

Homophobia in ender's game



Ender's Game, a novel by Orson Scott Card, is a form of anti-homosexual propaganda. The essay "Kill the Bugger: Ender's Game and the Question of Heteronormativity" by James Campbell goes in depth regarding the ways in which Orson Scott Card's thoughts on heteronormativity are reflected through structural subtleties in the novel. The 2013 film adaptation of Ender's Game also includes an emphasis on the element of heterosexuality, which further enforces Card's distaste toward homosexuality. Card's anti-homosexual thoughts are expressed through the underlying analogies in the novel that Campbell mentions. His opinions are emphasized in specific scenes throughout the novel, as well as through Card's production choice, to increase the significance of heterosexual relationships in the film. In the article "Kill the Bugger: Ender's Game and the Question of Heteronormativity," author James Campbell mentions several subtleties that, when read closely, point to Card's continued insults towards homosexuals. Ender's Game tells the story of Ender Wiggin, a six-year-old boy who is recruited to attend Battle School to train to command an army to attack a foreign planet. He is instructed to save Earth from the aliens who inhabit it, called the "buggers." Implied by the title of the response article, the term "bugger" is perhaps the most obvious of signs. The word "bugger" is a British slang term for either a male homosexual or a practice of sodomy. Ender is instructed to violently murder all of these buggers, which implies Card's desire to eliminate all homosexuals. As quoted in "Kill the Bugger," literary analyst Norma Spinrad said, "It is difficult to believe that Card was unaware of the obvious sexual connotations when he named the aliens the 'buggers'" (493). Card also likely included the buggers in the story to serve as a political scapegoat. According to Campbell, "the bugger menace is a propaganda

ploy of the powers that be in order to frighten the populace, ' because as long as people are afraid of the buggers, the I. F. can stay in power, certain countries can keep their hegemony' (Card 110)" (500). As long as people are unsure of how to understand and react to homosexuals, the politically advantaged are able to stay in power. Card writes the story in such a way that the enemy defines the accepted community, which corresponds with a quote from an article Card published titled " The Hypocrites of Homosexuality": "[Gays] must, in other words, obey the rules that define what that community is. Those who are not willing or able to obey the rules should honestly admit the fact and withdraw from membership" (Card par. 14). Similarly, Card expresses his feelings about homosexuals' true purpose through Mazer Rackham's monologue about strategies to kill the hives of buggers: " Murder's no big deal to them. Only queen-killing, really, is murder, because only queen-killing closes off a genetic path" (Card 270). According to Campbell, " to Card, genetic potential is synonymous with real life" (503). By employing this viewpoint, Card is implying that homosexuals are worthless because they provide no pro-creational benefit. By stating that the buggers' murder would be insignificant, he is once again expressing his belief on the worthlessness of homosexuals. There are also several characters whose traits reflect Card's beliefs. According to Campbell, Orson Scott Card created the character Bonzo to represent the convergence of " homosexual desire and homophobic violence," (496). Ender points out his physical attractiveness: " A boy stood there, tall and slender, with beautiful black eyes and slender hips that hinted at refinement. I would follow such beauty anywhere, said something inside Ender" (Card 76). When Ender is transferred from Battle School to the Commander School, Bonzo angrily says,

<https://assignbuster.com/homophobia-in-enders-game/>

"I'll have your ass someday" (Card 88), which Campbell interprets as a sodomy reference by Card. When Bonzo enters the bathroom with his sidekicks to attack Ender, he chooses a time and place when Ender is most vulnerable: the shower. Campbell equates this scene to a prison shower fight or gang rape: "such acts have a violent and sexual component" (Campbell 496). Ender ends Bonzo's life by kicking him in the groin, which Campbell sees as a further anti-homosexual symbol from Card. It is also arguable that because Bonzo dies shortly after making a violent homosexual advance on Ender, he is killed. This could be Card's way of subliminally pointing out that homosexuals have an inevitable end, should they choose to act on their sexuality. Campbell also draws a parallel between the physical structures in the novel to homosexual innuendos. Campbell compares the layout of the battle room to sodomy, stating that this "may represent the biggest nudge and wink in the novel, the battleroom itself" (Campbell 497), continuing to explain that "it doesn't take an unusually perverse reader to detect a sexual underpinning: the armies struggle until the stronger team penetrates the opponent's corridor" (Campbell 497). Each player strives to shoot the other players to freeze them, and stop them from penetrating the opponent's corridor. Campbell argues that this is a subliminal message from Card, implying that the common goal amongst humans should be to end sodomical practices. The players' desperate attempts to stop the opposing team from penetrating their corridor could symbolize Card's wishes that all homosexuals would stop engaging in such relations. In addition to the underlying analogies throughout the novel that Campbell mentions, there are several distinct scenes where Orson Scott Card's negative feelings on homosexuality surface. When Ender transfers to the Rat Army commanded

<https://assignbuster.com/homophobia-in-enders-game/>

by Rose the Nose, he is told by Rose not to “screw around with his desk [computer]” (Card 101). All the other children then laugh, and Ender realizes it is because Rose “programmed his desk to display and animate a bigger-than-life-size picture of male genitals, which waggled back and forth as Rose held the desk on his naked lap” (Card 101). This scene makes the homosocial relations in the novel more literal. Rose uses his computer to show his masculine power, while explicitly telling Ender not to “screw” with his genitalia. Card writes this homosexual reference in a way that has the other children laughing at Rose’s phallic display, which pokes fun at homosexuality in a potentially offensive way. There are several other clear moments in the story where homosexuality is portrayed in a negative manner. Ender sends an anonymous message as “God” directed at Bernard over the communication system: “Cover your butt. Bernard is watching” (Card 55). This is a clear expression of Card’s opinion of the unnaturalness of sodomy. Since the message came from “God,” we can assume that Card finds it divinely wrong and inappropriate on the highest level. Ender responds to this message with “I love your butt. Let me kiss it,” (Card 55) sent from the name “Bernard.” This message angers Bernard and he sees it as a challenge to his sexuality, and more deeply, his superiority: “Bernard’s attempt to be ruler of the room was broken. Only a few stayed with him now” (Card 85). This demonstrates that the quickest way to undercut an enemy in this story is to accuse him of being homosexual. Card’s beliefs on homosexuality are expressed through the effectiveness of this method of attack, by implying that being homosexual is a diminishing quality. A third direct reference to the prohibited nature of homosexuality is demonstrated through another character interaction. When Alai sends Ender off to the

Salamander Army, "Alai suddenly kissed Ender on the cheek and whispered in his ear. 'Salaam'" (Card 69). The word "salaam" means peace, which should bring a positive reaction to Ender. However, Ender feels oppositely about this interaction: "Ender guessed that the kiss and the word were somehow forbidden" (Card 69). Even though there is no direct disapproval from any bystanders, Ender feels deeply disconcerted about Alai's display of friendship. Card is once again demonstrating that any same-sex affection, whether a sign of peace, sexual attraction, or friendship, is wrong and should not be tolerated. The film adaptation of Ender's Game, directed by Gavin Hood, increases the role of heterosexual relationships - suggesting that heterosexuality is dominant over homosexuality. The sexual tension between Ender and his friend Petra in the Salamander Army is so prevalent in the film, and yet hardly noticeable in the book. When Ender enters the Salamander Army, Petra coaches him to bring him up to par with the other members of their team in the battle room. There is a lot of dramatic physical contact between Ender and Petra, and their eye contact is cinematically emphasized as well. Through these intentional, yet awkward interactions, Ender and Petra's relationship is highly sexualized, and a strong emphasis is placed on heterosexual values. Even though this romance was not written as a significant part of the novel, Orson Scott Card was credited as a producer for the film, so it is likely that he either initiated or approved this insertion. Particularly because the characters are so young—especially too young to be engaging in romantic relationships—this romance feels forced, and likely has a different purpose than to add to the storyline. By emphasizing the value and importance of heterosexual relationships, Card is expressing his opinion of the superiority of heterosexuality over

homosexuality, without being offensive. Since this was a multi-million dollar film, it is understandable that Card would not want to scare away his audience with blatant anti-homosexual references on screen. Many people are still against the film regardless. There is a campaign called "Skip Ender's Game", consisting of LGBT protestors trying to urge people against seeing the film adaptation in theaters, to prevent Card from earning more money. Their message on the front page of their website states, "Ender's Game author Orson Scott Card is more than an 'opponent' of marriage equality. As a writer, he has spread degrading lies about LGBT people, calling us sexual deviants and criminals. As an activist, he sat on the board of the National Organization for Marriage and campaigned against our civil rights. Now he's a producer on the Ender's Game movie. Do not let your box office dollars fuel his anti-gay agenda." Card indeed does have a history of fighting against homosexuality that likely influenced his writing. In 1990, he advocated the criminalization of homosexuality, arguing, "those who flagrantly violate society's regulation of sexual behavior cannot be permitted to remain as acceptable, equal citizens within that society." In 2004, when Massachusetts legalized gay marriage, Card responded by saying the following: "So if [gays] insist on calling what they do 'marriage,' they are not turning their relationship into what my wife and I have created, because no court has the power to change what their relationship actually is. Instead they are attempting to strike a death blow against the well-earned protected status of our, and every other, real marriage. They steal from me what I treasure most, and gain for themselves nothing at all. They won't be married. They'll just be playing dress-up in their parents' clothes." In 2008 he stated, "Regardless of law, marriage has only one definition, and any government

that attempts to change it is my mortal enemy. I will act to destroy that government and bring it down." He was a member of the National Organization for Marriage from 2009 to 2013, and gave his support to a group tied directly to anti-equality activism around the country. These numerous actions that Card has taken against gay rights clearly demonstrate his honest feelings about homosexuality. His continued financial support to anti-gay activist groups proves that his support has not dwindled, despite his revocation of some of his stronger anti-gay remarks and his step down from his position on the board of the National Organization for Marriage anti-gay hate group. These politically strategic moves were conveniently timed to the release of his film, perhaps trying to minimize the bad press from the LGBT community. The "Skip Ender's Game" campaign saw through these moves, and continued to discourage support from fans. The anti-homosexual references in Ender's Game are congruent with Card's history of activism, so it is doubtful that they were unintentional. As Campbell pointed out, there are many underlying negative homosexual references throughout the novel, but Card's beliefs are also indicated through the distinct scenes mentioned here. Ultimately reinforced by the heterosexual relationships in the film adaptations, Card blatantly expresses his anti-gay beliefs.