Taking a CBT look at the anxiety of seeking reassurance (neediness):
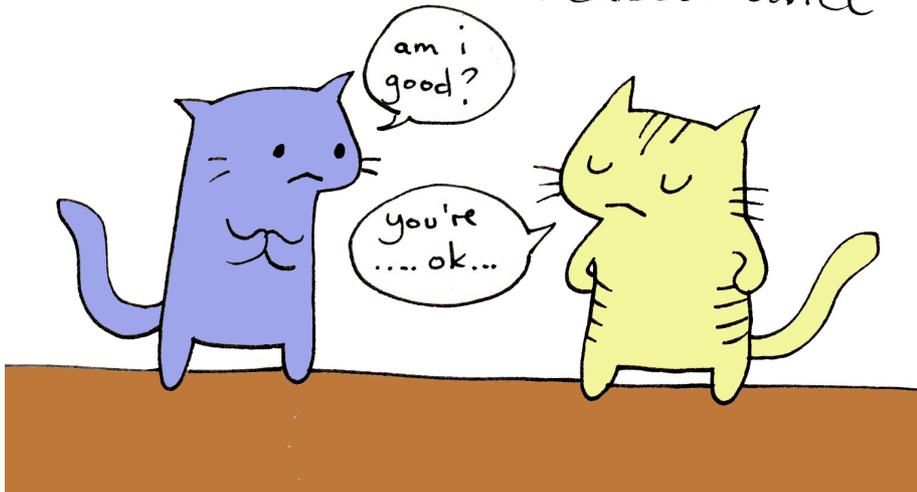

Low self worth is often a byproduct of anxiety and depression. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeking reassurance endlessly – we might feel that we are only of worth if we are of value to others, or that the only way to get respect and kindness from others is if we constantly please them and take care of them. This can extend to virtual strangers – and is always a recipe for discontent.

If we're constantly at hyper alert to please other people, why don't they give it back? They MUST give it back in kind, or else they're bad, and/or by implication saying that you're bad. But… who asked you to go to extremes and bake them a cake or practically stalk and harass them when they have a cold ('It's me again, are you okay? Are you sure? I can come around… Are you taking care of yourself? I have uni-flu here, have you taken them? Oh you poor thing… Blahdy blah blah…'.

Here's another one: A friend wants to give you a compliment, tells you they like your scarf, it looks good on you, it's lovely. "Oh? Here, take it. No, please. I don't even like it that much [you love it], I have loads of scarves, it'll be even nicer on you, it doesn't even really suit me [you love that bloody scarf]. Go on, no here, go on take it. Go on, go on, GO ON!". Your friend takes the bloody scarf. Yet you never see her wearing it. She doesn't tell you you're super kind and that she loves it and wears it all the time. She hasn't given you any impromptu gifts. You miss your scarf. When you're wearing an outfit it would match you think 'that bitch has my scarf'. Hmmm? If you can see yourself here it's time to stop and think about why you are such a 'giver' – are you looking for something back? Do you need to be liked and approved of by others in a pathological way?

This kind of behaviour is ultimately self defeating. Instead of people thinking you're an angel, a giver, they might think you're a needy pain in the ass. Sorry, but it's true. It's possible to devalue yourself by placing others at a higher value, it can make them uncomfortable, they might resent being put in a position where they feel they have to feed your need. They might not have wanted the bloody scarf.

To paraphrase the late great radio host and raconteur Gerry Ryan (I'm working from memory here, but the gist of it is correct), "You're not a GIVER, you have ANXIETY!!!". He was off on a stream of consciousness about a caller who'd moaned about people being selfish and just take take taking, and gave an example thus:

"Yeah, you know when people say 'that guy is unbelievable, he's such a giver, he was up mowing his new neighbours lawn the other morning!'? – well he's not a giver, he has ANXIETY! What the hell is he doing mowing a strangers lawn unasked?....".
Gerry was right.

Let's say there are three types of personality:

- The Negatively Selfish Person – who has a sense of entitlement and low frustration tolerance, and knowingly manipulates at the expense of others.
- The Martyr / Victim – who is constantly going out of their way (unasked) to please others, and is often inappropriately upset at not getting the same behaviour back.
- The Positively Selfish Person – who values themselves and other people, who will certainly help and take care of others if asked or if there is a genuine need, but assumes everything is rosy in the garden as a general disposition.

Our aim, if we want to be calm and happy, is
to be the positively selfish person, right? Positively selfish people are a pleasure to be around, they'll get the kind of feedback that you so desperately crave just by being happy and comfortable in themselves, showing respect and kindness to others, but in an appropriate way when required – not using the 'giving' as a manipulation to get love and respect and attention, believing that's the only way they'll get it.

Change your life: visit the other posts here in the blog to learn how to examine your thinking and behaviours to see if you can make positive changes and learn to value yourself and communicate and behave in healthy constructive ways. I suspect that when you journal your actual thoughts when you're in these situations, you'll see that they're not quite rational, and that you'll be able to challenge them with new healthier thinking that will make both you and the other people in your life happier.

A summary on the three personality type behaviours I mentioned in the above post:

1. **Being a martyr** - The martyr chooses to exclude 'self' in relationship dynamics, and instead takes on a role of responsibility to act only for the benefit of other(s) – measuring their success by the other persons happiness and well being instead of their own. This is unhealthy and when the martyr does not get 'payback' and continual gratitude from the other (who often does not 'choose' the dynamic but has it foisted on them, making them leave the relationship or at least feel resentful/guilty and disrespect the martyr), they can feel resentment, anger and unhappiness. For a healthy dynamic in a relationship there should be a 'balance of power' and a choice in 'giving' to the other.
2. **Being negatively selfish**- is a behaviour where the person is only concerned with their own 'self' and is aware that their gain is at a cost to other(s), their actions are deliberate and if allowed make them the 'abuser' or manipulator of the other, which will create unhealthy dynamics, and indeed a bad sense of 'self' even for the perpetrator.
3. **Being Positively selfish** - this is the ideal – this is where the person has a good life balance and understands that if the 'self' is fed and healthy (assuming at no detriment to the other) they will be happier and centred and able to give and support 'unconditionally' the people in their lives. The positively selfish person acts according to their own value system and beliefs, what fits with 'the highest version of you'.

See? Great.

Good luck, and may you and your lovely scarf have a long and happy life together!