Re: **ESC comments on 2020 Q3 feedback**
From: **Jennifer Daniel on behalf of Unicode Emoji Subcommittee (ESC)**
To: **Unicode Technical Committee (UTC)**
Date: **2021-02-22**

Gender Encoding for Emoji: Background: Introduction

The Emoji Subcommittee (ESC) is tasked with managing incoming emoji proposals and preparing these for submission to the Unicode Technical Committee (UTC). In addition, the ESC makes recommendations on proposals forwarded to the UTC Document Register.

Since the addition of gender-related ZWJ Sequences in Emoji 4.0, the encoding of gender has matured every year. **However, because many emojis are explicitly gendered to a binary this presents a problem creating zwj sequences that correspond to a spectrum of gender identities.** This document lays out our reccomendations and best practices for how to encode emojis as it relates to gender and or sex to ensure we are creating a system that scales without disrupting backwards compatability.

This document is not a proposal; however, it serves as background regarding implementing emoji that are "person" based and considerations when adding gender variants.

Background

In general terms, a "sex" symbol refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia and genetic differences. However, biological sex is just as much a construct as 'gender'. What is gender? Well, it can refer to the role of a male or female in society, known as a gender role, or an individual's concept of themselves, or gender identity.[1]

As part of Facebook's onboarding flow, they offer 56 gender options to identify. ESC hopes to settle on three: Male, Female, and the spectrum beyond these binaries known as "gender inclusive".

Are the "gender inclusive emoji" explicitly "non-binary"?
The "gender-inclusive" emoji such as *adult* (and such as the recent depictions for most emoji whose name uses *person*) are intended to function as the gender equivalent of the neutral skin tone. Ideally this should have been the default emoji gender presentation for emoji representations of people from the start, as the earliest documentation specifies that in general gender representations were to be "gender-neutral". As such, "gender-inclusive" emoji representations are not intended to represent only people with non-binary gender identity or presentation; rather they are meant to be truly inclusive in the sense that they are meant to be unmarked or ambiguous as to gender presentation.

For skin tones, UTS #51 says "Multi-person sequences that mix people characters without skin tones and people characters with skin tones should not be generated." And similarly, multi-person combinations using "gender-inclusive" people emoji are meant to be ambiguous/inclusive/unmarked about the gender presentation of the people involved, i.e. to represent all gender presentations, so the intent is not to have people combinations that mix unmarked and marked gender presentation.

Since there is no one way in which a non-binary individual (or person of any gender) can or should present and the Unicode encourages implementers to not suggest otherwise. Sometimes a Doctor is just a Doctor. We recommend that any "inclusive" based character not be explicitly associated with any single "sex symbol" as part of its encoding.

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[1] Additional reading: https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/