FILM SUMMARY

In the West, we live under the pretense that a crime is punishable under law and that true criminals are brought to justice. By all definitions of rape and sexual assault, it appears to be both unlawful and punishable by law. THE INVISIBLE WAR shows us the flip side of this reality, unveiling a dark and dirty world where sexual assault is allowed to exist, and at times even encouraged within the U.S. Armed Forces.

Through interviews with former military personnel, lawyers, advocators, and the military’s own rape prevention agency, we become privy to the nauseating tales of former U.S. military officials who were subjected to sexual assault while serving under the dome of American defense. Those brave enough to report their injuries, both physical and psychological, were faced with the ice-cold reality that the military does not manage such accusations fairly. Victims were ignored, chastised, criticized, even dismissed while watching their perpetrators rise within the ranks. Females are charged with adultery after being raped by a married colleague. Since fair and unbiased legal aid is never available, victims see just three options: suicide, AWOL, or dealing with it.

THE INVISIBLE WAR presents shocking evidence of an outdated and corrupt judicial system within the military, where victims cannot access justice because their advocators are oftentimes guilty of similar crimes. Filmmaker Kirby Dick and team attempt to pry open the steel door of the military’s antiquated, torturous judicial system, which has been allowed to rule and ruin long past its time.

The Invisible War
Discussion Guide

In the West, we live under the pretense that a crime is punishable under law and that true criminals are brought to justice. By all definitions of rape and sexual assault, it appears to be both unlawful and punishable by law. THE INVISIBLE WAR shows us the flip side of this reality, unveiling a dark and dirty world where sexual assault is allowed to exist, and at times even encouraged within the U.S. Armed Forces.

Through interviews with former military personnel, lawyers, advocators, and the military’s own rape prevention agency, we become privy to the nauseating tales of former U.S. military officials who were subjected to sexual assault while serving under the dome of American defense. Those brave enough to report their injuries, both physical and psychological, were faced with the ice-cold reality that the military does not manage such accusations fairly. Victims were ignored, chastised, criticized, even dismissed while watching their perpetrators rise within the ranks. Females are charged with adultery after being raped by a married colleague. Since fair and unbiased legal aid is never available, victims see just three options: suicide, AWOL, or dealing with it.

THE INVISIBLE WAR presents shocking evidence of an outdated and corrupt judicial system within the military, where victims cannot access justice because their advocators are oftentimes guilty of similar crimes. Filmmaker Kirby Dick and team attempt to pry open the steel door of the military’s antiquated, torturous judicial system, which has been allowed to rule and ruin long past its time.
FILM THEMES

By maintaining all legal control and judicial proceedings under its jurisdiction, the military has managed to protect, hide, and even enable sexual assault to thrive within its branches. THE INVISIBLE WAR reveals the severe mishandling of military rape and sexual assaults, delving into the reasons why the armed forces are such a breeding ground.

ENVIRONMENT OF MASCULINITY
To rise up through the military ranks, one must prove their strength in body, mind, and character. It’s not a career path for the weak-willed, and most people who enlist in the military strive to serve their country with pride, pushing themselves to their personal limits. Within this environment of pure macho power, a victim is weak, the opposite of what the military stands for. Committing an act of sexual assault on a fellow soldier proves one’s power to conquer and control. THE INVISIBLE WAR provides compelling proof that the military fosters an incredibly potent ‘group’ mentality. Fight together, stick together. To report that one had been assaulted, or that one had witnessed an assault, would be to break from both the masculine and group mentality.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MILITARY RAPE
“Rape within the military is akin to incest,” stated one military psychologist. The military is one big family, a community of brothers and sisters fighting together to protect and serve their country. When a person is raped by a brother, what consolation can they find? How can they believe the world is a safe, worthwhile place in which to exist? Victims of military sexual assault are injured deep down in their cores, making them all the more in need of psychological and medical assistance, not to mention fair legal intervention, once they have plucked up the courage to report the crime. Yet, the film reveals the barren wasteland of resources available for military rape victims, those who need it most of all.

MILITARY VS. CIVILIAN JUSTICE SYSTEM
The military’s rape prevention program claims that there is always someone to turn to in the case of rape. They recommend reporting your rape to a congressman if your commander does not take your claim seriously. Imagine a civilian contacting a congressman with a rape claim. For civilians, there are public advocates, an extensive set of laws, and the police to bring perpetrators to justice, making it difficult for crimes to be repeated. Within the military, however, victims must report such crimes to those who are often perpetrators themselves, and once they realize that there’s nothing to hold them accountable, they become more potent in their reign of terror. THE INVISIBLE WAR exposes the imbalance between the civilian and military justice systems and argues for an overhaul of the military’s antiquated ways.

“This is not an issue of sexual orientation. This is simply an issue of power and violence... whoever is there to prey upon, men or women.”
Captain Anu Bhagwati

“Female marines are nothing but objects for the marines to fuck.”
Told to a female Marine recruit

“There is a right way, a wrong way, and the Army way.”
Army motto
FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Have you or anyone close to you ever been enlisted in the U.S. military? If so, do you have any knowledge or experience of how sexual assault was managed within certain divisions?

2. Do you know anyone who has been a victim of sexual assault? If so, did that person receive proper care and concern from the relevant authorities, and was the perpetrator brought to justice?

3. Can the military be trusted to clean up its own mess without civilian intervention?

4. The military’s rape prevention program consists of posters and videos informing women how to avoid rape rather than educating men that rape should never be committed. What do you think of this program? Is it a way for the military to cover up its wrongdoings and continue allowing rape, or is it a true effort to turn things around?

5. If an individual becomes aware of sexual assault taking place within their unit but does not report the assault, does s/he become guilty as well? What is the moral responsibility of witnesses? Should everyone involved – both directly and indirectly – be held accountable?

6. Most military enlistees are now aware of the assault risks they face when joining the military. If a soldier is sexually assaulted, did they “have it coming”?

7. Should female soldiers be told to de-feminize themselves (i.e. not wear makeup, not wear shorts or skirts) in order to discourage unwanted sexual advances from fellow soldiers?

8. Civilian tax dollars fund the military. In turn, the military pays for the alcohol that soldiers are “forced” to drink during bar nights, disputably encouraging sexual deviance to occur. Should we as civilians have more say in how our tax money is used?

9. Men are also victims of sexual assault within the military. How can men be educated on sexual abuse, while not being de-masculinized?

10. Do you think crimes committed during military service should become public information once an individual re-enters the civilian world? Should soldiers charged with military rape be placed on the civilian sexual offender registry?
FILM FACTS:

- Oscar and Emmy-nominated filmmaker Kirby Dick won 9 film awards, including the 2012 Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival, for THE INVISIBLE WAR. The film was also nominated for 4 additional awards.

- THE INVISIBLE WAR provides a rare example of how a movie can affect policy. Two days after Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta watched the film, he announced important policy changes on military rape prosecution procedures, removing the power from unit commanders and placing it higher up the chain of command.

- 25% of female soldiers haven’t reported their rape because the person they would report to was the rapist himself. 62% of victims who did report a sexual assault indicated they received social, professional, or administrative retaliation.

- Women who have been raped in the military have a higher post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rate than men in combat. For all victims interviewed in the film, suicide was stated as a very real thought and option.

- Director Kirby Dick and writer Amy Ziering believed so strongly in making this film - partly because there was so little media coverage and so few publications relating to the matter - that they chose to begin with or without external funding, embarking with a small grant from the Funding Exchange and a loan from Ziering. The total production budget was $450,000.

- 15% of incoming recruits to the Navy have attempted or committed rape prior to entering the military, twice the percentage of the equivalent civilian population. Military rapists are not listed on the National Sex Offender Registry. They re-enter society with crimes undetected.

- In the 2011 landmark Cioca vs. Rumsfeld legal case, which held former defense secretaries Gates and Rumsfeld accountable for an “epidemic” of rape within the military ranks, rape was ruled an “occupational hazard” of military service. An appeal has been filed.

- Following the release of THE INVISIBLE WAR, Kori Cioca, the woman who endured a broken jaw through rape and received an extensive amount of prescription medication but no military medical assistance, was able to receive the surgery she required through the help of civilian donors and supporters. Cioca and her husband welcomed a baby boy in May of 2012.

- The Pentagon estimates that as many as 70 sexual assaults of military personnel by other military personnel occur on a daily basis. Likewise, the number of sexual assault cases being reported is on the rise, with 19,000 cases reported in 2010 and 26,000 in 2012.

- In February 2013 on Katie Couric’s talk show, which reaches over 2 million viewers, Katie Couric devoted an entire hour-long program to discussing the film, THE INVISIBLE WAR.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Visit NotInvisible.org to find many ways you can raise awareness on military sexual assaults.

2. Become involved with Protect Our Defenders, a human rights organization giving voice to those who have been raped or sexually assaulted while in uniform.

3. Contact your Congress official and demand that they help stop military sexual abuse by calling for an external judicial process in the event of such abuse.

5. Share this film, allowing others to learn about this important topic, and follow the filmmakers as they work to bring other important stories and topics to light.