



THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA
and
Intervention Productions in association with TVO
present

A BETTER MAN
A documentary film by Attiya Khan & Lawrence Jackman

"*A Better Man* takes on the issue of violence against women from an angle we have never seen before. It is fierce, compassionate, searingly honest and beautiful."

- Sarah Polley

79 minutes, Canada, 2017

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NFB Electronic Press Kit with high-res stills: <http://mediaspace.nfb.ca/epk/a-better-man/>

Loglines

1-Liner

A woman confronts her former boyfriend about the daily abuse he inflicted on her during the two years they lived together.

2-Liner

Following a series of intimate conversations between a former couple who lived through two years of domestic abuse, **A Better Man** infuses new energy and possibility into the movement to end violence against women.

60-80 word description

During the two years they lived together, Steve abused Attiya on a daily basis. Now 20 years later, Attiya has asked Steve to meet. She wants to know if he will finally take responsibility for his violent actions.

Following a series of intimate conversations between the former couple, **A Better Man** offers a fresh and nuanced look at the healing and revelation that can happen for everyone involved when men take responsibility for their abuse.

Short Synopsis

"I wish I could have been a better man."

On a hot summer night 22 years ago, 18-year-old Attiya Khan ran through the streets, frightened for her life. She was fleeing her ex-boyfriend Steve, who'd been abusing her on a daily basis.

Now, all these years later, Attiya has asked Steve to meet. She wants to know how he remembers their relationship and if he is willing to take responsibility for his violent actions.

This emotionally raw first meeting, filmed by Attiya with Steve's consent, is the starting point for **A Better Man**. The rough footage also marks a new beginning in Attiya's own recovery process—as well as an important starting point for Steve. For the first time ever, he speaks of the abuse and cracks opens the door to dealing with the past.

Illuminating a new paradigm for domestic-violence prevention, **A Better Man** offers a fresh and nuanced look at the healing and revelation that can happen for everyone involved when men take responsibility for their abuse. It also empowers audience members to play new roles in challenging domestic violence, whether it's in their own relationships or as part of a broader movement for social change.

Long Synopsis

"I wish I could have been a better man."

On a hot summer night 22 years ago, 18-year-old Attiya Khan ran through the streets, frightened for her life. She was fleeing her ex-boyfriend, Steve, the young man who'd been abusing her daily for two years. Escape didn't come easily. The steady violence had left Attiya both physically and emotionally drained. When she finally bolted and ran, Steve pursued her. But she was quick on her feet and managed to get away, a traumatized but determined teenager beginning to realize that she deserved more out of life.

Now, all these years later, Attiya has asked Steve to meet with her in a coffee shop. Attiya has long moved on with her life, but she continues to bear the emotional scars of their time together. She wants to know how Steve remembers their relationship and how he justifies what he did to her. She wants to know what scars, if any, he bears as well. Most importantly, she wants to know if Steve is willing to take responsibility for his actions.

This emotionally raw first meeting, filmed by Attiya with Steve's consent, is the starting point for ***A Better Man***. The rough footage also marks a new beginning in Attiya's own recovery process—as well as an important starting point for Steve. For the first time ever, he speaks of the abuse and cracks opens the door to dealing with the past.

Told through Attiya's personal narrative, ***A Better Man*** goes on to follow a series of intimate conversations that take place between the former couple and therapist Tod Augusta-Scott, who specializes in working with men who have used violence. With Tod's help, Steve is able to return to the past he thought he had left behind and allows himself to remember specific incidents of abuse. As Steve and Attiya revisit their old apartments, school and hang-out spots, two very different sets of memories emerge. With surprising courage and empathy, Steve and Attiya lay bare their vulnerability to help each other come to terms with the violence that took place so many years ago. Attiya's narrative and healing process may be central to the film, but this is Steve's story as much as it is hers.

From the outset, Attiya knew that making this film would be extremely painful. But it was an exercise that went far beyond advancing her own healing journey. As a domestic-violence counselor, Attiya has witnessed firsthand the persistence of violence against women, despite the tireless efforts by advocates to bring about change. Through this experience, questions began to formulate in Attiya's mind: Why is it so difficult for men like Steve to get the help they need to change? What can be done to support them in a rehabilitative context? What if greater emphasis were placed on prevention instead of punishment?

Illuminating a new paradigm for domestic violence prevention, ***A Better Man*** offers a fresh and nuanced look at the healing and revelation that can happen for everyone involved when men take responsibility for their abuse.

By showing that men who use violence can be both willing and valuable participants in the healing process, ***A Better Man*** infuses new energy and possibility into the movement to end violence against women. It empowers audience members to play new roles in challenging domestic violence, whether it's in their own relationships or as part of a broader movement for social change.

A Better Man is a co-production of the National Film Board of Canada and Intervention Films. The project was initiated by one of the most successful documentary crowdfunding campaigns in Canadian history, exceeding its stated target by 50 percent. Its global supporters include author Margaret Atwood and musician Leslie Feist, along with leading labour unions and anti-violence groups. Resources for those seeking help with domestic violence can be found on the film's website, at www.abettermanfilm.com.

Co-Directors' Statements

Attiya Khan

A Better Man grows out of my personal and professional experiences with domestic violence. I hope that sharing my personal search for justice and healing will contribute to the struggle to end domestic violence.

I desperately want domestic violence to stop. Art, storytelling, and deep, painful conversations are an integral part of the solution. By getting closer to the truth of what survivors experience, and of why men choose to use violence, we can help stop the violence.

A Better Man documents a personal experiment for me and my abusive ex-partner Steve, a step towards healing, understanding, and accountability. My hope is that our story will motivate others to find new, creative solutions to a problem that continues to be a global epidemic.

This film was truly a community effort. Its seed funding came from over 1,000 contributors from 30 countries. Artists, advocates, labour unions, leaders in the women's community, friends, and family all stepped up, lending emotional, financial, creative, and political support to this extremely challenging project. Our production team combined expertise in documentary film with experience with the complex subject of domestic violence. The compassion of this community provided the support that Steve and I needed throughout the process.

During the nearly five years of making this film, I have had the privilege of meeting dozens of people working on innovative solutions to the problem of domestic violence. In nearly every community, there are advocates, activists, counsellors, and others working on new approaches to justice, new ways of healing, and new paths to non-violence for the people who use violence. Their work is deeply inspiring and deserves our close attention. That's why, in addition to our

film, we have created an interactive website that includes the stories of other men who are working towards non-violence and highlights resources dedicated to ending domestic violence.

In telling my story, I stand on the shoulders of so many survivors who bravely told theirs. **A Better Man** is also held up and inspired by a powerful and growing movement to end domestic violence that has been working on behalf of survivors for decades. If this film can help contribute to this movement, if it can inspire more courageous conversations in relationships, schools, and workplaces, then we will have begun to achieve our goal.

Lawrence Jackman

Originally, Attiya had no intention of having herself as a central character in this documentary. However, after learning about her personal and professional connections to the issues, it became clear that she was an essential part of the story.

Attiya and Steve are both still dealing with the aftereffects of their time together. Much of Attiya's life continues to be based around dealing with the trauma, and Steve seems in many ways to be a broken man. Part of Steve's motivation for participating in this film was to show other men the effects his actions have had on his life.

The main challenge in making **A Better Man** was that we were making public a process that would normally be private. Attiya and Steve were prepared to reveal this intensely difficult process for us, and it was the film crew's responsibility to make this as easy and honest as possible.

For the therapy sessions, our solution was to create a situation where everything was prepared before the sessions, so that Attiya and Steve could step into the filming process with ease. Even though it was a very controlled environment, once the cameras started to roll, it was essentially a verité shoot, with the discussion guided by the therapist, Tod Augusta-Scott.

Both Attiya and Steve showed great courage in allowing us to witness this process. It is a personal story, but one that has the possibility to create positive change for others, both victims and men who use violence. It also calls attention to the responsibility we all have to change the way our society perceives and deals with domestic abuse and violence against women.

The Social Issue

Gender-based violence is among the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, with the United Nations reporting that up to 70% of women have been subject to a form of physical or sexual abuse from an intimate partner or loved one. The UN defines violence against women as:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN 1993).

According to a [2013 Statistics Canada report](#), the rate of violent crime against young women aged 15 to 24 was 42% higher than the rate for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double the rate for women aged 35 to 44. The study also found that females aged 15 to 24 were the most vulnerable to certain types of dating violence, namely sexual violations. Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner.

Despite these startling statistics, in North America, relatively little has been invested in the rehabilitation of men who have used violence with a view to preventing future instances of abuse. Tackling this issue requires changes in norms in society and changes in behaviour within individuals. The UN Human Rights Council's resolution on eliminating domestic violence emphasizes the important role that men and boys can play and encourages them to become strategic partners and allies. It also stresses the importance of effectively responding to violence against boys as well, in order to break intergenerational cycles of violence.

Michael Kaufman, author, international educator, and co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign says, "I think we can end men's violence against women. One step is knowing that most men don't use violence in their relationships and believing that those who do can change. Whether they actually do change requires some very thoughtful work. ***A Better Man*** is a courageous and stunning contribution to a future without violence against women. It tackles some hard questions, foregoes simplistic solutions, and reaches out with both a challenge and deep compassion. By doing all this, it provides us with a vision full of immense hope and possibility."

A Better Man is unique because it is a complete dialogue between a survivor and the man who hurt her, now on a shared quest for restoration and healing. This original perspective on a prevalent issue is progressive, timely and revelatory.

Paulette Senior, President and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation, adds, "***A Better Man*** is an extraordinary documentary that has the power to change the tide on violence against women and girls. It is nothing less than courageous and bold; a deeply revealing attempt to pull back the curtains and shed light on an issue that has been so pervasive it leaves even the most

seasoned violence against women activists in perplexed states. ***A Better Man*** has moved me deeply and it will undoubtedly move an entire society."

Catchphrases

Should healing be a two-sided journey?

A woman confronts her former violent boyfriend

How one woman's journey of healing is changing the way we talk about domestic violence

Can men who use violence help their partners heal?

Should men who use violence be involved in the healing process?

Can men who use violence change their ways?

Can men who use violence take responsibility for their actions?

A fresh and nuanced look at the movement to end violence against women

New hope for those affected by domestic violence

The Team

ATTIYA KHAN (Co-Writer, Co-Director) is a Toronto-based feminist, intimate partner violence survivor, and long-time advocate and counselor for abused women and children. Attiya conceived the idea for ***A Better Man*** in 2012, drawing on her personal and professional experience with intimate partner violence. Attiya has worked in women's shelters in Canada and the United States, including running the Child and Youth Services Program at Transition House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She also worked at YWCA Toronto, supporting the communications and advocacy team, managing a training program on crisis intervention, and administering the December 6th Fund, which offers interest-free loans to women fleeing domestic violence. As a writer, activist, and speaker, she has presented at numerous events and conferences related to domestic violence. Together with her family, she recently co-founded a YWCA Toronto scholarship program for domestic violence survivors.

LAWRENCE JACKMAN (Co-Writer, Co-Director, Editor) is a Toronto-based filmmaker. Over the past 15 years, he has worked on many award-winning films, focusing primarily on independent documentaries and dramas. He often works as an editorial consultant and has a long-standing association with the NFB in this role. Jackman has experience working at critical stages to creatively and structurally bring films to completion. Both as an editor and a director, he is interested in creative storytelling and pushing genre boundaries. In 2011, he directed *How Does It Feel*, a documentary musical about the importance of creative fulfillment that tells the story of a singer with cerebral palsy.

CHRISTINE KLECKNER (Producer) is a producer whose short film *Barefoot* (2012) premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, received honourable mention at The Berlinale, and was selected for the Not Short on Talent Showcase at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. Prior to

that, she produced *Wapawekka* (2010) which screened at the Toronto International Film Festival, Sundance and the Berlinale. During her time with the National Film Board of Canada, she collaborated on ground-breaking projects including *Stories We Tell* and the multi-platform *Filmmaker-in-Residence*. She is an alumni of the National Screen Institute of Canada's Drama Prize Program. Christine resides in Toronto.

JUSTINE PIMLOTT (NFB Producer) is an award-winning producer with over 20 years of experience in the film industry. She began her career interning at the NFB's Studio D, earning credits on the films *The Company of Strangers* and *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*.

She is a co-founder of Red Queen Productions, where she has produced cutting-edge films about women, social issues, culture, and the arts, including *Punch Like a Girl*, a six-part series on women's boxing nominated for two Gemini awards for Best Direction; *Fag Hags: Women Who Love Gay Men*, winner of the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Inside Out Film Festival and the Audience Award for Best Canadian Film at the Reelout Festival; *Girl Inside*, winner of the Gemini for Best Director and nominee for the Donald Brittain Award for Best Social/Political Documentary; as well as *Dish: Women, Waitressing and the Art of Service*, *Derby Crazy Love* and the NFB co-production *The Mystery of Mazo de la Roche*, nominee for three Canadian Screen Awards and recipient of the Golden Sheaf Award for Best Social Issue Documentary.

Justine has a long track record of giving a voice to people and perspectives that are often missing from mainstream media. In 2014, she joined the National Film Board of Canada as a producer in the Ontario Studio. Her slate of projects at the NFB includes a short profile of Atom Egoyan entitled *Sculpting Memory*, the upcoming interactive work *Portrait of a Family*, and the feature documentaries *The Daughter Tree* and *A Better Man*.

Iris Ng (Director of Cinematography) is a cinematographer with over a decade of experience collaborating with award-winning filmmakers and artists. Her credits encompass art, narrative films, documentary series, commercials, and music videos, with a focus on long-form documentaries including *Stories We Tell* directed by Sarah Polley, *Herman's House* directed by Angad Bhalla (Emmy Award for Outstanding Arts & Culture Program), *The Ghosts in our Machine* directed by Liz Marshall, and most recently, a portion of the the 10-part Netflix documentary series *Making a Murderer*, Storyline Entertainment's *League of Exotique Dancers*, and Yap Films' *Loretta Lynn: Still a Mountain Girl* for the PBS series *American Masters*. She has also lensed films directed by Min Sook Lee, Fredrik Gertten, Michael McNamara, Martha Burns, Fisher Stevens, and artists Chris Curreri, Richard Fung, and Oliver Husain.

LESLEY BARBER (Composer) - A member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Class of 2016, film composer Lesley Barber writes music marked by intelligence and emotional depth. She has scored a string of award-winning and highly acclaimed projects, including Kenneth Lonergan's multi-award-winning and Oscar-nominated film, *Manchester by*

the Sea. Her distinguished list of credits include Lonergan's Oscar-winning *You Can Count On Me*, Jerry Rothwell's award-winning documentary *How To Change The World*, Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, Mira Nair's Golden Globe-winning *Hysterical Blindness*, Mary Harron's *Moth Diaries*, the children's classic *Little Bear* with Maurice Sendak, *Yo-Yo Ma: Six Gestures*, Wiebke Von Carolsfeld's *Marion Bridge*, Allison Anders' *Beaches*, and the recently released powerhouse doc *The Apology* by Tiffany Hsiung. Lesley is a proud and active member of the Alliance for Women Film Composers, which has taken a leading role in the much-publicized diversity conversation now occurring in Hollywood. She has a passion for good food, great cities and interesting company.

SARAH POLLEY (Executive Producer) is a Governor General's Award-winning writer-director whose dramatic features include *Away from Her* (nominated in 2007 for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, and winner of the 2008 Genie Awards for Best Motion Picture and Achievement in Direction) and *Take This Waltz*, starring Seth Rogen, Michelle Williams and Sarah Silverman. Her third film, *Stories We Tell*, was awarded Best Documentary by the Toronto Film Critics Association, the New York Film Critics Circle, the National Board of Review and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. It was also on the shortlist for the 2013 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Most recently, Polley adapted Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* for Netflix and CBC and serves as Executive Producer for the upcoming six-hour miniseries.

ANITA LEE (NFB Executive Producer) is presently Executive Producer, English Program (Ontario Centre) for the National Film Board of Canada. She is a multi-award-winning producer with 20 years' experience in the industry and founder of the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival.

As NFB producer from 2005 to the present, Lee produced some of the most acclaimed and inventive works in recent NFB history, including Sarah Polley's genre-bending *Stories We Tell*—a film that has resonated with audiences and garnered honours at home and abroad, with a list of awards that mark a number of firsts for the NFB that include Best Canadian Film and Best Documentary award by Toronto Film Critics Association, Best Feature Documentary by the Canadian Screen Awards, Best Documentary Film by both the National Board of Review, and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and named Best Non-Fiction Film by New York Film Critics Circle.

Lee also lead NFB's first foray into interactive production as one of the creator/producers of North America's first interactive feature film *Late Fragment*, in coproduction with the CFC Media Lab. Other recent productions include CSA nominated, TIFF premiered, 3D film *Let the Daylight Into the Swamp* and *Road Movie*, a film installation invited to TIFF and Berlin. Past productions include *Tiger Spirit*, winner Donald Brittain Award for Best Social/Political Documentary, *The Bodybuilder and I*, winner Hot Docs Best Feature Documentary, and *Flicker*, winner Hot Docs Jury Prize for Best Canadian Feature Documentary.

Prior to joining the NFB, Lee produced a slate of award-winning independent films that premiered at TIFF, Sundance and Berlin including John Greyson's feature film, *Proteus*, an official Canada/South Africa co-production (TIFF 2003/Berlin 2004) and is an alumni of the Canadian Film Centre Feature Film Program.

JANE JANKOVIC (TVO Executive Producer) originally joined TVO as senior producer of its Gemini-award winning daily current-affairs program Studio 2 and has been commissioning documentaries since 2007. TVO is a public media organization that informs, inspires, and stimulates curiosity and thought. Commissions focus on social-issue and current-affairs documentaries and digital media projects that focus on contemporary social, political and cultural issues that are of direct relevance to Canadian audiences and promote citizen engagement. Recent examples include *Lowdown Tracks*, *David and Me*, *The Polar Sea*, *The Defector: Escape From North Korea*, *The Lost Highway*, *Out of Mind Out of Sight*.

JANICE DAWE (Executive Producer) brings to *A Better Man* years of expertise in producing and financing award-winning documentaries for Canadian and international buyers. Most recently, she executive produced Michèle Hozer's 2016 Canadian Screen Award-nominated documentary *Sugar Coated* (TVOntario, Netflix, Canal D and ZDF). Janice held the senior role of Vice-President Production at White Pine Pictures, one of Canada's most respected documentary production companies earning Executive Producer credits for *The Experimental Eskimos* (Allan King Award for Excellence in Documentary), *Fight Like Soldiers Die Like Children*, and the Gemini-nominated mobile app released documentary series *City Sonic*. Over her career, Janice has formed strong relationships with the creative community, broadcasters, buyers, financiers and lenders. Janice currently serves on the OMDC Screen-based Industry Advisory Committee and is an active committee member for the CMPA.

KATHY AVRICH-JOHNSON (Executive Producer) - Creative producers turn to Kathy for her valuable insights, as well as straightforward and practical approach to addressing the issues, challenges and opportunities of rights acquisitions, co-production, financing, delicate clearances matters, and domestic and international distribution. In addition to producing hundreds of hours of drama including the series *Rookie Blue* and *Saving Hope*, Kathy was executive producer of Allan King's last three feature documentaries, the award-winning *Dying at Grace*, *Memory for Max Claire Ida and Company* and *Empz 4 Life*. Kathy produced two comedic documentaries through her production company Canadian Accents for the CBC arts strand "Opening Night". Kathy is the author of two much-appreciated and well-thumbed producer handbooks: *Development and Other Production Challenges* (published by Telefilm Canada, 2003) and *Canadian Production Finance* (published by the Ontario Media Development Corporation & Telefilm Canada, 1998; revised 2001).

Credits

Co-Director, Writer: ATTIYA KHAN
Co-Director, Writer, Editor: LAWRENCE JACKMAN
Producer: CHRISTINE KLECKNER
Producer, NFB: JUSTINE PIMLOTT
Executive Producer: SARAH POLLEY
Executive Producer: JANICE DAWE
Executive Producer: KATHY AVRICH-JOHNSON
Executive Producer, NFB: ANITA LEE
Executive Producer, TVO: JANE JANKOVIC
Director of Cinematography: IRIS NG
Composer: LESLEY BARBER

Selected Press Coverage

[New documentary looks at both sides of domestic violence](#)

CBC News: The National, Eli Glasner, November 16, 2014

[‘I think some men who use violence can change’](#)

Maclean's: #Project97, As told to Rachel Browne, December 4, 2014

[Film campaign asks women to tweet questions they would ask their abusers](#)

The Globe and Mail, Zosia Bielski, August 11, 2016

[Feist donates \\$10,000 to film about violence against women](#)

NOW Magazine, Kate Robertson, November 12, 2014

About the NFB

The NFB is Canada's public producer of award-winning creative documentaries, auteur animation, and groundbreaking interactive stories, installations and participatory experiences. NFB producers are deeply embedded in communities across the country, working with talented artists and creators in production studios from St. John's to Vancouver, on projects that stand out for their excellence in storytelling, their innovation, and their social resonance. NFB productions have won over 5,000 awards, including 15 Canadian Screen Awards, 17 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genies. To access many of these works, visit NFB.ca or download the NFB's [apps](#) for mobile devices and connected TV.

About Intervention Productions

Intervention Productions creates paradigm-shifting documentary media that presents new modes of understanding gender-based violence. By weaving together candid personal narratives and cutting-edge fieldwork, Intervention Productions tells powerful stories that challenge dominant viewpoints and offer refreshing glimpses at the many forms that healing and justice can take. The groundbreaking [2014 Indiegogo campaign](#) for its debut feature, *A Better Man*, set a new bar for crowdfunding documentary film, raising over \$100,000 from donors in 30 countries and earning support from influential artists ranging from Margaret Atwood to Leslie Feist. Intervention Productions co-founders Attiya Khan and Christine Kleckner believe passionately in the power of documentary storytelling to transform our communities and the world at large. For more information and resources including their impact and outreach work, visit abettermanfilm.com.

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