



# MIND | GAME

The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw, a documentary film.

# DISCUSSION AND ACTION GUIDE

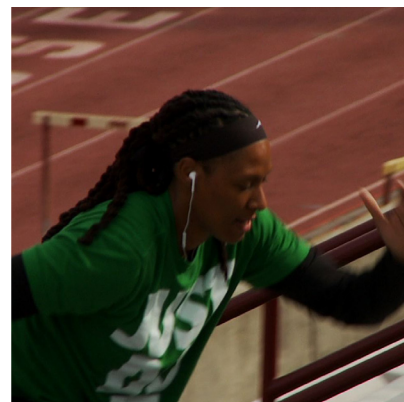
A joint project of Rick Goldsmith and The Jed Foundation

**THIS MIND/GAME DISCUSSION GUIDE** is designed for educators, mental health professionals and advocates, coaches and others, to promote awareness, stimulate conversation and provide talking points on a variety of issues, among teenagers, college students and adults alike.

**AS DISCUSSION LEADERS**, you have the opportunity to play an important role by creating a supportive environment that stimulates a productive discussion—one that can lead to a better understanding of the issues and help participants take positive action at home, among family and friends, in their communities, and beyond.

**ULTIMATELY, WE WANT TO HELP CREATE A WORLD** where people experiencing mental and emotional challenges can be accepted, feel safe seeking and getting help, and be supported by friends, family, strangers and society-at-large.

**THE FILM:** *Mind/Game: The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw*, a one-hour documentary film, tells the story of one superstar athlete's experience with mental illness. As unique as Chamique's journey is, it reflects the challenges faced by millions of people and families dealing with similar issues.



## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**REVIEW THE GUIDE.** Choose the topics most relevant for your situation and the issues facing the group you'll be leading. For those of you involved with youth sports groups and/or student-athletes, there is a section near the end of this guide with additional discussion points.

**WE DON'T EXPECT YOU AS FACILITATORS TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE, WE PRESENT LINKS TO RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES.** These links are available for your own reference, and to recommend to participants who want or need more detailed information.

## POST-FILM DISCUSSION

**BREAKING THE ICE:** Consider starting by asking participants for overall reactions to what they have just seen on screen.

*What parts of the film stand out the most for you? What was most surprising? [Get a sense of the room, encourage but don't require participation by all. Your goal is to make each person feel included and safe. Then move on...]*

### 1

## UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

**WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?** Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions—such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia—that impair one's ability to relate to others and function on a daily basis. Symptoms of mental illness can range from mild to severe, and differ depending on the type of mental illness. **Mental illness is real**, just like physical injuries and disease.

*How did you understand mental illness before you saw the film?  
How do you understand it differently now?*

**WHEN DOES MENTAL ILLNESS PRESENT ITSELF?** There can be subtle signs as early as age 14 (or even younger) for some of the individuals who later develop more evident mental illness.

*Chamique's grandma saw evidence of depression in the teenage Chamique. How did Chamique respond to her emotional challenges as a teenager and in college? How do you see Chamique's situation as similar to—and different from—the emotional troubles most of us have as teenagers and young adults?*

**HOW COMMON IS MENTAL ILLNESS?** 1 in 5 adults in the US experience a moderate to severe mental disorder in any given year. In spite of how common mental illnesses are, many people who experience them feel alone. It is important to remember that **mental illness affects nearly everyone and every family, in one way or another.**

**RECOVERY:** How likely is recovery from serious mental illness? For most people, recovery—which means returning to a productive life with positive relationships—is possible, especially when you start treatment early and play an active role in your own recovery process. Dr. Satcher says in the film, *"Mental disorders are treatable, and 85%-90% of the time, people will return to productive lives and positive relationships. It doesn't mean that problem is gone forever but it means that you have an opportunity to continue your life and manage it appropriately."* **Ask for comments on this statement.**

### Things to bring into the discussion:

Ways to "manage [mental illness] appropriately":

- seek professional help;
- communicate with your doctors and therapists;
- educate yourself about the illness;

- develop a strong support system, and help your friends and family members educate themselves;
- make healthy lifestyle choices;
- stick to your treatment plan, including engaging fully in therapy and taking any prescribed medication.

*How did Chamique apply what she learned about her own condition?*

## 2 OBSTACLES TO SEEKING AND OBTAINING TREATMENT AND SERVICES

### A) Personal obstacles

Several times in the film Chamique talks about “sweeping [her emotional problems] under the rug.” Discuss this. What might have caused her to do this?

#### Things to bring into the discussion:

- **It can be frightening** to experience serious emotional problems and to admit to yourself that you might have a mental illness. Denial is a common psychological mechanism used to deflect or reject unpleasant information.

- **The illness itself can cause obstacles.** Many people with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder lack awareness of their illness. This often results in not taking needed medication and can lead to a vicious cycle. Chamique, when she was on the L.A. Sparks, said the team helped her get a good therapist, “*but a lot of people that suffer from mental illness when things are going good, they think, ‘OK. I don’t have to take the medicine anymore,’ and then I did that, and things fell apart again.*”

**Chamique’s friend Rita**, discussing her phone call with Chamique during the car incident, said, “*maybe Chamique didn’t have the ability*” to use good judgment at the time. **Asia, the body-builder**, also talks about “*the point where most manic depressives want to stay, where nothing really matters to them... where you think that you’re invincible.*” **Discuss both of these in terms of being obstacles to treatment or to positive responses concerning one’s condition.**

- Most of us, at some points in our lives, think we don’t need to listen to advice because we know better. **[To the group:] Give some examples from your life, and what the consequences were. Compare those experiences to the extreme situations Rita and Asia describe.**

### B) Stigma

**1) Self-(or internalized) stigma** (feelings of shame and embarrassment): According to her agent Lon Babby, Chamique felt stigma during her experience with depression with the Mystics in 2004. Chamique often mentioned feeling “weak,” “ashamed,” and that she “should be stronger than this.” She recalls telling her friend Jennifer not to tell anyone—not her family, not her teammates—about her suicide attempt.

- How did shame about her problems/illness affect Chamique’s ability to seek out and get help at different points in her journey?

- How did she ultimately overcome her own sense of shame?

#### Things to bring into the discussion:

*How can you take action to help overcome self-stigma?* Understand that everyone is a valued person and deserves to be treated with respect. Think of mental disorders as similar to physical illness, disabilities or injuries, but NOT as

weakness or moral failing. Refrain from blame, shame, secrecy, stereotypes or discrimination. Look at mental health and physical health as equal and complementary parts of general health and wellness.

**2) Family and community stigma** - Mental illness is a taboo subject within many families and communities. This makes it more difficult to talk about AND to encourage or seek out professional help.

**3) Public stigma (reaction by others)** - Real or perceived consequences (discrimination on the job, looking for housing, etc.) that might result from revealing one’s emotional problems discourage people from seeking help.







### 3 THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

**What can you do to help?** Discuss Chamique's journey in the film in terms of the role played by her family and friends at different points in her life.

#### **The important role of family and friends in treatment and help-seeking:**

*Chamique often dismissed her own problems, but she often got help because of the concern and intervention by others. Discuss these instances, such as:*

- Grandma June when Chamique was a child;
- as a college student with Coach Summitt;
- with the Mystics, a friend urged her to see a therapist;
- after overdosing on pills, a friend made sure she got to the hospital;
- she ultimately saw her mother, a recovering alcoholic, as a role model because her mother sought and benefitted from treatment.



#### **Other things to bring into the discussion:**

*How important is it to express concern and sympathy to a friend in trouble?*

*What are important things you can do for a friend in distress?*

- It is not always necessary to provide answers to someone in distress. Often LISTENING, without judgment, is the best response. Let your friend know he/she is not alone.

- Ask what you can do to help. Leave it open-ended ("I want to know how I can best support you") or suggest specific tasks that might be helpful ("Can I drive you to your appointment?"). What are some other ways you can help a friend or family member in distress?

### SUICIDE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION:

Chamique survived a suicide attempt. How and why? Discuss the intervention of the friend who got her to the hospital, and the close friend who showed up at the hospital to be with her after Chamique's "worst night of my life."

Suicidal thoughts, suicide prevention:

- 1) Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults.
- 2) 90% of those who die by suicide have an underlying treatable mental illness.
- 3) Suicide is largely preventable when good mental health treatment is consistently accessible.
- 4) It is always important to take suicide threats seriously.



**If you think someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, approach him or her and have a caring conversation. If you are feeling suicidal or having impulses about self-harm, reach out to others. You are not alone. Help is available. The first step is breaking the silence. Many mental health advocacy groups (see end of this guide), have their own guidelines on how to intervene safely and effectively.**

**If you or your friend needs help right now you can text START to 741-741 or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).**

## HOW DOES SOMEONE'S MENTAL ILLNESS IMPACT THOSE CLOSEST TO THEM?

Chamique's close friend Rita tearfully describes being on the phone with her just before Chamique attacked her ex-girlfriend's car, and expresses guilt for not staying on the phone longer. What is Rita going through?

It is typical for close friends or family to experience two paradoxical feelings: guilt at not doing enough to "take care" of a close one with a disorder, or to prevent bad outcomes; and frustration at having their own lives constantly upset by their friend's or family member's erratic behavior.

Open up the discussion for the participants to share their own experience with close friends or family experiencing emotional problems or mental illness (while setting guidelines, i.e. please don't reveal sensitive information or name names).

## EDUCATE YOURSELF AND THOSE CLOSE TO YOU ABOUT YOUR MENTAL ILLNESS.

People can experience a wide range of mental disorders that often take a while to identify properly and treat. Chamique was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder (manic depression). What did she learn about herself? Chamique says her therapist encouraged her to "think differently," which is a phrase used in "cognitive behavioral therapy," a common therapy for bipolar disorder.

### FACTS ABOUT BIPOLAR DISORDER:

25-50% of those with bipolar disorder attempt suicide and 15% or more die by suicide. However, the suicide rate goes down dramatically with adequate treatment.

Bipolar disorder is a lifelong condition. Genetics and brain chemistry often cause the disease, but recognizing emotional factors help manage it.

*Chamique talks about the importance of continuing to take medication as prescribed. What are common reasons that people stop taking their medication? [Adverse side effects; enjoying the "high" or mania; not recognizing your own poor judgment]. She also talks about the importance of educating friends and family. Why? [To help recognize erratic behavior and destructive or suicidal impulses; to aid in getting professional help in times of crisis]*

## 4 WRAPPING UP

### Ask all participants who are willing to speak:

- How has the film or discussion changed your thinking about mental health and mental illness?
- What is one thing you might do differently as a result of the film and discussion?

### TAKE-HOME POINTS:

**Mental illnesses often make us frightened or uneasy, especially when people behave in ways that are hard to understand or when we are not educated about them. Opening up the conversation helps break down those fears, and also breaks down barriers to seeking help. Educate yourself, educate others, and don't be afraid to speak up among your closest friends and family, whether you are suffering yourself, or perceive that others may be suffering, often in silence. No one is alone and help is always available.**

## ADDITIONAL TOPICS FOR YOUTH SPORTS GROUPS AND STUDENT-ATHLETES:

- **Our sports culture in America.** From an early age, “no pain, no gain” is the universal mantra in organized sports. As a youth sports coach or parent, you can help replace a “winning at all costs” mentality with one that nurtures positivity, acceptance, and character-building. Positive Coaching Alliance, a nationwide organization, talks about the need to “respect yourself, your teammates, the officials and your opponents.”  
*What did you see in the film’s scenes of Chamique’s ‘mentally driven’ clinic for young girls?*
- **Mental health in highly competitive sports (high school, college, pros).** William Rhoden, the sportswriter, says in the film, “*Mental health and athletics at the highest level are almost antithetic, because mental health is about seeking help, being vulnerable, talking openly about your issues, and success in competitive sports is not showing weakness, not showing vulnerability, not asking for help.*” Discuss that statement. What might make it easier for competitive athletes to reach out for and receive help?  
*Can you think of situations where being vulnerable and asking for help actually demonstrate strength?*

## RESOURCES:

This is a sampling of organizations and websites to seek out more information:

**The Jed Foundation** - A national organization whose mission is to promote emotional health and prevent suicide among college and university students. [jedfoundation.org](http://jedfoundation.org)

**Bring Change 2 Mind** - A national public education campaign dedicated to ending stigma surrounding mental illness. Founded by Glenn Close. [bringchange2mind.org](http://bringchange2mind.org)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** - The nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives those affected by mental illness. [nami.org](http://nami.org)

**Active Minds** - National organization of student-run chapters fighting stigma and promoting mental health awareness, education, and advocacy. [ActiveMinds.org](http://ActiveMinds.org)

**Mental Health America (MHA)** - Promotes mental health, including early identification, intervention and integrated care for those who need it, with recovery as the goal. Works on mental health public policy. [mentalhealthamerica.net](http://mentalhealthamerica.net)

**Suicide Prevention Resource Center** - Promotes a public health approach to suicide prevention. [sprc.org](http://sprc.org)

**The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** - Funds research, offers educational programs, advocates for public policy, and supports those affected by suicide. [afsp.org](http://afsp.org)

**International Bipolar Foundation** - Dedicated to enhancing care and support services for those affected by bipolar disorder, encouraging helpful research and public education. [ibpf.org](http://ibpf.org)

**Positive Coaching Alliance** - National non-profit developing “Better Athletes, Better People”—to provide youth and high school athletes a positive, character-building youth sports experience. [positivecoach.org](http://positivecoach.org)

We will continue to update this guide. Give us your input.

[mindgamefilm.org](http://mindgamefilm.org)



Rick Goldsmith  
Kovno Communications  
(510) 849-3225  
[rgoldfilm@gmail.com](mailto:rgoldfilm@gmail.com)



[jedfoundation.org](http://jedfoundation.org)