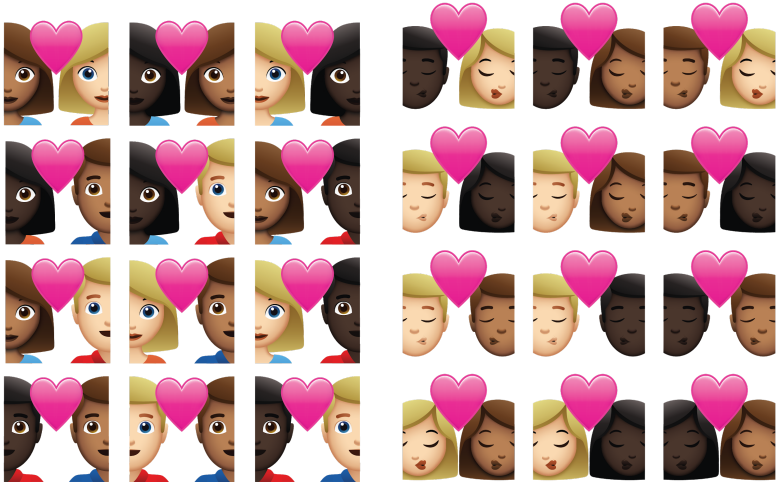


Proposal for Inter-Skintone Couple Emoji Sequences

Submitted by: Jennifer 8. Lee, Alex Marx, Apee Messer, Melissa Thermidor, of Emojination; Phil Fung, Claudia Fung, Dayo Olapade, Max Shron, Vijayachandran Mani and Alexis Ohanian. Created with support from Tinder.

Date: February 27, 2018.



Credit: Apee Messer, working with Apple images.

Abstract

We are proposing the addition of 21 ZWJ sequences for recommended general interchange (RGI) to allow for inter-skintone versions of COUPLE WITH HEART 🧑❤️🧑. This would include 3 skin tones (🏻 Light Skin Tone, 🏾 Medium Skin Tone, 🏿 Dark Skin Tone), as well as same-gender and mixed-gender couples.

There are 9 mixed-gender couple variations (3 male skin tones x 3 female skin tones), and 6 same-gender couples, for a total of 21 per design (9 female-male + 6 male-male + 6 female-female). A full list of the 21 ZWJ sequences can be found in the Appendix.

We feel strongly that inter-skintone couple emoji should be included in the Unicode emoji set.

The lack of representation for diverse racial identities is a significant issue in an increasingly globalised society. With this problem gaining increased media attention, and since efforts have already been made to ensure the representation of non-heteronormative sexual identities, now seems an appropriate cultural moment to give people the opportunity to see themselves represented in the emoji world. Moreover, recent years have seen a large spike in the number

of interracial couples and marriages. This ought to be recognised, especially given the current political environment.

Eventually we plan to expand the inter-skintone framework to encompass more emoji and, possibly, more skin tones. However, this 21 emoji is our more realistic proposal, taking into account the annual emoji budget.

Note: for ease on the eye, we use the phrase “inter-skintone” here instead of the more grammatically correct “inter-skin tone” and may move to the more condensed “interskintone.” While the public may see the proposal as interracial couple emoji, within the context of Unicode, these are technically inter-skintone emoji.

Introduction

Interracial relationships are common these days, and becoming ever more so. According to Pew research, about 17 percent of new marriages and 20 percent of cohabiting relationships in the US are interracial or interethnic. Additionally, about one-quarter of Americans have a close relative in an interracial marriage. With even the historically traditional institution of the British Royal Family soon to include an interracial couple, it is clear the needle is shifting in the direction of diverse relationships.

There is substantial user demand for an emoji option that represents interracial couples; we believe now is a fitting time for the purveyors of emoji to fulfill this demand. The introduction of an inter-skintone couple emoji would, for many mixed race individuals, be a way of expressing their cultural upbringings and backgrounds, and serve as a meaningful step towards cultural inclusion and diversity.



Credit: Apee Messer, working with Apple images.

Compatibility

Certain vendors have already implemented skin tones in multi-human sequences. In 2016, Microsoft introduced multiracial family emoji as part of a Windows 10 update, resulting in over 52,000 new family combinations.¹

Microsoft's Windows 10.0 also introduced interracial couple ZWJ sequences in 2017. Notably, the only way to access these new emoji in the current build is via copy and paste, as user input issues remain a complicated aspect of interracial emoji.

Facebook added 125 family emoji to its keyboard in 2017, allowing for non-yellow family emoji — but only if the family members share the same skin tone.² However, Facebook did *not* add skin tone modifier functionality for couples, perhaps in part due to the public perception issues surrounding single skin tone couples.

¹ <https://blog.emojipedia.org/diverse-emoji-families-come-to-windows/>

² <https://blog.emojipedia.org/facebook-adds-black-family-emojis/>

Facebook's ZWJ sequences do not use one skin tone modifier for the entire group, but rather a modifier for each emoji. Thus, even though these sequences are not "inter-skintone," they utilize the same mechanism that allows for inter-skintone families.

It is telling that even though they have chosen to highlight different characters in their respective user interfaces, both Microsoft and Facebook use the same mechanism to apply skin tones to multi-human emoji characters.

As multiple vendor platforms begin to implement skin tone modifiers in multi-human emoji units, it is critical that Unicode either coordinate interoperability or at least formally document vendor behavior.



Limited Scope

Due to the combinatorial explosion of multi-human emoji sequences, this proposal is, presently, limited to the discussion of multiracial two-person emoji sequences. We feel that the scope of their related user interface design issues is manageable, whereas, for example, the functionality of an interracial family might prove too complex for the current period.

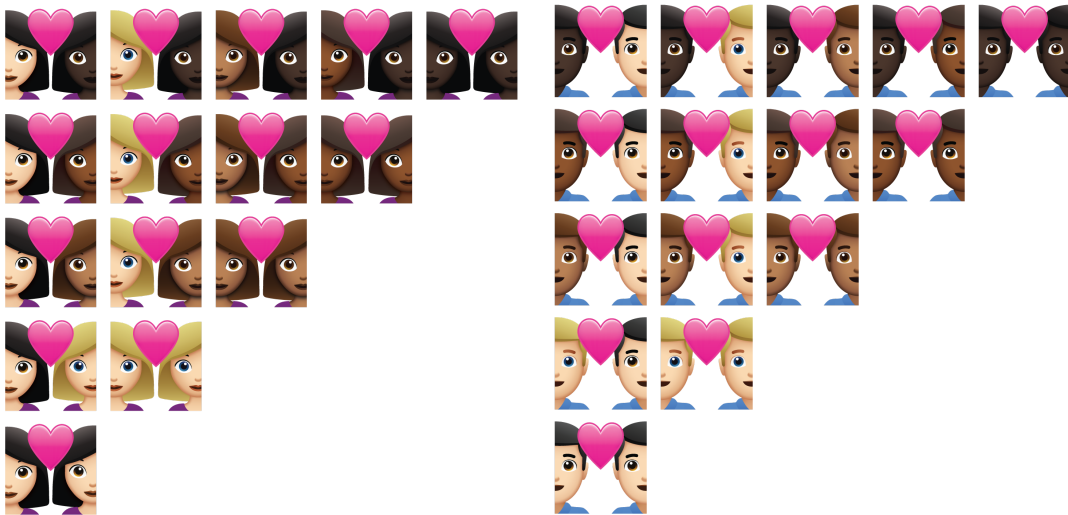
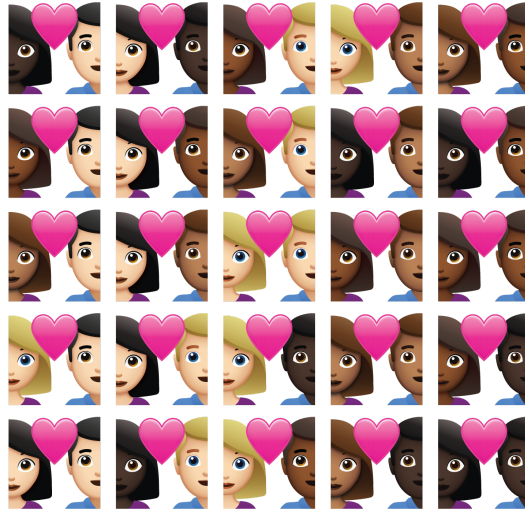
Memory Load Factors

Implementing all 5 skin tones instead of 3 would yield 55 combinations per design, which would require a significant percentage of our annual emoji budget. (There are 25 male-female variations, and 15 variations per same-gender combination: $25 + 15 + 15$).

While we have broader ambitions for interracial couple sequences, we are conscious of the taxing memory load these would entail. We scope the recommended ZWJ sequences in the following ways:

- Recognizing only 3 skin tones (Light, Medium, and Dark) instead of 5. **The mixed-gender have 9 variations, whereas mixed-gender each have 6, for a total of 21 per design ($9 + 6 + 6$).**
- Initially recognizing only 1 of the designs. We plan to prioritize COUPLE WITH HEART () , as it is the most versatile ZWJ sequence outside of KISS ().
- Limiting the skin tones to 3, and the interracial emoji design to 1, results in only **21 new images**.

However, Below is a full set of 55 emoji couple images, spanning all 5 skin tones and same-gender and mixed-gender couples.



One of the reasons Microsoft was able to implement interracial family emoji sooner than other vendors is because its emoji font implementation uses vector graphics, meaning there exists a relatively lightweight method of adding new color combinations into existing emoji sequences. In contrast, Google, Apple, and other vendors use individual graphic files for each emoji color combination.

We acknowledge that an implementation supporting a large number of new emoji may be more technically challenging than adding a single new emoji, and that this proposal will present engineering and design challenges given the large number of new emoji characters it suggests. With this in mind, we are severely limiting the scope of the proposal to make its implementation realistic in terms of both interface and memory load. However, it is worth noting that the vendors that would be predominantly in charge of bringing the new emoji to fruition are large-scale, multinational corporations that have tackled significant engineering challenges before, staffed by

some of the top technical talent in the world. We believe that, with time, it will be possible to make our proposal a reality.

Demand and Expected Usage Level

Interracial couple emoji are consistently among the emoji most requested by the public of Emojipedia,³ with disappointment over their absence regularly voiced on Twitter.



On Instagram, there are over half a million occurrences of the “interracial” hashtag, nearly 300,000 occurrences of the “interracial couple” hashtag, and over 300,000 occurrences of the “interracial love” hashtag. Numerous Instagram accounts are dedicated solely to celebrating interracial couples and blended families: the account ‘The Swirl Life’ has a following of over 28,000; the account ‘Mixed Race Babies’ boasts over 288,000 followers.

On YouTube, a search for ‘interracial’ yields over 450,000 results⁴; a search for ‘mixed race’ yields over 2 million results⁵. Furthermore, several prominent YouTube personalities are in interracial relationships:

³ <https://blog.emojipedia.org/top-emoji-requests-2016/>

⁴ [YouTube search for 'interracial'](#)

⁵ [YouTube search for 'mixed race'](#)

- Patricia Bright (1.9 million subscribers)
- David and Adanna (240k subscribers)
- MAZELEE (410k subscribers)
- Jamie and Nikki (1.3 million subscribers)
- Keren and Khoa (662k subscribers)
- McClure Twins Family (770k subscribers).

According to Twitter a high proportion of Twitter users (about 85%) who are active during prime-time report that they tweet about television content they are watching.⁶ For instance, there were 17.3 million tweets about the 2017 #GRAMMYS⁷, and 27.6 million tweets about #SB51⁸. Some of the most tweeted-about television shows feature interracial couples and blended families:

- *Orange is The New Black*
- *This Is Us*
- *House of Cards*
- *Grey's Anatomy*
- *Scandal*
- *How to Get Away With Murder*
- *Stranger Things*

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the classic *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and the 67th of the premiere of *I Love Lucy*, the first television program to feature an interracial couple.

Though each tweet, television show, movie, and YouTube channel differs in format, theme, and audience, all share one commonality: the depiction of interracial love as something that, simply, exists — yet this fact of life is still not reflected on keyboards.

Certain tech companies have attempted to address the lack of interracial couple emoji. In 2016, Swyft Media released an app called Love-Moji to commemorate *Loving v. Virginia*, the 1967 Supreme Court case that struck down laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Love-Moji is, essentially, a sticker app that includes interracial couple's racial identities.⁹ Though it's a workaround that does somewhat address the need for interracial emoji, a sticker in the likeness of an emoji does not carry the same weight as a Unicode-recognized emoji. In our opinion, users shouldn't need to download a separate app in order to feel included.

The demand for interracial couple emoji is expected to increase in the coming decades: the number of interracial marriages and relationships is on the rise, and increases in the rate of

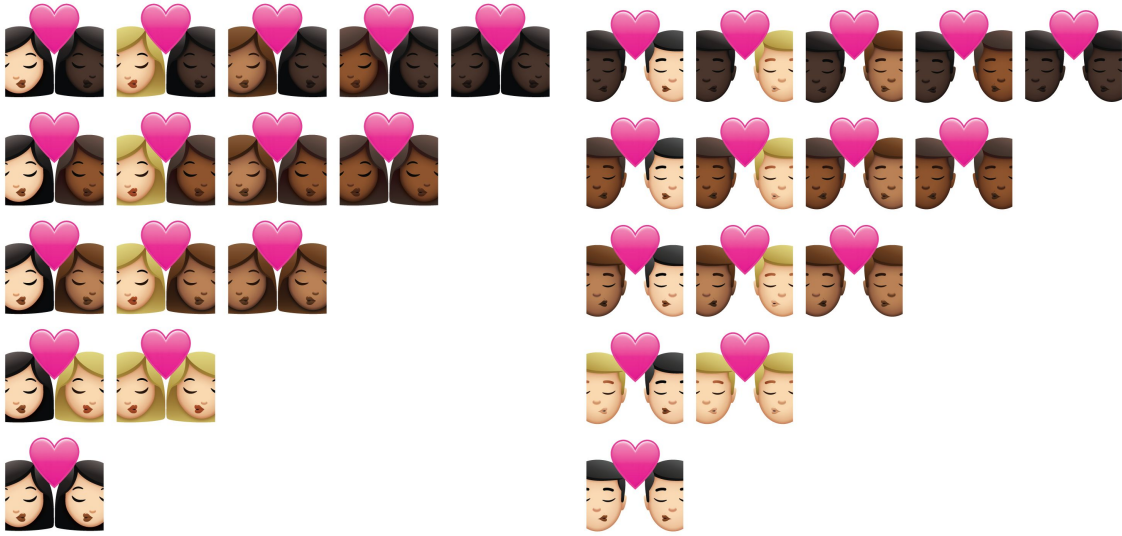
⁶ <http://fortune.com/2015/09/21/here-are-some-tv-tips-from-twitter-everyones-favorite-second-screen/>

⁷ <https://www.postchup.com/2017/02/14/17-3-million-grammys-tweets-annual-grammy-awards/>

⁸ <https://www.postchup.com/2017/02/07/super-bowl-li-tops-27-million-tweets-for-sb51/>

⁹ <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/love-moji-app-loving-interracial-couples-same-sex>

interracial marriage correlate with the advent of online dating services in the 2000s and the creation of Tinder in 2014.¹⁰



Technical Spec: Allowing Skin Tone Modifiers in Multi-Human Emoji ZWJ Sequences

We propose recognizing skin tone modified humans in the existing zero-width joiner sequences already being used by certain vendors, such as Microsoft and Facebook.

The main non-modified two-person ZWJ sequences recommended for general interchange are currently:

- 🧑 (Man) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 🧑 (Man)
- 🧑 (Man) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 🧑 (Woman)

¹⁰ <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/609091/first-evidence-that-online-dating-is-changing-the-nature-of-society/>

- 🧑 (Woman) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 🧑 (Woman)
- 🧑 (Woman) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 💋 + ZWJ + 🧑 (Man)
- 🧑 (Woman) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 💋 + ZWJ + 🧑 (Man)
- 🧑 (Woman) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 💋 + ZWJ + 🧑 (Man)

The 5 emoji skin modifiers, based on the 6-point Fitzpatrick scale, are:

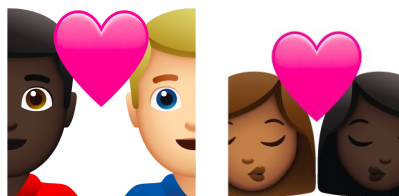
- 🏆 Light Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 1 and 2
- 🏆 Medium-Light Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 3
- 🏆 Medium Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 4
- 🏆 Medium-Dark Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 5
- 🏆 Dark Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 6

The 5 men emoji are: 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆. The 5 women emoji are: 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆 🧑🏆. They can exist individually, but not in multi-human sequences.

Allowing the use of skin tone modified humans would allow for interplatform recognition of sequences like:

- 🧑🏆 (Man: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 🧑🏆 (Man: Medium Light Skin Tone)
- 🧑🏆 (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ + ❤️ + ZWJ + 💋 + ZWJ + 🧑🏆 (Woman: Dark Skin Tone)

These would render as:



The primary advantage of this system is that the fallbacks are fairly understandable. In the cases of the examples above, the emoji render in the following manner:

- 🧑🏆 ❤️ 🧑🏆
- 🧑🏆 ❤️ 💋 🧑🏆

User Interface

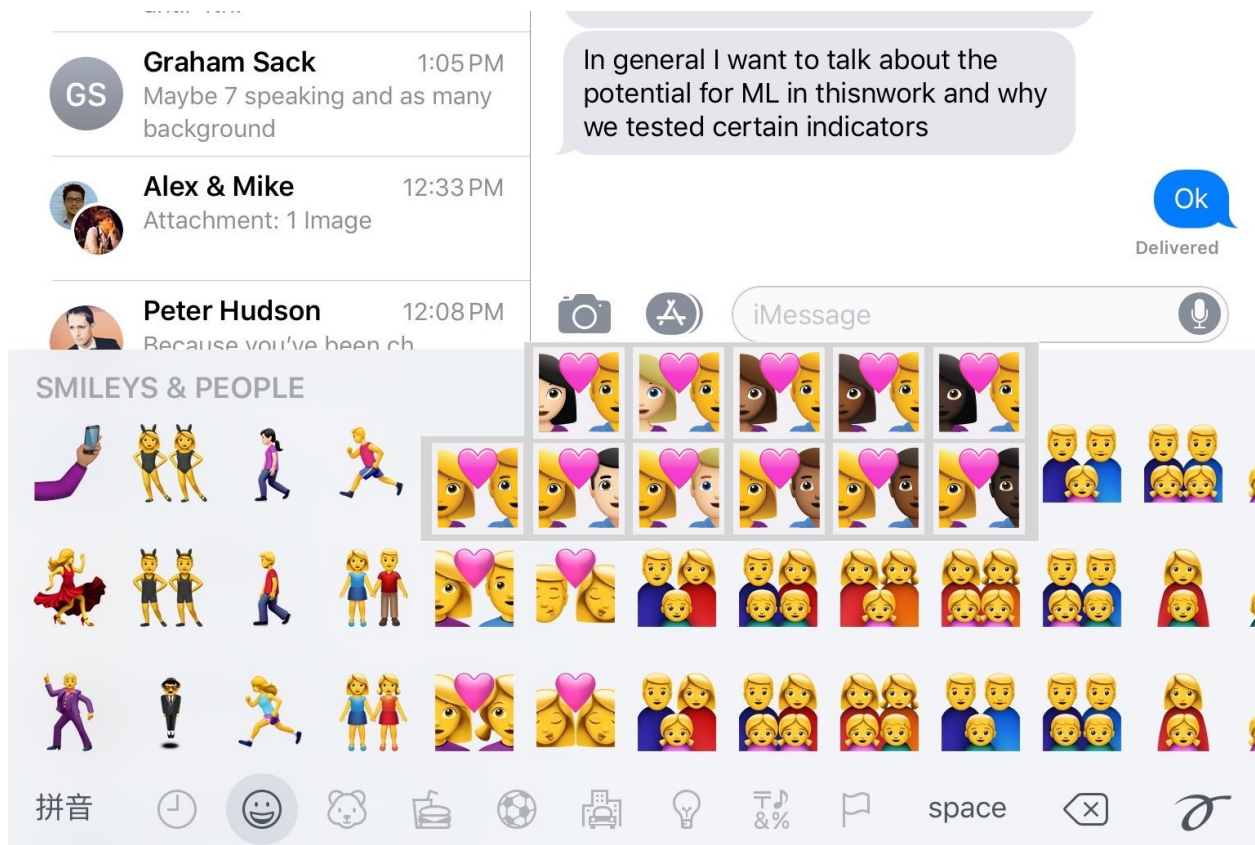
The most problematic technical aspect of inter-skintone couple emoji is the design of user input mechanisms, as the combinatorial possibilities can quickly become unwieldy. Although Microsoft

supports multiracial human sequences, it does not have a publicly available input mechanism. Instead it relies on the inconvenient workaround of cutting and pasting from the web.

5 skin tone modifiers plus the non-modified base emoji yields 26 variations (5 x 5 modified skin tones + 1 non-modified) for two-gender couples, and 16 variations (15 modified skin tones + 1 non-modified) for same-gender couples. These variations would occupy a cumbersome amount of space on a mobile keyboard. We offer three possible solutions to this problem.

Option 1: Popup allowing for the separate selection of the individuals in the couple with two styles.

- **Horizontal Layout**



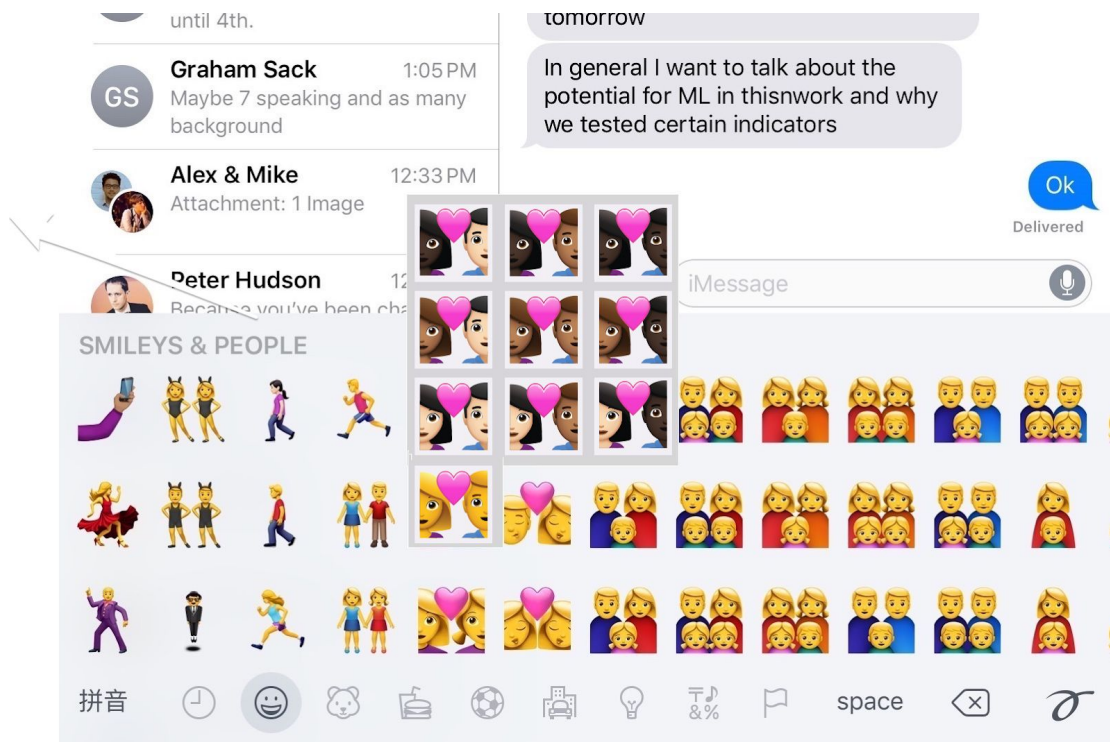
- **Split Layout**



Pros: Allows for the ability to perform a two-part selection without a combinatorial explosion.

Cons: Introduces a new interaction for a mobile user interface — a double select — that could be confusing to users and difficult to engineer.

Option 2: 3x3 grid, or limiting the number of skin tones allowed in coupledom.



Option 2 is to reduce the 5 current skin modifiers to 3 (Light, Medium, and Dark skin tones), which allows for a more manageable pop-up. This would result in 10 (3 x 3 modified skin tones + 1 non-modified) variations for two-gender couples and 7 (6 modified skin tones + 1 non-modified) for same-gender couples.

Pros: A set of 3 skin tone modifiers is simpler on the user interface, while conveying a wide range of interracial options. A 3x3 pop-up grid would fit on the interface.

Cons: The simplification of a skin tone set from 5 to 3 would likely raise public outcry. The public relations angle of a simplification must be carefully considered.

Option 3: Special keyboard for interracial options.

Option 3 is to devote an entire keyboard to inter-skintone couples and families, in the spirit of the Love-Moji app. Given the likelihood that certain emoji will be used more often than others, it's plausible that these frequently used emoji would become the default options on the main emoji keyboard.

Pros: Fixes the issue of user input while allowing more room. Potential long-term use in any future expansion of interracial family emoji.

Cons: Necessitates a new emoji keyboard. Two keyboards raises a new layer of complex interactivity.

Further Issues for Discussion

Couples

We are explicitly limiting the scope of our proposal to the recognition of two-person emoji — as opposed to family emoji — to ensure its requests are achievable for most vendors. Family units will be deferred for the time being, but the implementation decision-making process may want to take into account potential family unit issues.





“Yellow”

Our proposal does not allow for the combination of non-modified skin tone (yellow in the case of Apple and other vendors) with modified skin tones. Each mixed gender couple will have 5 skin tones with only 26 variations ($5 \times 5 + 1$), instead of 36 (6×6).


Gender Neutral

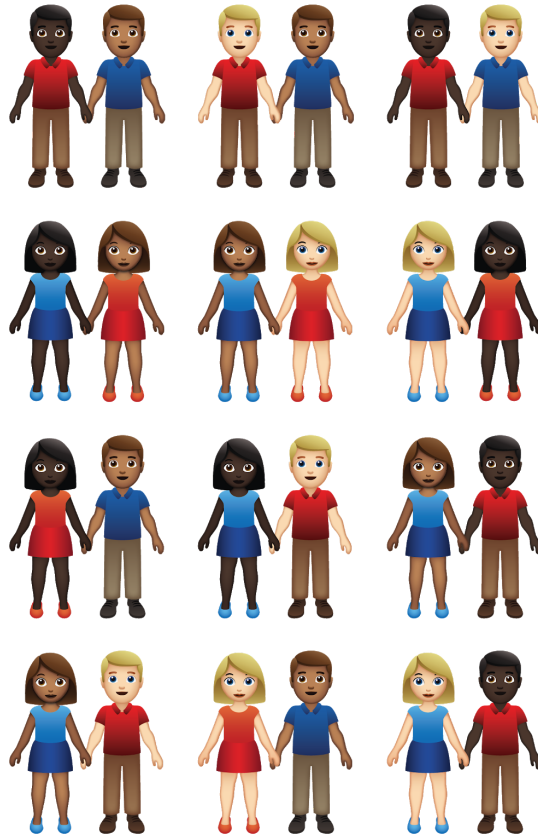
Our proposal does not currently address gender neutral couples, as they aren't yet Recommended for General Interchange and we are still waiting to analyze their usage numbers. Should the gender neutral combinations emerge, this technical specification would also allow for interracial use.

Non-ZWJ Two-Person Emoji

If inter-skintone two-person ZWJ sequences are allowed, we anticipate users will eventually wonder why it doesn't also exist for single code point two-person emoji such as MAN AND WOMAN HOLDING HANDS () , PEOPLE WITH BUNNY EARS () , PEOPLE WRESTLING () , or SHAKING HANDS () . Though the reasons will be apparent to those with a working knowledge of multi-human ZWJ sequences, most users will likely find the inconsistency confusing.

This is still a preliminary discussion, without a current vendor precedent; however, we may want to explore the possibility of implementing 2 skin tone modifiers for code points with multiple humans. Consistently mapping each skin tone modifier to each character (left to right, for example) may prove difficult, but any issues that arise should be manageable considering there are generally only 2 characters per single code point emoji.

We will further elaborate on this issue in a later technical proposal if the current proposal is successfully recommended for general interchange. If we were to begin work on single code point emoji, we would prioritize the most versatile, COUPLE HOLDING HANDS () . Below is a series of example images.



Coda

This section addresses select issues raised by standard emoji character proposals. Although this is a more technical proposal, we aim with this section to address foreseeably relevant issues.

Image Distinctiveness

Even on a small smartphone screen, it is highly unlikely that a user would be unclear about the significance or purpose of the image. The use of only 3 skin tones contributes to maintaining image distinctiveness.

Completeness

Ever since the option to specify the skin tone of all of the profession emoji was made available, demand for this functionality has increased. In a sense, this new functionality would complete the couple emoji set.

Frequently Requested

A cursory search of the phrase “interracial emoji” on Twitter reveals significant user demand. Below is a small sampling from recent months:

- "Where THE F**K is our INTERRACIAL COUPLE EMOJI ?!?!?! 🧑🏻❤️🧑🏻🧑🏻🏻"11
- "For real tho when's the interracial couple emojis gonna come out!?"12
- "Where the interracial emoji couples at 🤔"13
- "Why doesn't emoji have an interracial gay couples??"14
- "It's the end of 2017 and there is still no emoji for interracial couples. I'm sorry but my blonde emoji is tired of kissing another blonde boy. Where's the emoji for the blonde kissing the light skinned man. Get with it 2017"15
- "Will Prince Harry and @meghanmarkle #RoyalEngagment finally bring an #interracial #couple #emoji? I've been waiting for it for 2 years!!!"16
- "There isn't an emoji that represents us holding hands and being best friends. Bologna. I want an interracial best friend non binary emoji."17
- "All these emoji updates and they have yet to add an interracial couple emoji. I'm trying to flourish out here with my chocolate bae."18

Selection Factors Exclusion

Overly Specific

The purpose of this functionality is to expand the range of couple identities available, thereby making it less specific — read: limited — rather than more so.

Open-Ended

This proposal would not be open-ended once all skin tones are represented.

Already Representable

Although certain ideas or words can be represented by existing emoji (penis as aubergine, etc.), there currently exists no way to represent an interracial couple.

Transient

With the world becoming ever more diverse, there is virtually no chance of this functionality becoming obsolete any time soon.

¹¹ [Syd \(sydneyhsl\)](#). "Where the fuck is our interracial couple emoji." 6 Jan 2018 1:33AM.

¹² [Katelyn Norton \(Katelyn_Norton8\)](#). "For real tho when's the interracial couple emojis gonna come out!?" 4 Jan 2018 2:45PM

¹³ [A\\$AP Kurv \(Mass_Appeal\)](#). "Where the interracial emoji couples at." 2 Jan 2018 8:00AM

¹⁴ [Just Chloe \(Chloebee15\)](#). "Why doesn't emoji have an interracial gay couples??" 8 Dec 2017 2:40PM

¹⁵ [Jessica Vallone \(JustChill_Jess\)](#). "It's the end of 2017 and there is still no emoji for interracial couples. I'm sorry but my blonde emoji is tired of kissing another blonde boy. Where's the emoji for the blonde kissing the light skinned man. Get with it 2017"

¹⁶ [Laetitia Tomasso \(lt0912\)](#). "Will Prince Harry and @meghanmarkle #RoyalEngagment finally bring an #interracial #couple #emoji? I've been waiting for it for 2 years!!!" 27 Nov 2017 6:37PM

¹⁷ [Alex C. Lange \(ItsAlexCL\)](#). "There isn't an emoji that represents us holding hands and being best friends. Bologna. I want an interracial best friend non binary emoji." 16 Nov 2017 1:26AM

¹⁸ [Nohelya \(nOri___\)](#). "All these emoji updates and they have yet to add an interracial couple emoji. I'm trying to flourish out here with my chocolate bae." 1 Nov 2017 10:24PM

Author Bios

Jennifer 8. Lee (jenny@emojination.org) is an emoji enthusiast and founder of Emojination and Emojicon. She is also the co-author of the proposals of dumpling emoji, the hijab emoji, and has shepherded through more than 50 emoji proposals supported by Finland, the Gates Foundation and General Electric among many others. In her other life, she is CEO of Plympton, a literary studio and a documentary film producer.

Alex Marx (alex.d.marx@gmail.com) is an emoji enthusiast and a fan of diverse representation. He is an actor who lives in London.

Philip Fung (philip.w.fung@gmail.com) was one of the first mobile engineers at Facebook and co-founder of A3 Foundation, a non-profit to support racial diversity in media.

Claudia Jimenez Fung (claudia.v.jimenez@gmail.com) is a mobile tools engineer at Slack and supporter of more diverse representation.

Melissa Thermidor (thermidor.melissa@gmail.com) is the Social Media Lead at NHS Blood and Transplant and a strong advocate of diverse representation and inclusion. She is also in an interracial marriage.

Aphee Messer (aphmesser@gmail.com) is a graphic designer for Emojination and one-half of an interracial couple. Her images of the hijab emoji and the woman's flat shoe emoji have gone viral around the world.

Dylan Sherry (dylanjsherry@gmail.com) is a data scientist and software engineer at DataRobot and a supporter of equitable representation and technology's role in that representation. He was the lead author of the lobster emoji proposal, which is part of Unicode 11.0

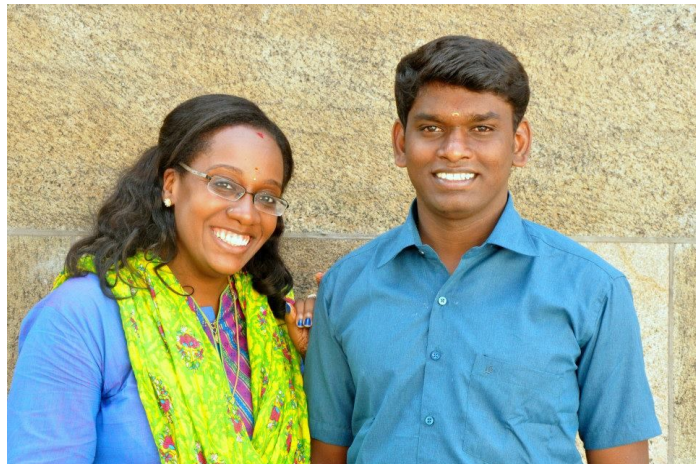
Alexis Ohanian (contact@alexisohanian.com) is a cofounder of Initialized Capital, Reddit, and co-author of the hijab emoji.

Photos of Some of Our Contributors and their spouses

Aphee Messer and David Kandoje



Melissa Thermidor and Vijayachandran Mani



Philip Fung and Claudia Jimenez Fung






Alexis Ohanian and Serena Williams



Appendix: Full List of 21 Requested Emoji ZWJ Sequences for RGI

Note: for simplicity's sake, we have limited this proposal to 3 skin tones.

-  Light Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 1 and 2
-  Medium Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 4
-  Dark Skin Tone, representing Fitzpatrick 6

Variations of

-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Light Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Light Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Light Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)

Variations of

-   (Man: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Light Skin Tone)
-   (Man: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Man: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Man: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Man: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Man: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Man: Dark Skin Tone)

Variations of

-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Light Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Light Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Medium Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone)
-   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone) + ZWJ +  + ZWJ +   (Woman: Dark Skin Tone)