

MHA Media Award 2017 Nomination Statement

Mind/Game: The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw

In 2012, filmmaker Rick Goldsmith embarked on a journey to tackle the stigma of mental illness. Known for his documentary treatment of contemporary social issues, Goldsmith had come upon the remarkable story of an African-American sports superstar who recently embraced the role of mental health advocate.

Chamique Holdsclaw was the greatest women's basketball player the world had ever seen: seven consecutive championships from high school through college, moves and flair comparable to the best men's players, the "female Michael Jordan."

But six years into her pro career, on a road trip with the WNBA's Washington Mystics in 2004, Chamique Holdsclaw mysteriously disappeared. She was, it turned out later, suffering from both clinical depression and the shame of her illness, afraid to admit any of her troubles to her fans or even her teammates. She returned to the WNBA, but two years later attempted suicide by overdose. Hitting rock bottom, only then did Chamique seriously accept professional help.

As Chamique progressed in apparent recovery, she began sharing her story, first with friends and then publicly, both as part of her own healing, and to help others overcome the stigma of mental illness, which had kept her silent for so long. When Rick learned of her journey in early 2012 through an article in *The New York Times*, he approached her and asked if he could document her story.

THE FILMMAKING JOURNEY

On paper, Chamique and director Rick Goldsmith were polar opposites in almost every demographic: race, gender, age, religion, family background, sexual orientation. But they connected through their shared passion for bringing discussion of mental illness out of the shadows. What neither anticipated, however, was an incident that occurred six months into the production of the film and nearly derailed it.

In November 2012, Holdsclaw was once again in the headlines-- but this time in handcuffs. The event involved an attack on her ex-girlfriend, and suddenly Chamique was looking at a possible 65 years in prison. Skewered in the media, she faced social ostracism, financial hardship, months of legal travail—and a new diagnosis: bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, a disease that results in suicide for 3 out of 20 who have it.

Would it really make sense for Chamique to continue to participate in a documentary film? She had her life to put back in order. And Rick had to consider: Might putting Holdsclaw through the rigors of a film be counter-therapeutic? The production was put on hold, while Chamique consulted with her therapist, and both filmmaker and subject sought out colleagues, family, friends, and, finally, each other. They came to the conclusion, separately and together, that continuing to follow Chamique's journey, for both of them, was important to pursue for the broader good it could do, and because, in the end, the resultant film would be more powerful, more instructive, more inspirational and more *real* than either had envisioned at the start.

Shortly after production continued, Rick was awarded a Rosalynn Carter Mental Health Journalism Fellowship, which provided him with immensely valuable consultation and advice from mental health professionals (including renown psychologist and author Kay Redfield Jamison). The fellowship increased his understanding of the sensitive issues involved, and helped him gracefully integrate key information about mental illness into Holdsclaw's personal mental health journey, as it continued to unfold before him.

TARGETED IMPACT

Mind/Game: The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw was completed in early 2015. The 56-minute documentary is an intimate portrait with a compelling narrative, both educational and inspirational. On a social level, it explores the damage caused by stigma and articulates the necessity for more humane mental health policy. On a personal level, it addresses specific issues such as overcoming shame, resistance to taking medication, and not letting mental illness define oneself or get in the way of living a full life. Chamique's story goes beyond the headlines of mental illness by debunking myths and misconceptions, and offering a blueprint for recovery.

From the start, Rick's goal has been to use ***Mind/Game*** to positively impact the discussion of mental health and mental illness on every level: within families, communities, the media, and in public policy circles. Chamique's story not only attracts broad audiences, but populations who might not otherwise seek out mental-health-themed films: athletes, sports fans, African-Americans and other minorities, college-age youth, teenage girls, young women and the LGBT community.

Since its release in April, 2015, ***Mind/Game*** has screened at dozens of conferences, focusing on suicide prevention and other mental health advocacy, gatherings of mental health professionals (sports psychologists, psychiatric nurses, therapists), audiences of servicemen/women and veterans, LGBT and disability education groups, and sports organizations of all ages. Other highlights include a screening presented by former First Lady Rosalynn Carter at The Carter Center and another sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor on the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Director Rick Goldsmith and Chamique Holdsclaw, alone and together, appear at these screenings regularly for poignant and provocative Q&As and panel discussions. (See attached PDF listing of screenings and testimonials.)

Mind/Game has been immensely well-received among general audiences as well. The film debuted at the Nashville Film Festival, where it won its first of many Audience Awards, and at more than 20 film festivals and counting. This spring it will be honored at the Roger Ebert Film Festival in Illinois with a "Golden Thumb" award. In 2016, the film was cablecast nationwide on Viacom's LOGO Network.

To help raise mental health awareness, Rick and ***Mind/Game*** have connected with numerous groups and organizations, including Mental Health America; NAMI; Bring Change 2 Mind (established by actress and ***Mind/Game's*** narrator Glenn Close); Active Minds; Positive Coaching Alliance; and The Jed Foundation. Goldsmith received a prestigious Voice

Award for ***Mind/Game*** from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).

Mind/Game continues to be distributed and screened in colleges and universities by the filmmaker co-op New Day Films. Chamique recently completed a tour sponsored by NAMI Maine, visiting with four Maine colleges and their women's basketball teams to screen the film and discuss mental health. Rick went on a Southern Circuit Tour, screening ***Mind/Game*** in 7 cities this past winter, and will do a Mid-Atlantic tour in 9 cities later this year.

To assist teachers, counselors and coaches, a free, six-page discussion and action guide (attached), made in partnership with The Jed Foundation, is available as a free download to aid in facilitating discussions about mental health and stigma after screenings of the film.

Perhaps most importantly, ***Mind/Game*** serves as a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles. I have personally seen many times over how the film has facilitated a space where people feel comfortable talking about their own experiences and mental health challenges—and has educated others unfamiliar with such frank discussions. With each screening, it continues to raise awareness and break down the stigma that still keeps so many from seeking help. I am proud to nominate ***Mind/Game*** for a 2017 Mental Health America Media Award and look forward to the good work it will continue to do.

--Lauren Kawana, Associate Producer

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Rick Goldsmith (producer, director, editor, co-writer) has been making documentary films for more than three decades. He specializes in documentaries that tell intensely personal stories in order to address important social/political issues. ***The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*** (2009) (co-produced and co-directed with Judith Ehrlich), was an Academy Award nominee for Best Documentary Feature, and won the George Foster Peabody Award for its POV/PBS broadcast. It tells the story of how a Pentagon insider put his career and freedom on the line to expose government lies in an attempt to help stop the War in Vietnam.

Goldsmith produced, directed, edited and co-wrote the Academy-Award-nominated documentary feature ***Tell the Truth and Run: George Seldes and the American Press*** (1996), which was broadcast nationwide on public television and has become a staple of journalism schools and college programs nationwide. The film is a piercing look at censorship and suppression in America's news media, and has influenced a generation of aspiring journalists. Goldsmith also co-produced and co-directed (with Abby Ginzberg) ***Everyday Heroes*** (2001), a behind-the-headlines documentary feature about AmeriCorps and an incisive look at youth, race, and national service. The film was broadcast nationwide on public television.

Goldsmith is a member of the Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS); Writers Guild of America, West; International Documentary Association (IDA); and New Day Films, a filmmaker distribution co-op.