Introduction

I chose to watch a movie called *The Upside of Anger* to illustrate debilitative and facilitative emotions. After reading chapter 4, Emotions: Thinking, Feeling, and Communicating, in our text book *Looking Out Looking In*, I became very interested in debilitative and facilitative emotions and how we display and manage each one. On page 140, the book *Looking Out Looking In* defines facilitative emotions as emotions, which contribute to effective functioning, and debilitative emotions as emotions, which detract from effective functioning. The movie *The Upside of Anger* shows great examples of both kinds of feelings and as Popeye, the youngest daughter in the movie states in the beginning: “Anger has the ability to change us.” But I am going to give some extensive illustrations of both debilitative and facilitative emotions starting on page 4.

*The Upside of Anger* is a movie about Terry a mother of four daughters who one afternoon comes to the dinner table and simply states that he has left. When she said “he,” she was referring to her husband. She believes that he has taken off with his Swedish secretary, who coincidently also left three days ago. She hasn’t spoken to him since he left or hasn’t any actual proof that this is really the case, but this is what she believes and she chooses to live her life based on this assumption. Terry becomes filled with anger, rage, and depression. She doesn’t only take out her debilitative feelings on herself by drinking and smoking excessively, but she also takes out her anger on her four beautiful and lovely daughters, who try to have patience with their raging mother. Unfortunately, it gets to the point where their mother becomes so bitter that no one except
Denny, Terry’s neighbor who is a former baseball star-turned-local DJ, can deal with her. The girls develop their own individual ways of dealing with their mother and their own feelings and anger. Their different personalities display how differently they deal with their emotions. First we have Terry’s oldest daughter, Hadley. She is a college student and leaves to go to live where her school is located the day after her mother breaks the news about her father leaving for Sweden. Her way of dealing with Terry is simply to not include her mother in her life. Then we have the second oldest, Emily. Emily is a dancer and wants to go to a dance college to her mother’s disapproval. She dances her way through her pain. Then we have Andy, who rebels against her mother by going out with Denny’s producer at the radio station, Shep, who is double her age and somewhat of a “bad boy”. The youngest daughter, Popeye, works on a project throughout this movie that is about, that’s right, anger.

I wanted to give this introduction to the movie, because the storyline is the major reason I chose this movie as my video critique assignment. I first saw this movie when it came out in the theaters, and I remember thinking that I hope that I never become like Terry. I believe that most people deal with anger at some point in their lives, but there are better and worse ways of dealing with strong emotions. After the movie, I remember thinking to myself that during times of hardship in my life, I would find better ways of dealing with my anger than Terry did throughout The Upside of Anger.

*The Upside of Anger* is filled with debilitating emotions and it is truly a great movie. I also find that the movie shows clear examples of how Terry’s self-talk and negative thoughts lead to her debilitating emotions. Self-talk is described on page 142 in our text book *Looking In Looking Out.*
Detailed Description of Theory/Behavior/Strategy

Popeye starts out with this powerful statement in her school project: “My mother was always the nicest person I ever knew. She was the nicest, sweetest woman anyone who knew her ever knew. Then things changed and she changed. She got angry. Good and angry. Anger has turned my mother into a very sad and bitter woman. If she wasn’t my mother I would slap her. I would. I would look her straight in the face and tell her what I really think of her and then I would run really fast in the opposite direction.” In this statement, Popeye talks about how anger has changed her mother’s emotional state. The intensity of the anger that possesses Popeye’s mother is at the point where Popeye doesn’t want to deal with her anymore. As Looking In Looking Out describes on page 140, “a certain amount of anger can be constructive because it often provides the stimulus that leads you to improve the unsatisfying conditions. Rage, on the other hand, will usually make matters worse.” Terry’s anger with her husband’s abandonment has left her with rage. She decides that she is not going to call him and ask for an explanation. She thinks his actions are enough and she builds her anger on the simple fact that he didn’t come home.

Terry blames her husband for causing her this enormous pain that she can’t control, and in her mind there is nothing she can do about it. On page 147, the textbook talks about the Fallacy of Causation, and this is a good example of that. Terry doesn’t realize that she is responsible for her own feelings and that it is her reaction to this event that actually makes her feel worse.

After her husband leaves, Terry starts to drink and smoke throughout the day. She is drunk all the time. Her drinking buddy Denny, the neighbor, listens to her, but he drinks just as much as she and this obviously adds to her downward spiral. In one scene
Terry goes to the store and buys vodka. First she takes two bottles, but then she changes her mind and grabs a third bottle. Her drinking makes her anger even worse. She starts to lash out at everybody around her for no apparent reasons. Terry continues throughout most of the movie to engage in debilitative self-talk especially while intoxicated and this is something the book calls rumination. Rumination, page 143, is, “dwelling persistently on negative thoughts that, in turn, intensify negative feelings.”

When it comes to her daughters, Terry takes out her anger on all four of them. However, the three oldest get most of her anger directed toward them. As Terry herself says while talking to Denny about what she has in her life: “I have what? Bills, responsibilities, four girls, one that hates me (referring to Hadley) and two or three that are leaning that way.” Unfortunately, it is Terry’s own behavior that makes it so difficult for the girls to love her. She yells at them, she ignores their needs, and she doesn’t listen to them. In one scene in particular, Emily is practicing her dance moves in the studio her father built for her in the back of the house, when her mother comes in. Terry immediately starts to complain that she is dancing too much and eating too little. Emily’s response is this: “Be happy for me. Shit. You know, I am focused. What’s your problem? The only thing you are focused on is drinking and Denny. Be glad that I have a dream.” Her mother’s response is to yell at Emily and cursing her husband for causing these arguments. The power of Terry’s feelings is controlling her life. The intensity of feelings is explained on page 140 in Looking Out Looking In, and the Fallacy of Causation on page 147.

When Denny is talking about taking their, now year long, relationship to the next level, Terry’s response is: “I have had my heart broken really badly Denny. It’s not the kind of thing that ever heals.” On page 141 in Looking Out Looking In, the book says, “one characteristic that distinguishes facilitative feelings from debilitative feelings is
“their extended duration.” What the book is trying to tell us is that it is normal for Terry to be sad for a while after her husband’s rejection, but she can’t be sad and bitter forever. She needs to find a way to get over her rage and depression in a constructive and efficient manner.

After one of Terry’s middle daughters, Andy, takes up a relationship with a much older man, Shep, Terry goes crazy. At one point at the dinner table, Terry imagines Shep’s head getting blown up and his nose ending up in her soup. Terry hates this relationship so much she stops talking and smiling every time Andy and Shep are around. I would call these emotions very intense and over the limit of beneficial facilitative emotions.

Hadley, the oldest daughter, leaves for college in the beginning of the movie. Three years after her leaving, Terry and the rest of the girls go to her graduation. After the ceremony, Terry finds out that Hadley has had a boyfriend for the past three years without telling her and now they are getting married. Terry gets so angry she can’t control her feelings. She starts yelling at Hadley and embarrassing her daughter in front of her new in-laws. At lunch she drinks one drink after another. She makes an embarrassing speech that all four girls would like to forget about. Here Terry becomes the victim of the Fallacy of Shoulds, described on page 146 in our textbook. She thinks Hadley should have told her about this relationship a long time ago. Instead of accepting what is, Terry is stuck with what Hadley should have done. The Fallacy of Causation comes back here too, because Terry blames Hadley for her outburst. If Hadley had told her a long time ago, she wouldn’t have reacted in the way she did and she would have embarrassed herself. What Terry’s doesn’t realize is that her anger was the reason Hadley didn’t tell her to start with.
At Hadley’s wedding, Terry takes a good look at her daughters having fun dancing. She finally realizes what she has and how important her family is to her. She then goes to the bar and orders a coke, but before she gets it in her hand something makes her angry again and she orders herself an alcoholic beverage. But the road to recovery has started. Terry slowly starts to monitor her feeling as described on page 149 in *Looking Out Looking In*. Terry starts to recognize that her feelings and her drinking are not resulting in facilitative emotions and her road to a constructive and a healthy relationship with her daughters and Denny has finally started.

In the end, it turns out that Terry’s husband didn’t run off to Sweden with his secretary. He fell into old water well in the back yard and died. He was found after a construction worker walked into the same well. Terry’s anger, which has already at this point improved greatly, is now turned into sadness and she accepts that her husband was a good man after all. Her feeling becomes facilitative and is well managed.

In the end of the movie, Popeye’s final statement in her school projects is: “*Anger and resentment can stop you in your tracks. That’s what I know now. It needs nothing to burn but the air and the life that it swallows and smothers. It’s real though, the fury, even when it isn’t. It can change you, turn you, mold you, and shape you into someone your not. The only upside to anger then is the person you become, hopefully someone that wakes up one day and realizes they are not afraid of its journey. Someone that knows that the truth is at best a partially told story that anger like growth comes in spurts and fits and in it’s wake leaves a new chance of acceptance and the promise of calm. Then again, what do I know, I am only a child.*” Popeye understands facilitative feelings and recognizes the road to get there. Her mother was a living example of someone living with debilitative feeling for three years, but eventually came to realize that the only people she hurt by being in a constant angry state was herself and her family, the people close to her.
Conclusion

In summary, I believe that this movie clearly demonstrates debilitative and facilitative emotion. Scene after scene in *The Upside of Anger* are filled with ineffective and harmful feeling and thoughts. The pain, the anger, the rage, the depression that tears Terry apart is very clearly shown and the helplessness of her daughters is heartbreaking. I find that this movie makes you think and realize that painful events can happen, and most likely will happen, at some point in every person life. It could be the death of a family member or a friend, a loved one leaving or an illness, but realizing that destructive and debilitative emotions and self-talk are not going to make matters better but instead worse is a good lesson. In the end of the movie, Terry turns her debilitative emotions into facilitative emotions and she becomes, once again, the happy, nice person she was before the thought her husband had left her for another woman.