



# Strout's Insight into the Times: Trauma and Recovery in *Olive Kitteridge*

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**Abstract**— *Olive Kitteridge* wins the 2009 Pulitzer Prize and is a representative work of Elizabeth Strout. The eponymous character Olive Kitteridge personifies the pathos of contemporary America in the contemporary world, through whom Elizabeth Strout strives to shed light on a spiritual barren American. Thus, it's essential to analyze how Olive Kitteridge deals with her traumatic experiences according to the arrangement of Elizabeth Strout. Through close reading of the text, this article will systematically analyze Olive Kitteridge's individual trauma from three aspects--the manifestation, the causes, and the recovery methods, so as to present an approachable way to smooth the pain of modern people and show the mental damage caused by rapid modernization.

**Keywords**— *Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout, Trauma*



## I. INTRODUCTION

*Olive Kitteridge* is written by American writer Elizabeth Strout and won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize, centering on the female character Olive Kitteridge, who has experienced both inner and outside suffering. As a contemporary work, many critics were attracted by the outstanding narrative strategies as well as the unique female character. Strout skillfully draws together 13 short stories by playing the role of Olive given her core position, so the analysis of this character occupies a large part of the study of the work. The research focus of Olive Kitteridge is a keen point since the work has been published. For instance, Emily McAvan explores Olive Kitteridge's undoing in her relationship, which is the result of deliberate arrangement of Elizabeth Strout under the impact of post-structuralist ideas. Susan Guaccero LCSW also adopts Bromberg's psychoanalytic theory to analyze

Olive's spiritual world through thoroughly illustrating the arrangement of Olive's life experience so as to provide solid text foundation for revealing Olive inner world, and shows the superb artistry used by Elizabeth Strout. At the same time, Elizabeth Strout takes 13 short stories of narrative strategy, which is unique and innovative in the modern literature so that many scholars choose to explain the unique narrative mythology's function and value. Such as Helena Kadmos asserts that the interconnected stories play an innovative and fresh role in showing women's independence without emphasizing on the individual trajectory for this multistory design reveals the complex social quality of the subject, upending the single narrative method to make a productive form to explore how women come to a greater sense of who they are. Tetiana Kushnirova also focuses on the multiple narrative structure through which each narrator can completely show his or

her own real life and evaluates the role of this structure in unity of the plot. *Olive Kitteridge* is regarded as a successful novel revealing the aging society of America. So, some scholars gradually pay attention to this couple's old age life experience to explore the influence of this new era phenomenon in all aspects. Teresa Requena-pelegrí analyzes the relationship between power and age in the privilege system and compares vigorous men and aging men to show the fact that the aging men are understated, eventually proposes the possibilities for transforming normative conceptions of masculinity. Jelena Šesnić combines *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *Olive Kitteridge* to explore the impacts of an aging society on contemporary Western society focusing on pastoralism and the narrative of ageing, which takes emotions and the display of aging into consideration.

As Rae-Lee Kruger once asserts that Elizabeth Strout makes use of *Olive Kitteridge* to unveil the ubiquitous terror, in which "characters feel and attempt to cope with terror in their everyday life" (2016: 107), corresponding to the mental feeling of the American public. Meanwhile, Screenwriter Jane Anderson, who writes the screen adaptation of the book, has described *Olive Kitteridge* as the story of depression. People are aware of this work's historical setting closely related to modern spiritual desolation. "Strout never emotionally flinches from the complexities of the human condition-trauma, loneliness, love, marriage, parenting, loss, aging, fear, death, and hope-but confronts them directly and with exquisite sensitivity" (Guaccero, 2010). Each of the stories that makes up *Olive Kitteridge* is about sadness, hurt, or disappointment that has been hidden or wrapped into the very skin of its protagonists and that will shift, move, and be re-accommodated throughout the story.

The traumatic narrative as widely discussed by critics, for it posits that real trauma is hidden by the narrative and literary way is obviously of valuable significance to be adopted in modern literature. In Hartmann's view, ordinary trauma is both an important opportunity for the emergence of modern fiction and an important expressive theme for it. Trauma has a powerful implication for contemporary literary theory, which has a kind of feature of prolonged impact on both the bearers and the event itself. Therefore the research of trauma narrative has been valued

gradually "in the study of history and historical narrative, and also of narrative in general" (Berger, 1997). It is not difficult to find that although people realize the significance of this work in presenting various mental dilemmas faced by modern people, they have not systematically explored the causes behind it. But I think there are many other factors worth exploring. Given the same background of living in western world, *Olive Kitteridge* is of over-size importance to explore her psychological trauma as a great scenario to outline the shadow of modern peoples. Therefore, this article will systematically explore Olive's trauma and the causes of trauma, in order to reveal the undercurrent of trauma under the smooth surface of Western society. In addition to deepening our knowledge of this book, the analysis of *Olive Kitteridge's* trauma causes, and cruel attempts can serve as a useful model for contemporary people.

## II. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA OF OLIVE KITTERIDGE

It is hard to miss that Olive struggles to fit in with her family and the community but in vain eventually, which is directly tied to her trauma philosophically. The novel centralizes Olive Kitteridge's course of life as well as entangles the stories of numerous characters' traumatic experiences. Nearly every character is bound and prisoned by their past suffering experience. According to Shalev "Specific attributes of traumatic events may contribute to the occurrence of either PTSD or depression" (1998: 630), but the result "shows that extreme events can be associated with the early and simultaneous development of both PTSD and major depression or a combination thereof" (1998: 637). Numerous events in Olive's life place her under a lot of stress and jeopardize her spiritual health when we recall her life in the novel, the sense of loneliness haunting in Olive's lifetime. She seems to be in an embarrassing situation where nobody can hear her voice and she also can't pour out her woe which she even doesn't know where it comes from and how to deal with, even her family members find it difficult to communicate with her.

### 2.1 Depression

"*Olive Kitteridge* had never in anyone's memory felt inclined to be affable, or even polite" (Strout, 2008). One

such person who is viewed as aloof and unsociable is Olive. What happened around her makes her annoying and unpleasant, showing her attitude as world-weary; especially she detests every single member of people in the town as well as her husband Henry, so she forgoes her social desire and isolates herself within such an oppressive home atmosphere. This irritation will keep embarrassing her family regardless of the occasion or time. Depression patients struggle more than most people do to control their emotions while under pressure. As Olive and Henry experience robberies, Olive can't help but lose control and laugh at Henry's constant nagging, simply displaying her harshness and apathy while being hijacked which also causes the two to grow apart. It seems that only if Henry is hurt can she draw strength from his pain. Under high physical pressure, Olive criticizes Henry, "He got that from his mother. His mother was impossible. Just ignore him.....You'd have to know his mother. His mother was full of pious crap" (Strout, 2008). In the novel, many clues imply her emotional instability. And from the words of Christopher: "one minute you're one way, the next-you're furious" (Strout, 2008). We can see that her mental condition has been bad, and her mood has been changing erratically. It can't be missed that Olive has depressing moods and a frequently harsh tongue; her brittleness and sensitivities frequently show as scathing put-downs of people around her and uninterested in social niceties. This is a sort of revolt against the undeserved homage she has to bear. For instance, Olive cannot help but erupt when the Henrys come home for dinner since her husband spilled ketchu "'Leave it,' Olive commanded, 'standing u Just leave it alone, Henry. For God's sake.' And Henry Thibodeau, perhaps at the sound of his name being spoken sharply, sat back, looking stricken" (Strout, 2008).. Even some trials can arise her annoyance, which may come to a deeper layer that she has a strong emotion of loathe toward Henry out of various reasons. The tough attitude straightforwardly shows in the word "command" just like a superior towards an inferior corresponding the response of Henry who completely presents a state of oppression. However, Strout also indirectly shows Henry's superior identity in the family because he is inexperienced in household duties while Olive takes main responsibility of it. Even as a scholar woman and math teacher, she still

needs to shoulder the role of traditional mother and wife in the family in which Henry is the one who sits idle and enjoys the fruits of others' work, missing the role of husband and father, invisible in the sharing of family tasks. These hints point to the fact that she is obviously frustrated and unable to manage her temper due to physical strain, which may be what gives her character its foundation in the marriage life.

Another distinctive feature of depression is suicidal tendencies. Compared to the unsteady emotional condition when getting along with her family numbers, Olive is emotionless when she is alone. Olive has a unique understanding of the feeling because she lacks friends and relatives. Olive will get numb, drifting off to sleep while listening to the transistor radio. The daily existence of depressed patients involves being unable to socialize properly and being completely alone, like a mobius strip in which Olive falls into the infinite loop between the two. What's more, she can't be accepted by her son and is criticized by her son's wife Ann, which deepens her sense of loneliness causing her to be stuck in despair for the exclusion from loved ones. When she offers to visit her granddaughter and is refused by her son, which is the straw that breaks the camel's back, the thought of suicide surfaced uncontrollably. "The thought that she could, anytime she needed to kill herself went through her head. It was not the first time in her life that she'd thought this, but before, she would think about the note to leave. Now she thought she would leave no note" (Strout, 2008).. Olive forces herself to live and escapes from this idea before her son's estrangement crushed her mental fortress perceptibly. In the novel, Jane suggests that she slits her wrists to kill herself, and she gives up from her initial panicked denial to her silent intention, and then to the final. Obviously, Olive still has a strong sense of living and resists the idea of death even though the desire of living is paralleled by the shadow of death, which is typical of depressed patient. She is constantly torn between the thought of life and death, making her spiritual world is on the verge of collapse. As same as other depressed patients, thoughts of suicide which comes from the doubt of meaning of life and attitude of pessimism recur in her mind at any time.

## 2.2 Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of 9/11

Posttraumatic stress disorder has risen to the attention of scholars for so many years. It is widely discussed as well in literary works as a trauma symptom. Charney defined it as “an illness of considerable prevalence, often characterized by high morbidity, treatment resistance and a chronic course” (1993: 294). As pointed out by Šesnić, who has “[Found] ourselves at another turn of the century and a little beyond it in post-9/11 America as an implicit backdrop of Strout’s stories” (2019: 454), Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge* is set the 9/11 as background, which results in the collective trauma for modern American individuals. Another oblique way of interpreting the trauma of *Olive Kitteridge* as we have been confused by the traits the author creates intentionally is to relate to the collective trauma caused by 9/11, insofar as we trace back to the century or the setting.

In Freud’s elaboration of the concept of “Latency”, “the memory of traumatic events can be lost over time but then regained in a symptomatic form when triggered by some similar event” (Berger, 1997). The portrayal of *Olive Kitteridge*’s reaction in the airport exemplifies the traumatic reactions of people after 9/11. Years later, *Olive* is still remembering the terrorist attacks as the plane lands, even though she is traveling to see her son in New York. “*Olive* had never been in a plane by herself. Not that she was by herself now, of course..... *Olive* seeming the only one with trepidation” (Strout, 2008). In her subconscious, there is a fear of airplane accidents. So, she avoids taking the plane alone and living in her town, just like other PTSD patients who shun all similar experiences as the trauma event, since there is a feeling of panic in her heart. When she gets way from the airport, the panic that she has pushed down seemly disappear at once.

“Confusion.....and which had then grown into an active panic on the airport’s escalator, changing into a stunned block of perfect oddness the whole drive in, now, as *Olive* stepped from the car onto the sidewalk, seemed to cause everything to sway around her, so that reaching to get her bag from the backseat, she actually stumbled and fell against the car.” (Strout, 2008)

Her fear of the tragic event in the past is evident in her

state of confusion and panic. What’s more, when she is alienated by her son showing as unacceptable attitude, which is a great spiritual shock, her unconscious trauma and pain cause her mental forbidden machine to crash. “[T]he diagnosis of PTSD includes symptoms such as aggravated startle responses and heightened reactivity to trauma reminiscent and nonreminiscent stimuli” (Pacella et al., 2013). PTSD patients will show an avoidance attitude towards traumatic memories and resist recalling and reexperiencing of the traumatic event to avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, but traumatic memories show a lingering state and are easily triggered by things associated with trauma, which makes patients’ panic response intensified. There are several levels of change in mood: confusion, panic, and stun and eventually it transforms the physical discomfort. The sensation of abandonment *Olive* experiences as a result of being stunned by how much her kid has alienated her is the cause of her confusion, at the same time is the subconscious evasive attitude of the place of airport which is closely related to her trauma memory. Gradually she realizes she is alone in an airport; panic seeps into the mood caused by hyperarousal for she anticipates danger’s coming out of control. Soon, changes in the street scene that have little to do with traumatic memories distract her emotionally from panic, but traumatic events can make people lose their ability to adapt to everyday life. *Olive* has moved from her small town to New York, out of the comfort and security of her living environment; she is apparently unable to adapt, losing control and replacing it with a sense of vulnerability, which is manifested by physical symptoms of vertigo. Meanwhile, she can’t help fainting for she empathizes with a moody atmosphere of restless anxiety in the airport. *Olive* is also the victim of collective trauma caused by the communal pain of 9/11. And this fear and pain permeate every modern American.

Another affair that can certify *Olive*’s trauma of 9/11 in the novel is that *Olive* thinks back to the day she watches the television screen showing the moment the plane crashes into the building over and over again, and she falls into deep despair in her room. She can’t act with any emotional response as a kind of numb negativity. When she returns to her room after meeting Christopher’s new family and exchanging pleasantries, a sudden urge to cry comes over

her. "She wanted to cry. She wanted to wail like a child" (Strout, 2008). The two completely different images are inharmony with each other giving her a strong sense of separation and strangeness; she seems to be a participant as well as a spectator. When she decides to leave New York, she once again has trouble controlling her emotions at the airport which becomes the trigger of her traumatic memory. An uncontrollable emotion controls her refusal to cooperate with the airport staff. " 'I will not take off my shoes,' she heard herself say. She said, 'I don't give a damn if the plane blows up, do you understand? I don't give one good goddamn if any of you are blown sky-high'" (Strout, 2008). Olive is in a state of overvigilance at this moment. Refusing to take off her shoes becomes a way to resist registration and the shoes becomes the root of security. The terrorist attack of 9/11 has cast a huge psychological shadow on her, and this fear is invisible but everywhere.

### III. THE CAUSES OF OLIVE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS

#### 3.1 Family dysfunctions

"Human is the most helpless of all animals at birth, and in need of protection for a much longer period of time than any of them" (Fromm & Anderson, 2013) During the growth of a child, a child needs to be attached to his or her mother and the all-enveloping love to keep him or her away from outside danger. When he or she reaches a certain age, he or she turns to father or mother as the new center of life. The existence of parents is central to a healthy child who can form a sound personality. In Olive Kitteridge, relations between parents and children are alienated. Some parents choose to commit suicide in front of their children, which brings a lifetime burden on their children's hearts. Olive Kitteridge also suffers pain and torment from the previous generation. She is a harsh and domineering woman, who suffers from the painful memory of her father's suicide. Olive's father also suffers from depression, who finally shoots himself in the kitchen without any note, which leads to Olive's furiousness and capricious mood out of excessive spiritual harm when she grows up and makes her unable to love and treat others and her family normally.

The suicide of Olive Kitteridge's father has a great effect on her character. She is born into an incomplete family,

and the death of her father caused her a great deal of anguish. Her unusual upbringing has an impact on her way of life, which finally leads to her being a tough and hateful woman. Olive is domineering to her son as well. When her son Christopher cannot learn to skit well, she ever beats him badly. Olive has overwhelming power and absolute authority in the Kitteridge on account of her controlling desire stemming from her sense of unsafety so that everything out of her control will make her anxious and angry. She refuses and fears that her father's sad death or likewise things will happen again, therefore she wants to use control to ensure that Kitteridge will proceed in the way she desires. When Olive goes to New York to stay with her son for a few days, they have a furious quarrel. Christopher says: "I am not going to take responsibility for the extreme capriciousness of your moods.....You kind of behave like a paranoid.....you are furious, it's tiring, very wearing for those around you.....I am not going to be ruled by my fear of you" (Strout, 2008). Olive can not be understood and accepted by other people as well as her family numbers. At the same time, she is hard to get along well with her husband in marriage because she actually been in a state of struggle because of the influence of the patriarchy. "You have no idea how tired I am, teaching all day, going to foolish meetings where the goddamn principal is a moron! Shopping. Cooking. Ironing. Laundry. Doing Christopher's homework with him! .....Well, I'm sick and tired of it, Sick to death" (Strout, 2008). Olive needs to work and take care of household chores as well as educate the children, while Henry obviously does nothing. The burden of the family, so to speak, made Olive sharper. The imbalance of intra-household labor division put so much pressure on her in both physical and mental aspect. In order to escape the stressful family, Olive develops an unethical relationship with her colleague. The extramarital affairs happen to both Olive and Henry, but they both keep silent because there is no spiritual communication between them. They used to talk about biology and enjoy a harmony and happy love life based on the equal status between man and woman, while with the establishment of marriage relationship, this equal status has been broken and leads to the instability. When Henry asks whether Olive will leave him, Olive refuses to answer and expresses he is so disgusted, which can be understood as a



rebel action, and she is trying to express her grievances. Olive cannot experience joy in this family that was once bound by love because of the pressure of male authority; she can only feel pressure. So Olive takes the way to reject and reproach Henry so as to express her displeasure. Both of them can not seek a sense of satisfaction from the other, so even in marriage, they also need to seek spiritual satisfaction from other people. At the same time, leaving of Christopher eventually crashes Olive's mental wall because she totally makes her whole life dependent on her children, which is also the root of the broken relationship between Olive and Christopher. Likewise, the perverse mother-son relationship tortures Christopher who escapes from Olive when he grows up. While Olive also reaps the fruits of her own controlling desire, losing the love of her son. Overall, an unhealthy family environment of two generations leads to Olive's great psychological trauma.

### 3.2 The indifference of American society

The entire novel is infused with a sense of the absurd which is a fact of both the real world and spiritual world. Albert Camus once mentioned in his interest in existentialism that absurd and revolt are coherent. "At this point of his effort, man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Foley, 2014). In Camus's opinion, the absurdity came out of the disharmony between the individual search for the meaning of life and the meaninglessness of the world. The creation of psychological problems is always due to the incompatibility between personal expectations and an unchanged and inhuman world. Contemporary American society has entered a highly developed post-industrial period, but the ecological crisis, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, environmental pollution, and so on have rapidly deepened the concern of contemporary American people for survival, making them anxious, and finally becoming the source of their fear. "Strout contextualizes individual terror against the broader national and cultural form felt by the United States after the events of 9/11" (Krugerl, 2016). Olive Kitteridge drew its materials from American people's lives in the 21st century after September 11 terrorist attack. The terrorist attack is beyond the American

people's expectations and predictions. They never think their powerful country would meet with misfortune. As a collective trauma, the event of 9/11 causes prolonged consequences for all Americans. When Olive Kitteridge takes a plane to visit her son in New York, all of a sudden, she remembers the terrorist attack many years ago at the moment her plane takes off. At that time, watching the plane flying over the towers back and forth, she is sitting in the bedroom in desperation, crying like a child. Almost all Americans felt that their lives are seriously threatened. This becomes the common mood of the characters in the novel.

Meanwhile, the increasingly rampant individualistic value orientations which "Originated with the Renaissance or with the rise of the bourgeoisie" (Dumont, 1986) and have dominated the modern American world, are the root of the collapse and desolation of people's spiritual world for in the process of individuation, they break the connection with others and the community. The famous French anthropologist Louis Dumont never defines the norm of Individualism without any substantive arguments in his work, but he asserts that modern ideology is characterized by individualism. Individualism is primarily about the relationship between the individual and society, between the individual and the group, and is mainly reflected in opposition to the regulation and oppression of the individual by authority. But when individualism overemphasizes the rights of the individual, individualism decayed into egotism and materialism. In Olive Kitteridge, Olive, and other characters are the victims of individualism which caused a sense of loneliness and indifference seeping into everyone's bone and flesh. America is deeply influenced by the doctrine of individualism which permeates the life of Americans, calling for pursuing and worshiping self-centered values. The suicide rate in modern America has been increasing. The prevalence of psychological disorders in American society is manifested by the phenomenon of suicide. In this work, there are so many suicides happening around people. Like Olive's father and Henry's mother. All these affairs cause the disorder of human mental condition, inflicting a devastating emotional shock on their families. What's more, the alienation of the 20th century is at its most vivid in this novel. Olive consequently rejects not

only engaging with the outside world but also being accepted by it. The alienation in the novel not only can be shown between parents and children but also among individuals in the town. The residents of the town go through the motions of their routine existence. People in this small town don't know each other very well. Some even purposefully distance themselves from others and avoid social connection; others want to leave the community; still, others live alone as if they were recluses. In this town, people have shallow relationships and don't care about each other. There is a clear example of the town's open stores' stuffs being very warm to Christopher, they greet him warmly, but in the knowledge that there is a danger of an explosion, they don't choose to talk to him, just smile and watch him walk in that direction. This is a kind of alienation. Everyone seems to have put on a mask of enthusiasm, but the heart is cold and hard. This seems to be characteristic of modern people.

#### IV. THE TREATMENT OF OLIVE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS

Olive Kitteridge is always immersed in her own world and values others from her own viewpoint, which can be shown by the fact that she judges others' choice of the stroller and reconfirms her own way of parenting Christopher. The turn of her identity from a wife and mother to Olive herself is the revolt against individualism, the process of self-identity perusing, and the way of healing her trauma, in which Olive experiences two kinds of mental travel, saving others and soothing herself.

Talking cure as an effective way to relieve the psychological pressure of trauma victims by retrieving the strong feelings of trauma and telling them out is first coined by a patient whose pseudonym is Ann O during the cure process of hysteria. In the 1890s, psychologists have found that sharing experiences positively, particularly traumatic experiences, is a useful and powerful method of trauma healing. In the novel, Olive is inconsistent with external and internal performance. Internally she is sharp and sensitive, but externally she is unexpectedly easygoing and soft; this difference in personality occurs at different stages of the olive's life. Olive would never spill her guts and would only use harsh words to express her displeasure at an early age, largely because of her self-centered

thought. It is derived from the individualism of America, often characterized by high self-centeredness. When she is alienated by her family, she seems to find her life meaning gradually, since she overemphasizes her family. Strout also mostly describes Olive's home life in the novel to emphasize how important it is in her life in the first half of the piece. In contrast, when Olive is alone in her old age, Olive starts interacting with the outer world and people and rethinking the meaning of life.

There is an example of her saving Kevin. Kevin returns to the town where he grows up and tries to kill himself, just like his mother does. Olive changes a lot and begins to take care of Kevin when she seems to notice that something is wrong with Kevin and forcefully asks for a seat in Kevin's car. At the same time, there is a description of Kevin's first lover's mental activity, she finds "it gave her a feeling of safety, having Mrs. Kitteridge with her" (Strout, 2008). Olive may simply wish to vent about her distressed family in this conversation, or she may feel that saving this young man will also save her, both of which are being made to save and be saved through talking and sharing between two trauma victims. For herself, Olive finds consolation from Kevin who shares common suffering with her with an incomplete family, with whom she can talk about her depressed son, disabled husband, and suicidal father so as to relieve herself of mental stress. At the same time, Olive breaks the image of a tough and serious math teacher from the way of acting as a listener, bringing up Kevin's mother and encouraging him to confide, which shows that she lives in her own world and turns to help others in the same way that she wants someone else to be able to help her. She offered "acts of negligence or acts of God" (Strout, 2008).as a great comfort to Kevin, who eventually changes his attitude toward Olive from refusal to accept, implying a change of desire from death to the living. Recounting some traumatic events as the common experience of the witness of suicide and views of depression is a method of trauma healing by which both Kevin and Olive have got Heartfelt Soothing. Olive, despite her blunt character, is kind, true, and friendly, so Kevin, a student from many years ago, can still find a sense of belonging in her after his return.

"Individuals in organizations need a situated identity to guide their actions" (Luthans, 2022). Humans must

inherently live in a group due to their social nature. Socialization is an activity in which human beings experience being needed to achieve the meaning of life. After her son's leave and Her husband's stroke, Olive lives in her empty house alone and nobody accompanies her in her old age. Her pursuit and recognition of life come from the control and clutch of her family, but she was eventually excluded by her family, which largely led to her suicidal tendency because she loses the goal of life. When she recalls the life of her life, she finds that she hates to be alone, but she does not know how to overcome the sense of loneliness and separation in her heart. Rollo May explained the sense of loneliness in his anthology *Man's Search For Himself*, "Another characteristic of modern people is loneliness. They describe this feeling as one of being on the outside, isolated, or, if they are sophisticated, they say that they feel alienated" (2009: 13). When Henry dies and Christopher leaves, Olive totally lives alone. In this condition, she cannot find her self-identity. The sense of loneliness leads to her continuous thought of killing herself to finish her endless loneliness. And this state is changed by another lonely man Jack Kennison who is afraid of being alone as same as Olive. When Olive finds him fainting on the road and wants to seek help from others, he says "I don't care if I die. Just don't leave me here alone" (Strout, 2008). While Olive also draws strength and new direction "because Jack, in the doctor's office, had needed her, had given her a place in the world" (Strout, 2008). Despite the fact that the two people are very different in terms of walking speed and thought which shows their attitudes and lifestyle are unlike, the two people choose to spend the rest of their time together. They choose to save each other from the way of accompanying for seek new spiritual support. Since Olive is needed by Jack Kennison, she reconfirms her self-identity again and finds a new connection with the world. The companion of Jack removes her sense of loneliness and puts an end to her endless thoughts of killing herself.

## V. CONCLUSION

Strout demonstrates in this work how people can suffer spiritually as a result of personal, familial, and social neglect. Many contemporary individuals who share a

comparable level of suffering with Olive and are bogged down by different psychological problems can be seen as echoing Olive Kitteridge's trauma. Olive's personal trauma is a common trouble in modern times. What she experiences in her life, a trauma in the original family, incomprehension, an indifferent society, loneliness, and others, is the common mental predicament of modern people. In such a fast-paced life, everyone has to endure emotional conflict.

In Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout presents the life of ordinary people. In everyone's life, they will experience complicated and accumulating traumatic feelings. The spiritual predicament can be solved by us. Through empathy, all people need to show solicitude for each other. Elizabeth Strout characterizes characters that are empathetic, able to change, and resilient, highlighting the importance of empathy and telling in treating trauma. All of this has a referential value for all people who get stuck in a mental predicament.

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