



CRAZYWISE

Crazy...or wise? The traditional wisdom of indigenous cultures often contradicts modern views about a mental health crisis. Is it a 'calling' to grow or just a 'broken brain'? The documentary CRAZYWISE explores what can be learned from people around the world who have turned their psychological crisis into a positive transformative experience.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE GUIDE

Severe mental emotional distress and the lives it affects is an ever-growing problem. Is there something fundamentally wrong with our current mainstream approach to mental health? If so, what are the issues and how can we best take action to address them?

CRAZYWISE does not pretend to have the answers but only to explore and challenge a status quo that is not working. We have to get past finger pointing, accusations, and demonizing. Our hope is that the film will help start much-needed, in-depth, and open dialogue that leads to committed action and solutions.

The film, along with this guide, is meant as an aid to start the ball rolling. Guided conversations or traditional Q&A sessions following a screening can (all) be very exciting and productive. One of our favorite formats if time is available, is the [Open Space Meeting](#)--the description is included in this guide. (Page 10)

ABOUT THE FILM

What can we learn from those who have turned their psychological crisis into a positive transformative experience?

During a quarter-century documenting indigenous cultures, human-rights photographer and filmmaker Phil Borges often saw these cultures identify “psychotic” symptoms as an indicator of shamanic potential. He was intrigued by how differently psychosis is defined and treated in the West.

Through interviews with renowned mental health professionals including Gabor Mate, MD, Robert Whitaker, and Roshi Joan Halifax, PhD, Phil explores the growing severity of the mental health crisis in America dominated by biomedical psychiatry. He discovers a growing movement of professionals and psychiatric survivors who demand more choices and alternative treatments that focus on recovery, nurturing social connections, and finding meaning.

CRAZYWISE follows two young Americans diagnosed with “mental illness.” Adam, 27, suffers devastating side effects from medications before embracing meditation in hopes of recovery. Ekhaya, 32, survives childhood molestation and several suicide attempts before spiritual training to become a traditional South African healer gives her suffering meaning and brings a deeper purpose to her life.

CRAZYWISE doesn’t aim to over-romanticize indigenous wisdom, or condemn Western treatment. Not every indigenous person who has a crisis becomes a shaman. And, many individuals benefit from Western medications.

However, for thousands of years, indigenous cultures have formed deep connections between themselves, their ancestors, and nature through shared rituals and metaphor. These connections and their acceptance of non-ordinary states of consciousness is something we can learn from.

CRAZYWISE adds a voice to the growing conversation that believes a psychological crisis can be an opportunity for growth and potentially transformational, not a disease without a cure.

FROM THE DIRECTORS

PHIL'S STATEMENT

I've traveled the globe for many years documenting human-rights issues. Along the way, I've met many indigenous healers.

Many of them were selected as healers after having what Westerners would call a psychotic break. In many cultures, hearing voices and having visions are considered signs of a valuable sensitivity—not a medical problem. I found this contrast to Western culture fascinating and it became the inspiration for CRAZYWISE.

Years later, while making a short film on meditation, I met Adam Gentry. This engaging, bright young man told me about the terrible side effects from medications he had taken to treat a psychotic break. Exasperated and severely ill, Adam quit all meds and stabilized himself by doing a 10-day silent meditation retreat. I thought it was a great story about the power of meditation.

But that wasn't the end of the story.

Two months later, Adam was rejected from his fourth meditation retreat when he revealed his mental health history. That rejection and the stigma of "mental illness" started a vicious downward spiral for him.

In an effort to understand, I started interviewing mental health professionals and people who had experienced similar breaks. A clear theme emerged: being told you have a diseased brain or faulty genetics is extremely disempowering and harmful. Many of the Shamans I interviewed were given a very different explanation for their experience—a supportive, empowering explanation.

This multi-year journey of discovery has shown me there's often important wisdom in the human experiences we call crazy. I now believe that shifting our point of view can help individuals like Adam and Ekhaya find meaning, dignity, and purpose in their lives.

KEVIN'S STATEMENT

Phil and I have worked together on projects for years, going back to 1999 when we traveled to Siberia to photograph and explore an aging group of Shaman women.

Then, in 2012, I began shooting a film about Phil's human rights photography while he began another film about the healing power of meditation. During his filming, Phil met a young man named Adam who struggled with major anxiety and depression. Phil reached out to me, knowing my family was all too familiar with the ups and downs of mental health.

Our daughter is a survivor of mental and emotional crises as a single mom raising a young daughter in Seattle. She's struggled for over 25 years with severe depression, and is able to cope thanks to the love and support of our immediate family, and community and state mental health agencies.

What compels me is the hope that our film can transform the way we frame and treat a mental health crisis—be it with a friend, co-worker, or loved one. My hope is that CRAZYWISE will help to restore connections and conversations among families, and to re-awaken the hope of recovery in the face of overwhelming stigma and fear.

Making CRAZYWISE has been incredibly rewarding. Following the lives of our main subjects Adam and Ekhaya left me deeply impressed with their resilience, grace, and inner strength while dealing with adversity.

As storytellers, we want to connect to audiences with themes of family, love, and loss. Our hope is to move people emotionally, inspire awareness, and reduce stigma around mental health crises—and to let audiences know there's real power in telling our stories, whatever they may be.

THE ISSUE

Biomedical advancements over the past 30 years have given us powerful pharmaceutical tools to address mental emotional suffering and have helped many people cope with their distress. In CRAZYWISE, we question the dominance of the Biomedical or 'Disease Model' approach to psychological distress and explore its limitations and potential problems. For example:

1. Receiving the diagnosis of a 'diseased brain' creates anxiety and fear and can have a strong negative placebo effect
2. Treatment relies mostly on suppression of symptoms and can have severe negative side effects in the long term
3. Diagnostic categories are expanding and beginning to pathologize and chemically treat normal human experience, especially in children.
4. Diagnostic labels stigmatize and consequently tend to isolate the person suffering
5. The individual's responsibility for their recovery tends to shift over to clinical experts and scientists looking for a cure.

CRAZYWISE asks:

Is it time to pay more attention to the psycho/social and spiritual underpinnings of mental health and bring a more balanced approach to mental health care?

What can indigenous cultures teach us about the role community support, peer mentorship and diagnosis has on mental health?

What can we learn from people who have successfully navigated a psychological crisis?

What steps can we take to improve mental health care?

ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING THE FILM

TRADITIONAL Q & A

Remember to direct the questions and comments back to the audience in order to start a lively dialogue. Be sure to save time to ask for possible solutions and action items to some of the issues raised in the film. Our experience has been that the Q&A will go on as long as you let it--there is so much to discuss!

After the Q&A, please ask if anyone would like to host a Community Screening of their own and direct them to the CRAZYWISE website.

Here are a few possible questions to start the Q&A:

If you could ask anyone in the film a question, who and what would you ask?

Do you believe most psychological crises are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain?

Considering mental health, do indigenous spiritual beliefs have any significance or meaning for us in our modern world today? Does shamanism have any relevance?

Do you think a psychological crisis could be an opportunity for personal growth...or a potential 'calling'?

Adam said 'when it first happened it was very fun and exciting...it was the first time I felt at one with the universe'. Adam's mother said 'He had an equation that would solve all the family's problems.' What do you think was happening to Adam when he first experienced his crisis?

After Adam's 'feeling of oneness' he said 'then I went too far and then it got scary: What do you think he meant by going too far?

Have you ever had a non-ordinary experience or a frightening emotion that you were afraid to tell anyone about?

What do you think led Adam to spiral down after stabilizing himself with meditation?

What advice would you like to give to Adam?

What can we learn from Ekhaya's journey?

After Ekhaya's childhood trauma, she said 'I was wearing a mask -- being what everyone wanted me to be'. Have you ever felt like that?

Ekhaya said that she had to experience all of her difficult and frightening feelings and be with them before she could let them go. Why do you think she had to re-experience her pain?

What role do you think Yeye Gogo Nana, using traditional African rituals, played in Ekhaya's recovery?

Everyone we've interviewed said medications can play a role in stabilizing and treating a psychological crisis. What has your experience been with medications?

What are some first steps we can take to help solve our mental health care crisis?

THE OPEN SPACE MEETING

If you want to follow the film with a more robust session than a traditional Q&A and spend an afternoon or a whole day, an Open Space Meeting can generate more ideas, solutions and empower the participants to take ownership of the action items--all while having lots of fun.

After viewing the film, an Open Space Meeting usually starts with a general theme such as:

- The Biomedical Model
- Mental Health Care Crisis--Solutions?
- Re-thinking Madness
- Creating Community Support

In the first 30 minutes, topics generated by the audience are written on a board at the front of the room. Examples:

- Spirituality and Mental Health
- Peer to Peer movement
- Coming off Medications
- Creating community

People break into roundtable groups according to the topics they are passionate about and explore ideas, solutions, and action items. At any time, anyone can move from one table to another to find the topic and discussion that excites them. These discussion groups usually last an hour and there can be up to three one-hour rounds in a day.

A recorder harvests the ideas, solutions, and action items at the end of the session and presents them to the whole group.

Open Space works best when:

- The issue is complex
- Conflict or special interests are holding back the ability to change
- You have no preconceived notion of what the outcomes should be

Probable Outcomes:

- Builds energy, commitment, and shared leadership
- Action plans and recommendations emerge from discussions as appropriate
- You create a record of the entire proceedings as you go along

More information on Open Space type meetings [here](#).

GROW THE CRAZYWISE MOVEMENT

As filmmakers, we believe that film is a powerful tool for changing public perception and creating social change. We are just one part of a movement of organizations and individuals who are rethinking mental health. You can join us and help this movement grow! Bring the message of CRAZYWISE into your community with the following actions:

Stay in Touch:

Sign up for our mailing list on our website, and like us on facebook and twitter to get the latest news from CRAZYWISE.

Visit our Website:

You can find various mental health resources by visiting our resource page. Visit our blog to find bonus video content from dozens of mental health professionals. Our website is also where you can purchase a copy of the DVD or stream CRAZYWISE online!

Spread the Word About CRAZYWISE:

Tell your community about CRAZYWISE by sharing the film on your social media accounts, newsletter, or blog. If you don't use social media, just tell a friend, or send an email to a family member!

Organize a Community Screening of Your Own:

Do you have a network of people who would love to see CRAZYWISE? You can host your own screening and directly extend the reach of the film by visiting the [community screening page](#) on our website. Or maybe you want to host a screening and don't know who to invite? Contact a local mental health organization near you to ask if they would like to partner to organize the screening. One screening can lead to more screenings, creating a ripple effect to engage and move people to action. There is hope for recovery.

Connect or Create a Community Organization:

Would you like to join a peer-support group and connect with like-minded individuals? Check out the resource page on our website to find a peer-support group near you. Can't find one? Consider organizing a peer-support group of your own!

RESOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS

Navigating mental health resources for yourself or someone you care about can be daunting and confusing, especially when seeking help during a crisis or acute psychological experience. One size does not fit all when it comes to mental health treatment. We have compiled a list of community and peer-focused resources that we came across during the making of the film. CRAZYWISE cannot advise on a particular treatment and is not affiliated with any of the services included.

Visit our resources page: crazywisefilm.com/#resources

Useful Links:

Website: crazywisefilm.com

Newsletter: crazywisefilm.com/crazywise-newsletter-signup/

Blog: crazywisefilm.com/blog/

Community Screenings: <https://crazywisefilm.com/community-screenings/>

Resource Page: crazywisefilm.com/#resources

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YouTube: youtube.com/user/CrazywiseFilm