

# Union of Saints, The Psychology of Forcing Others to Recall Negative Past Experiences

Are we holding others accountable for things we are not ourselves accountable for?

## Power & Control Abuse Dynamics

When individuals compel others to revisit harmful or shameful experiences many years later — 10, 20, 30 or more — it can reflect several psychological traits or maladaptive patterns. While **holding people accountable** can be important in certain contexts (e.g., justice for crimes), when done in an excessive, controlling, or punitive way, it is often linked to the following:

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### 1. Rumination and Neuroticism

- **Rumination** is the tendency to dwell on negative experiences long after they've passed.
  - Individuals high in **trait neuroticism** are especially prone to this. They may keep past wrongs mentally alive, revisiting them repeatedly.
  - Over time, they may externalize this rumination by demanding others relive the same memories — effectively trapping both parties in the past.
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### 2. Low Forgiveness and Grudge-Holding

- Research in personality psychology links **low agreeableness** and **low dispositional forgiveness** with long-term grudge-holding.
  - Instead of moving toward closure, such individuals store grievances as a kind of “psychological debt ledger.”
  - Years later, they may call up old wrongs not to heal them but to reaffirm power, moral superiority, or resentment.
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### 3. Vindictiveness and Narcissistic Traits

- Within narcissistic and antagonistic personality features, there is often a **vindictive dimension**: the need to retaliate or punish rather than resolve.
- A narcissistic person may force someone to recall past failures or mistakes as a means of reasserting dominance, controlling the narrative, or avoiding accountability themselves (a form of **projection or blame-shifting**).

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#### 4. Cognitive Biases: Memory as a Weapon

- In interpersonal conflicts, some people engage in what John Gottman (marital researcher) calls “**kitchen sinking**”: bringing up every past transgression during arguments.
  - This transforms memory into a weapon, rather than a tool for understanding.
  - Such a tactic undermines trust and prevents constructive dialogue.
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#### 5. Unresolved Trauma and Justice-Seeking

- For individuals who have experienced deep harm, repeatedly recalling the past may reflect **unresolved trauma**.
  - Trauma often locks memory into a loop, making the past feel ever-present.
  - In these cases, forcing others to recall may be less about vindictiveness and more about an unhealed wound — though still maladaptive if it prevents healing for either party.
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#### Summary

In psychological terms, the behavior of **forcing others to revisit past negative experiences decades later** may reflect:

- **High neuroticism** → rumination and inability to let go.
- **Low agreeableness** → grudge-holding, unforgiveness.
- **Narcissistic or antagonistic traits** → vindictiveness, control, blame-shifting.
- **Unresolved trauma** → looping memory, need for belated justice.

While accountability is important, **weaponizing the past** often signals unresolved personal issues rather than genuine repair. In clinical settings, this pattern is often addressed through therapies that focus on **forgiveness, acceptance, and trauma processing** (e.g., CBT, ACT, EMDR).

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