheartedly accepting and subsequently implementing a proposal that almost entirely hinged on there being a cause to further. This is especially insulting to me personally because my own document I had also submitted long before this rule came into effect was thoroughly ignored despite fighting for the exact same cause, not to mention the numerous similar proposals I sent in afterwards.

If we ignore the gender aspect entirely, the proposal requested the addition of emoji representing eleven (originally thirteen) different professions. The selection of professions, while highly systematic in appearance, was not inherently well-suited for the purpose of emoji encoding. It may be true that farming is an important profession, but why did it need to have emoji presentation? Who was asking for this? Why did there need to be two versions of the farming emoji with so little difference between them that they can barely be told apart? The proposal did not answer any of this.

Search trends were shown for a couple of professions, only two of which – doctor and student – ranked significantly higher than the presumably arbitrarily chosen comparison point RUNNER. The singer or rockstar was “of course” included in the proposal; this is impressively even one word fewer than the entire justification for PRINCE and MOTHER CHRISTMAS.

These professional emoji were not gendered versions of existing ones; they were completely new ideas. Even under the assumption that gender variants were subject to laxer rules – which cannot possibly be true as we have established – the authors would have needed to make a vastly more compelling case. Many emoji proposals with orders of magnitude better argumentation did not even make it to the document registry because the ESC did not consider them appropriate, and yet this enquiry that is essentially devoid of any purposeful meaning not only was accepted immediately but also fully implemented in an emergency Unicode Emoji update in just a couple of months time.

The document did briefly acknowledge the need for a third gender option at the very end but made absolutely no attempts at actually developing such a solution. Even if the proposal had been well-formed it would therefore have utterly failed to achieve its self-declared goal of improving gender representation in Unicode.

Female Police Officer, Male Police Officer, Female Construction Worker, Male Construction Worker, Female Sleuth or Spy, Male Sleuth or Spy, Female Guardsman, Male Guardsman, Woman with Turban, Man with Turban, Female Person with Blond Hair, Male Person with Blond Hair, Female Information Desk Person, Male Information Desk Person, Female Face Massage, Male Face Massage, Female Haircut, Male Haircut, Female Face with No Good Gesture, Male Face with No Good Gesture, Female Face with OK Gesture, Male Face with OK Gesture, Female Person Bowing Deeply, Male Person Bowing Deeply, Female Happy Person Raising One Hand, Male Happy Person Raising One Hand, Female Person Frowning, Male Person Frowning, Female Person with Pouting Face, Male Person with Pouting Face, Female Face Palm, Male Face Palm, Female Shrug, Male Shrug, Female Person with Ball, Male Person with Ball, Female Runner, Male Runner, Female Surfer, Male Surfer, Female Swimmer, Male Swimmer, Female Weight Lifter, Male Weight Lifter, Female Rowboat, Male Rowboat, Female Bicyclist, Male Bicyclist, Female Mountain Bicyclist, Male Mountain Bicyclist, Female Pedestrian, Male Pedestrian, Female Person Doing Cartwheel, Male Person Doing Cartwheel, Female Water Polo, Male Water Polo, Female Handball, Male Handball, Female Juggling, Male Juggling, Female Wrestlers, Male Wrestlers, Female Golfer, Male Golfer, Woman with Bunny Ears, Man with Bunny Ears [66]

Relevant documents: [L2/16-181](#) (*Gender Emoji ZWJ Sequences*)

[L2/16-182](#) ([no title])

L2/16-181 proposed the addition of gender-specific sequences to 33 pre-existing characters. The authors asserted that vendors displayed their intended-to-be-neutral human-form emoji with clear gender stereotypes (thereby ignoring Unicode recommendations) because of “realism”. This claim was never examined further within the document and it is unclear what exactly “realism” here entailed.

Emoji are simplified, abstracted pictographs, not images of real, actual humans. They are inherently unrepresentative of reality, so any illusion of realism falls flat immediately. And even assuming that emoji are supposed to depict real humans: Real humans aren’t just walking clichés. Gender is not something that can be seen, even though many people may believe that after being bombarded with stereotypes for all their life. An emoji without obvious gender presentation is not unrealistic, but expecting everyone to neatly fit into categories definitely is.

The possibility of vendors changing their glyphs to appear less gender-specific instead of introducing *more* gender specificity – which arguably would have been the far superior

option both for consumers and for designers – was never seriously considered. The authors simply claimed with no supporting arguments that having separate male and female versions of all emoji, and indeed having any gender in the standard at all, was something that is necessary (*‘Vendors cannot have both a male and female version of each one.’*) and thus many gendered sequences should be added to Unicode. Are we supposed to take this as a self-evident truth? On the same note, the authors never discussed the addition of more than two genders.

23 of the affected emoji (26F9, 1F3C3–1F3C4, 1F3CA–1F3CC, 1F46E–1F46F, 1F471, 1F473, 1F477, 1F481–1F482, 1F486–1F487, 1F575, 1F645–1F647, 1F64B, 1F64D–1F64E, 1F6B6) are pure compatibility characters for either Japanese carrier sets or Wingdings/Webdings that were added for round-trip mappings and not because of their usefulness as pictographs. The document did not explain why more superfluous variants of these characters were necessary as emoji. My research could reveal direct requests to the Unicode Consortium for only one of the 66 gendered sequences: Female Runner, in one 2015 proposal ([L2/15-271R](#), *Female Runner Emoji Submission*) and as feedback on [PRI #321](#). Note, however, that the people asking for Female Runner were labouring under the misapprehension that U+1F3C3 RUNNER is male rather than neutral due to badly designed fonts on their devices, and thus did not ask for Male Runner as well. I thought I also remembered someone asking for Female Police Officer back in the day, but alas I could not find such an enquiry except for one brief mention of the idea on [PRI #286](#) all the way back in 2014.

As far as I can tell, the origins of the remaining ten characters lie within the following documents:

- [L2/09-114](#): BICYCLIST, MOUNTAIN BICYCLIST, and ROWBOAT
- [L2/14-174](#): FACE PALM and SHRUG
- [L2/15-196R4](#): PERSON DOING CARTWHEEL, WRESTLERS, WATER POLO, and HANDBALL
- [L2/15-061](#): JUGGLING

None of these proposals ever addressed the issue of gender in any way, shape or form. They merely requested the addition of one emoji per concept and did not express any need for additional variants, be it gender or something else.

The document L2/16-181 specifically excludes certain characters like MAN WITH GUA PI MAO from having gender variants. This, too, was done without any kind of explanation as to why. There is no discernible pattern to be found.

3. Consequences

It is time for the UTC to own up to their mistakes. This whole ordeal has gone on for way too long. I am not asking for much; the solution to this problem is laughably easy. The current gender situation in Unicode is discriminatory, end of discussion. It excludes transgender people by pretending that only women can get pregnant. It excludes non-binary people by treating the third gender option as secondary to male and female, and by neglecting it for virtually all current human-form emoji. It excludes gender non-conforming people by carefully avoiding gendered sequences for characters like BEARDED PERSON.

This has to stop.

Imagine if the Unicode standard recommended against Fitzpatrick types 4 through 6 for certain characters because there isn't "considerable demand", but always fully embraced types 1 through 3. Imagine if POLICE OFFICER or RUNNER or the two Astronauts could only be white people. This is what you are doing right now, only with gender instead of skin tone.

It is unacceptable to expect me or anyone else to follow guidelines that the UTC has deliberately violated on 122 occasions. All proposals need to be treated as equal. Intentionally or not, the UTC has set a clear precedent over the years that gendered emoji – and especially gender variants of existing symbols – do not need to be warranted in order to make it into the standard. Regardless of whether this is a good or a bad thing, regardless of whether this aligns with official procedures, it is indisputable that it is the case.

It is particularly unacceptable to adamantly insist on the fulfilment of opaque, unverifiable criteria for emoji that try to represent real identities of real people when creatures that don't even exist (zombies, merfolk, elves etc.) are granted the luxury of full gender coverage without any obstacles. The Unicode Consortium is not doing its reputation any favours by talking about the importance of diversity and representation all the while ignoring the existence of tens of millions of people and giving that attention to vampires instead.

Waiting "to see the level of usage of CHILD, ADULT, and OLDER ADULT before adding additional gender neutral sequences" (cf. [153-C24](#)) is a non-argument; those three characters would not have been added to Unicode 10 in the first place if their proposal did not provide evidence for their expected popularity. Otherwise I am forced to conclude that the UTC admitted to encoding three characters with no practical use that nobody wanted.

As of the time of writing ADULT is available in the emoji sets of Apple, Google, Microsoft, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, EmojiOne, and Emojidex. That is all major emoji vendors that are still actively developing their fonts with the exception of Samsung. Nothing is preventing them from putting a hard hat or a judge's gavel on ADULT to create a neutral option. In fact, Emojidex already offers three distinct genders without any trouble, although mostly just for RGI emoji.

With all that in mind I once again propose the addition of the emoji listed in [L2/17-232](#) to Unicode Emoji, with two changes:

1. PERSON WITH CROWN shall be called HEIR TO THE THRONE instead, which is a name that originated within the Unicode Technical Committee. It better describes the role of the character as a direct counterpart to PRINCESS and PRINCE.
2. PERSON WITH CHRISTMAS HAT is dropped from the proposal for the time being because I do not think that it is the ideal solution to the problem. This character will be proposed anew once a better alternative has been devised.

As a reminder, the following 34 emoji are proposed for inclusion. I will not provide any additional rationalization for them apart from what I had already written in previous proposals because it evidently is not necessary to defend additions of this kind.

PERSON DANCING and HEIR TO THE THRONE must be atomic characters to stay consistent with their male and female equivalents; I expect them to be fast-tracked into Unicode 12 in 2019 just like all other emoji characters. The remaining emoji are ZWJ sequences following the established patterns.

Proposed Codepoint(s)	Name
1F9BA	PERSON DANCING
1F9BB	HEIR TO THE THRONE
1F472 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman with Chinese Cap
1F472 200D 2642 FE0F	Man with Chinese Cap
1F470 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman with Veil
1F470 200D 2642 FE0F	Man with Veil
1F935 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman in Tuxedo
1F935 200D 2642 FE0F	Man in Tuxedo
1F574 FE0F 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman in Suit Levitating
1F574 FE0F 200D 2642 FE0F	Man in Suit Levitating
1F930 200D 2640 FE0F	Pregnant Woman
1F930 200D 2642 FE0F	Pregnant Man
1F931 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman Breast-Feeding
1F931 200D 2642 FE0F	Man Breast-Feeding
1F9D5 200D 2640 FE0F	Woman with Headscarf
1F9D5 200D 2642 FE0F	Man with Headscarf
1F9D4 200D 2640 FE0F	Bearded Woman
1F9D4 200D 2642 FE0F	Bearded Man
1F9D1 200D 2695 FE0F	Health Worker
1F9D1 200D 2696 FE0F	Judge
1F9D1 200D 2708 FE0F	Pilot
1F9D1 200D 1F33E	Farmer
1F9D1 200D 1F373	Cook
1F9D1 200D 1F393 (FE0F)	Student
1F9D1 200D 1F3A4	Singer
1F9D1 200D 1F3A8	Artist
1F9D1 200D 1F3EB	Teacher
1F9D1 200D 1F3ED (FE0F)	Factory Worker
1F9D1 200D 1F4BB (FE0F)	Technologist
1F9D1 200D 1F4BC	Office Worker
1F9D1 200D 1F527	Mechanic
1F9D1 200D 1F52C	Scientist
1F9D1 200D 1F680	Astronaut
1F9D1 200D 1F692	Firefighter