FILM SUMMARY

In the West, we live under the pretense that a crime is punishable under the law, and that true criminals are brought to justice. As defined by Merriam Webster, rape and sexual assault is “unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female...” With all the facts before us, rape appears to the logical mind 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, even to thrive, and even at times encouraged within the world of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Through interviews with former military personnel assaulted on the force, and additional evidence from lawyers, advocates, and even the military’s own rape prevention agency, THE INVISIBLE WAR introduces us to a painfully brutal reality. We are privy to the nauseating tales of former Air Force, Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps officials who were subjected to sexual assault while serving under the dome of American defense. For those brave enough to report the extreme injury - both physical and psychological - that they had suffered at the hands of fellow soldiers, their “brothers and sisters in arms, members of the military family,” they were faced with the ice-cold reality that the military does not manage such accusations fairly. Victims were ignored, chastised, criticized, even dismissed without benefits while they watched their perpetrators rise within the ranks. Female military staff is charged with adultery for having been raped by a married colleague, and more than one victim claimed they saw three options: suicide, AWOL, or dealing with it. Receiving fair and unbiased legal aid was never an option. THE INVISIBLE WAR presents shocking evidence, as we view the outdated and corrupt judicial system of the military - where victims cannot be brought to justice when their advocates are more often than not those guilty of the crimes against them. 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

Director: Kirby Dick
Year: 2012
Time: 93 min

You might know this director from:
Outrage (2009)
This Film Is Not Yet Rated (2006)
Twist of Faith (2004)
Derrida (2002)
Sick: The Life & Death of Bob Flanagan (1997)
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 battles to reveal the corruption and severe mishandling of military rape and sexual assault, delving into the reasons why the armed forces are such a breeding ground teeming with degrade and attack.

AN ENVIRONMENT OF BRUTE POWER AND MASCULINITY

To rise up through the military ranks proves one’s strength of body, mind, and character. This is arguably 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 of strength and capacity. You would be hard pressed to find a tree-hugging, peace-loving, sweetly sympathetic individual within the ranks. Within this environment of pure macho power, a victim is weak, the opposite of what the military stands for. By 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 world within the military contains an incredibly powerful group mentality. Fight together, stick together. To report that one had been assaulted, or that one had witnessed an assault taking place would be to break from that masculine mentality.

MILITARY RAPE CUTS DEEPER THAN CIVILIAN 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 alongside one another to protect and serve their country. When a woman or man is raped by a brother, what consolation is there that the world is a safe, worthwhile place in which to exist? The victims of military sexual assault are beaten and battered straight down to their cores, making them all that more in need of psychological and medical assistance, not to mention fair legal intervention, once they have plucked up the courage to report the wrongdoing. Through interviews with victims, attorneys, psychologists, and loved ones, THE INVISIBLE WAR paints a stark picture of 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 should your commander not take your claim seriously. Imagine a civilian contacting a congressman with a rape claim. The police, an extensive system of laws, and public advocates are available to bring perpetrators to justice in the civilian world, making it difficult for crimes to be repeated. Within the military, the individuals to report such crimes to are often the perpetrators themselves, and once they understand that nothing is in place 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 it is time 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 (retired)

“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 a certain division?

2. Has anyone close to you ever 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. Should the military be left to clean up its own mess without civilian intervention?

4. With its poster and music video campaign of informing women how to avoid rape rather than educating men that rape should never be committed, is the military’s rape prevention program just 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. Does an individual who witnesses or is made aware of sexual assault taking place within one’s unit and not reporting that assault just as guilty as the perpetrator? Should everyone involved - both directly and indirectly - be held accountable?

6. Most 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 not encourage unwanted sexual advances from fellow soldiers?

8. Civilian tax dollars fund the military. The military in turn pays for the alcohol which soldiers are “forced” to drink during bar nights, disputably encouraging and enabling 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. Should crimes committed while serving in the military become public information once an individual re-enters the civilian world, i.e. should soldiers charged with military rape be placed on the civilian sexual offender registry?
FILM FACTS:

- Oscar and Emmy-nominated filmmaker Kirby Dick won nine film awards, including the 2012 Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival, for THE INVISIBLE WAR and was nominated for an additional four 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 movie, he announced important policy changes on military rape prosecution procedure, removing the power from unit commanders and placing it higher up the chain of command.

- 25% of female soldiers haven’t reported their rape, as the person they would report to was the rapist himself. 62% of victims who did report a sexual assault indicated they met with 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, and suicide was stated as a real thought to all victims interviewed in the movie.

- Director Kirby Dick and writer Amy Ziering believed so strongly in making this movie — in part 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, and 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 talk show “Katie,” which reaches an average 2.08 million viewers, Katie Couric devoted an entire hour-long program to discussing the movie.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Visit www.notinvisible.org, which provides many ways to raise awareness on military sexual assaults.

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

3. Contact your Congress official, demanding they become involved in the campaign to stop military sexual abuse, calling for an external judicial process in the event of such abuse.

4. Support the Soldiers Project, which offers free confidential therapy for veterans and their loved ones.
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