

THE TRANSFORMATION OF JAKE SULLY: EXPLORING PERSONALITY TRAITS IN THE WORLD OF AVATAR

¹ Eva Alfiona Fitricianingtyas, ² Afina Murtiningrum*

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang

*Corresponding Author:

afina@unissula.ac.id

Abstract

This essay examines the personality traits of Jake Sully, the major character in James Cameron's film *Avatar* (2009), using the Big Five personality traits model. Jake Sully undergoes a profound transformation from a soldier to a key leader among the Na'vi people on the alien moon Pandora. The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative. Two types of data were used in this study, namely primary and secondary. Primary data were taken from the movie. Meanwhile, secondary data were taken from e-books, e-journals, and articles about personality traits and social interaction. There were several steps to analyze the data, such as watching the movie and reading the script of *Avatar* (2009), identifying data, classifying data, and reducing data. The result can be drawn from this study is that this transformation is significantly influenced by his personality traits, particularly his Openness to Experience, Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness. Jake's high Openness drives his willingness to immerse himself in the Na'vi culture, leading to his eventual rejection of his initial mission and alignment with the indigenous people. His Extraversion, marked by sociability and assertiveness, facilitates his integration into the Na'vi community and his rise as a leader during the conflict against human invaders. His growing Conscientiousness reflects a deepening sense of moral responsibility and dedication to the Na'vi cause. Finally, Jake's agreeableness is evident in his growing empathy and understanding towards the Na'vi. From the beginning of his interactions with the Na'vi, Jake shows a willingness to listen, learn, and respect their ways, even when they differ significantly from his own experiences and beliefs as a soldier. Overall, by analyzing Jake Sully's character development through these personality traits, the essay highlights the narrative storyline and thematic depth in storytelling.

Keywords: personality traits, openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness

I. INTRODUCTION

James Cameron's 2009 epic science-fiction film *Avatar* has captivated audiences worldwide for its innovative visual effects and its themes such as environmentalism, colonialism, and identity. Jake Sully, the major character, is a former Marine who finds himself in the alien world of Pandora. Utilizing an Avatar, a genetically modified body that he can control remotely, Jake immerses himself in the culture and environment of the indigenous Na'vi people. As he navigates the intricacies of his dual identity—both as a human soldier and as a Na'vi warrior—Jake's personality traits become integral to the film's narrative development and thematic richness.

Personality traits are the distinctive patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that characterize an individual's unique way of interacting with the world (Back, 2021). These traits are considered to be relatively stable over time and across situations, shaping an individual's motivations, and responses to environmental stimuli (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Some studies have taken the issue of personality as a central focus in order to understand the complex interplay between an individual's inherent characteristics and their interactions with the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). Studying personality traits has important implications for understanding human behavior, as these traits have been linked to provide valuable insights into the ways in which individuals navigate and adapt to the complexities of their social and cultural environments (John et al., 2008).

One of the most widely accepted models of personality traits is the Five-Factor Model, also known as the "Big Five" (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). This model posits that there are five broad dimensions of personality: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each of these dimensions encompasses a range of more specific traits that contribute to an individual's overall personality profile (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

In psychological research, the Big Five personality traits—Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—serve as a framework for understanding individual differences (Roberts et al., 2017). In *Avatar*, Jake Sully's character is particularly intriguing due to the significant evolution of his traits as he transforms from a soldier into a leader of the Na'vi. This transformation is not only significant to the storyline but also provides a valuable case study for analyzing personality traits within a cinematic framework.

This essay will investigate the personality traits of Jake Sully as portrayed in *Avatar*, employing the Big Five model as an analytical lens. By exploring traits such as Openness to Experience, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness, this analysis will demonstrate how these characteristics shape Jake's transformation throughout the film.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive qualitative methods. Qualitative research focuses on gaining a thorough understanding of the research question through an approach that values humanism or idealism. It was employed to explore the behavior, attitudes, interactions, beliefs, and experiences of individuals. This method offers unique insights that quantitative measures and data cannot capture (Gerring, 2017). Qualitative research highlights the significance of understanding the social and cultural contexts in literature (Dawson & Mortimer, 2020). Therefore, descriptive qualitative research was chosen for this study as it is suitable for examining the personality traits in *Avatar* (2009) as the main point of the analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research discusses about Jake Sully's transformation as the major character by exploring more on his personality traits. The findings are presented in the form of dialogues, monologues, and narration from the *Avatar* movie.

3.1. Openness to Experience

One of Jake Sully's most prominent personality traits is his high level of Openness to Experience, which significantly influences his journey in *Avatar*. Openness is characterized by a willingness to engage with new ideas, experiences, and unconventional viewpoints, often leading to creativity and adaptability (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Initially, Jake is depicted as a soldier with a straightforward mission, but his inherent curiosity and adaptability become evident as he begins to immerse himself in the Na'vi culture. Unlike his fellow soldiers, who are primarily focused on their military objectives, Jake displays a profound interest in learning about Pandora and its inhabitants. An example of this personality trait in Jake can be seen in the following quote:

Jake, bored, scouts ahead a few meters. He comes to a glade filled with shoulder-high spiral plants called Helicordians. He brushes one and shtoonk! -- it sucks down into a tube in the ground so quickly it seems to simply vanish. **Curious, Jake touches another -- shtoonk! And another -- like popping balloons after a party.** (*Avatar* 32:28 - 33:23)

From the narration above, it is known that Jake's coming to Pandora forest for the first time does not stop him from being curious about the new environment. He finally discovered new things, such as helicordians plants, which are sensitive to touch. So, he tries to touch some of them. Helicordians are plants he had never seen before because they grow in the jungles of Pandora, so he was interested in paying attention to something that was still unfamiliar. Thus, one of the characteristics of openness to experience that can be seen from Jake is curious

According to McCrae and Costa (2008), openness to experience refers to actively seeking and appreciating experiences for themselves. They like to discover something new and unusual. Open individuals exhibit curiosity, creativity, inventiveness, and unconventionality. Jake, a human from Earth with a completely different cultural and linguistic background from the Na'vi, is able to open up by learning the local language. It is also important to make communication easier so that Jake can convey his ideas or

thoughts to more Na'vi people who can not speak English. Speaking the local language is also a form of approach so that Jake's relationship with them can be deeper and more intimate. Another example of openness to experience in Jake Sully can be seen in the quote below:

Neytiri touches her lips with her fingertips.

JAKE: "Seyri."

She touches her nose, her ears, her eyes in quick sequence.

JAKE: "Ontu, mikyun, nari." (*Avatar* 1:07:26 - 1:07:54)

The quote above tells that Jake displays a profound interest in learning about Pandora and its inhabitants. Jake's Openness to Experience is exemplified when he first navigates the unfamiliar environment of Pandora through his Avatar. His initial experiences, such as riding the direhorse and bonding with the banshee, reflect his willingness to embrace the new and the unknown. These experiences not only signify his physical adaptation but also mark the beginning of his psychological transformation, from a skeptical outsider to a respected member of the Na'vi community. According to Roberts et al. (2017), individuals who score high on Openness are more likely to seek out novel experiences and view the world from diverse perspectives, which aligns with Jake's evolving worldview as he begins to see the value and wisdom in Na'vi customs.

3.2. Extraversion

Jake Sully's Extraversion is another key personality trait that significantly impacts his character development and the film's narrative. Extraversion, typically associated with sociability, assertiveness, and a tendency to seek out social interactions, plays a vital role in Jake's ability to integrate into the Na'vi community and ultimately lead them in their fight against human invaders (John et al., 2020). From the outset, Jake's extroverted nature is evident in his proactive approach to engaging with the Na'vi and his eagerness to prove himself both as a warrior and a leader. Jake as a foreigner who meets the Na'vi natives for the first time, does not feel nervous or reluctant. He knows how to assess the situation that makes it impossible to survive in a forest full of predators alone and tries to approach Neytiri. Jake then takes the initiative to communicate with Neytiri. Jake's ability to try to integrate into the Navi's community is presented in the quote below:

JAKE : "Look, um, I know you probably don't understand this. But -- thanks. Thank you. I owe you."

...

JAKE : "If I'm so ignorant, maybe you should teach me."

NEYTIRI: "Sky people can not learn. You do not See." (*Avatar* 43:21 – 45:18)

The quote above shows that Jake asks Neytiri to teach him. Jake is proactive in approaching and creating relationships, although Neytiri did not want to do so at first. This shows that he can socialize well, which is a sign of an extrovert. Another proves of extraversion personality trait in Jake is shown by his likeness in attending a lively events, it is also presented in the quote below:

Jake sits, eyes closed, as Neytiri and another young hunter paint his face and body in preparation for uniltaron -- the Dream Hunt.

EYTUKAN : “You are now a son of the Omaticaya. You are part of the People.”
(Cameron, 1:33:02 – 1:33:57)

In this scene, Jake engages in communal rituals, Dream Hunt, which integrates him into and makes him part of the Na'vi tribe named Omaticaya. This is meant to make Jake a part of the people, and he gains a sense of belonging by successfully going through a series of rituals that also recognize him by the tribe. Jake, who enjoys being surrounded by people and participating in lively activities, is a proof that he has high extraversion personality trait.

Jake's sociability is a central aspect of his Extraversion, which enables him to form strong bonds with key Na'vi characters, particularly Neytiri. His ability to connect with others is not just a result of his Openness to Experience, but also of his extraverted tendency to seek out and enjoy social connections. This trait is crucial in building trust and camaraderie with the Na'vi, who initially view him with suspicion. According to Soto and John (2017), individuals high in Extraversion are often able to forge social bonds quickly, a skill that Jake leverages to become an integral part of the Na'vi community.

3.3. Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is another critical personality trait exhibited by Jake Sully, particularly as his character evolves from a soldier to a dedicated leader and protector of the Na'vi. Conscientiousness involves a high degree of organization, responsibility, and a strong work ethic (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Moreover, McCrae and Costa (2008) also stated that conscientiousness encompasses self-discipline, organization productivity, ambition, and persistence in achieving goals. People with high scores are hardworking, dependable, forceful, dutiful, and responsible. A person with ambition will do everything possible to achieve his goal. Jake, in this case, has the ambition to save Pandora from the RDA Company's exploitation that hurt many people and destroyed the Omaticaya tribe's home and sacred place. He does not want a place as pristine as Pandora to suffer and die like Earth because of human greed in extracting resources. An example of this conscientiousness personality trait in Jake is reflected in the quote below:

He meets her eyes, which are filled with horror, but also something else.
Call it faith.

MO'AT : “You are one of us. Help us!”

Jake takes the knife and cuts Grace free.

JAKE : **“We’ve gotta move! He’s gonna blow the columns.”**

(Avatar 1:55:24 - 1:55:31)

Jake looks into the eyes, hears Mo'at's words, and then feels where he belongs. The trust given by Mo'at can prove that Jake is a reliable, dutiful, and responsible person. Jake develops a strong sense of duty toward the Na'vi people. The ambition to protect the Na'vi began to take root in his heart. Jake fulfills his calling when he sees the Omaticaya tribe helpless and realizes that they have lost the home where they lived against the advanced technology and firearms of the RDA Company. Jake's conscientiousness is reflected in his moral responsibility towards the Na'vi and Pandora. Initially, his involvement in the Avatar program is driven by a promise of financial reward, but as he becomes more connected with the Na'vi, he develops a profound sense of responsibility for their well-being and for the preservation of their world.

Jake's conscientiousness is most evident in his meticulous approach to mastering the skills required to live as a Na'vi. His determination to prove himself to Neytiri and the other Na'vi is reflected in his rigorous training and his dedication to understanding their ways. This aspect of his personality is crucial to his acceptance by the Na'vi and his eventual role as their leader. According to Roberts et al. (2017), individuals with high levels of conscientiousness are often driven by a strong sense of purpose and a desire to achieve their goals, traits that Jake increasingly embodies as he integrates into Na'vi society. Another example of Jake's conscientiousness can be seen in the quote below :

Jake silently drawing his bow, his eyes focused in intense concentration. A beat -- the arrow flies.

Jake pulls the arrow from the twitching body of a hexapede. He dispatches it with his knife. **He speaks haltingly but with feeling in Na'vi.** (*Avatar* 1:10:11 - 1:15:47)

Jake's training with Neytiri is successful due to his persistence. This can be seen from Jake's rapidly increasing ability in archery, which allows him to hit prey precisely. Jake's language skills also developed, and he can speak the Na'vi language, although he is still working on it. His rigorous training and strong dedication to understanding Navi's ways proves his personality trait of conscientiousness.

3.4. Agreeableness

People with a high level of agreeableness become cooperative and prefer social harmony to avoid conflict. They are commonly sympathetic, soft-hearted, helpful, forgiving, and tolerant. Agreeable people also perceive others positively. People with low agreeableness, on the other hand, are obstinate, sceptical, suspicious of others, impatient, and prone to confrontation (McCrae and Costa, 2008). Although Jake is a former marine but he is not impulsive and assumes all problems can be solved with strength.

Jake's agreeableness is marked by his soft hearted and always thinks about not letting Pandora fall like Earth and Na'vi being kicked out of their own home. Do not mention the same origin as RDA company, Jake's mind is clearly determined right and wrong. Finally, he and other researchers seem able to pull their guns against the RDA company because of their greed. Jake's action clearly reflects the personality trait of agreeableness. As mentioned by Graziano and Eisenberg (2017) that the personality trait of agreeableness is reflected by how individuals interact with others and their willingness to help and cooperate in social situations. The proof of agreeableness personality trait in Jake can be found in the following quote:

JAKE : "I'm gonna get you some help, Grace."

GRACE: "Forget it, it doesn't matter."

Jake grabs her shoulders.

JAKE : "No! The People can help you. I know it".

(Avatar 2:06:31 – 2:06:43)

Jake will not be easy to let Grace's state continue to deteriorate. Jake tries to seek help because Grace's condition is getting weak. Then Jake wants to ask for help from the Na'vi people. Jake has a good impression of the people, and he is sure of the attitude they will take, seeing Grace's condition, which is at the edge of death. Although Jake is still considered a traitor, and they leave him, he is steady. He tries as hard as it is to become

Turok Makto to make them believe that his love for Neytiri is pure and that his concern for the people is real. This means Jake is generous and compassionate and perceives others positively. The next example of agreeableness also can be seen from the quote below:

NEYTIRI: "I See you."

JAKE : "(a hoarse whisper) I See you."

Neytiri's eyes brim with tears.

NEYTIRI: "I was afraid Jake -- for my people. I'm not anymore."

(*Avatar* 2:11:13 – 2:11:36)

Jake has a soft heart and tolerates Neytiri's behavior, which was previously filled with fear, anger, and distrust. He is well aware of the chaos, and Neytiri's father also increases her burden. Then, the fact that Jake was initially a spy who collected information made it worse. Jake understood things to be difficult for her and was willing to bear them together. What he does that refers to the agreeableness of being forgiving. Jake does not give up, and he strives to gain the trust of Neytiri and the entire Omaticaya clan. He also wants to fly with them to stop the RDA company, which is rampant and arbitrary. The last example of agreeableness example can be found when Jake, who is not a true Na'vi, is willing to fight with the RDA Company because he wants to help the Na'vi escape the threat of resource exploitation and the destruction of the Home Tree and sacred places, The Wells of Souls :

Gunners try to swing their guns toward him, but he rakes them with his A.R., still running forward, and – **Jake pulls two grenades from his battle harness, yanking the pins out with his teeth. He hurls them down the intakes of the VTOL turbofans.** (*Avatar* 2:37:00 – 2:37:20)

Jake is capable of taking leadership to prevent the battlefield due to his various abilities, experience on the battlefield, and skill in the use of firearms. He has the will to protect this world far from human greed and the one he loves, Neytiri. He clearly understood what RDA Company is doing solely for resources and ignored the nature and inhabitants of it. Now, Jake has everything worth protecting on Pandora, and fighting is his only option. Jake's action aligns with a research on the 'Agreeableness' trait, which encompass attributes like compassion and a concern for the welfare of others (Roccas et al, 2002). Jake's transformation from a Marine to a fierce protector of the Navi people demonstrates his growing Agreeableness (Cameron, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION

Jake Sully's character in *Avatar* serves as a compelling case study of personality transformation influenced by both external experiences and internal growth. Through the lens of the Big Five personality traits, Jake's Openness to Experience allows him to embrace the new world of Pandora and its culture, setting the foundation for his transformation. His high level of Extraversion facilitates his ability to connect with the Na'vi, build relationships, and eventually emerge as a leader, while his developing Conscientiousness and Agreeableness reflects his evolving sense of responsibility and commitment to the Na'vi people. These traits collectively contribute to his transition from a Marine to a leader for the Na'vi and their environment. Jake's journey underscores the

importance of personality traits in shaping human behavior and decision-making, particularly when individuals are confronted with new and challenging environments.

REFERENCES

- Back, M. D. (2021). "Social Interaction Processes and Personality". In J. Rauthmann (Ed.), *The Handbook of Personality Dynamics and Processes*. Academic Press
- Cameron, J. (Director). (2009). Avatar [Film]. Lightstorm Entertainment.
- Caspi, A., Roberts, B. W., & Shiner, R. L. (2005). Personality development: Stability and change. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 56, 453-484
- Dawson, P., & Mortimer, K. (2020). "The role of qualitative inquiry in literary studies: Reflections on practice." *Literary Studies*, 62(3), 287-305
- Gerring, John. (2017). "Qualitative Methods" *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol (20) ,15-36, DOI:[10.1146/annurev-polisci-09241s5-024158](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-09241s5-024158)
- Graziano, W. G., & Eisenberg, N. (2017). Agreeableness: A dimension of personality. In *Handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 795-824). Academic Press.
- John, O. P., Naumann, L. P., & Soto, C. J. (2008). Paradigm shift to the integrative Big Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and conceptual issues. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 114-158). Guilford Press
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (2008). The Five-Factor Theory of personality. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 159-181). Guilford Press.
- Roberts, B. W., Luo, J., Briley, D. A., Chow, P. I., Su, R., & Hill, P. L. (2017). A systematic review of personality trait change through intervention. *Psychological Bulletin*, 143(2), 117-141
- Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., Schwartz, S. H., & Knafo, A. (2002). The big five personality factors and personal values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(6), 789-801.