

Science or alchemy?

We are writing following the publication of the Reproducibility Project (reported in *The Psychologist*, October 2015, p.794) to encourage the Society's Boards and its Editorial Advisory Group to take steps to identify effective ways to respond to the implications of the Project and implement them. We are concerned that there has been an element of complacency and even self-satisfaction, in the reporting of the Project. It is claimed, for example, by the Project's corresponding author, that the Project shows the essential quality of self-correction. However, the Project has attracted attention in part because it is unique within psychology, and it is unlikely to be repeated regularly because it depends upon many researchers giving up their time and resources voluntarily for little personal reward. Few institutions would be happy with researchers doing so regularly at the expense of their main research objectives.

The collective results make very embarrassing reading for psychology. The bottom line is that for any recently published significant result in a leading psychology journal, there is only a one in three chance that the research, if repeated, would produce a statistically significant replication. This lack of reliability must be a deterrent to the application or extension of new research. Furthermore, the effect size of the repeated study is likely to be less than half of that originally reported. Any potential users or students of psychology who encounter these findings are likely to question the legitimacy of the discipline.

Some of the reasons for the very poor replicability of published research have been widely discussed. Selective publishing, *p*-hacking, and other ways of massaging results exist, and strategies of registering all planned research can help to address them, but this needs to be formally incorporated into research procedures. However, we believe that there is a further possibility that has not been mentioned in the reports but that will have contributed to some of the misleading original findings. Data are often collected by research assistants and postgraduate students, and the temptation to report the results desired by their employers or supervisors must sometimes lead to data that have been adjusted or possibly invented. There have been a few published examples of identified data fixing, but much more will have been going on. The rewards for falsification are big and, at present, the risks of being caught are small. It will take imaginative procedures established from the top of the profession to reduce, with a goal of eliminating, the temptations and opportunities to cheat.

At present, attempting replications is a low-status activity and publishing the results is difficult. The use of databanks to keep attempted replications publicly available is a

step in the right direction, but such databanks need to be permanently well funded, and the Society may be able to help here. Even then, the balance in status between replication and original research needs to be shifted where possible. There is a place for the Society's journals to encourage the publication of attempted replications, and an investigation into how this could be achieved in practice without excessive increase in costs and reader boredom needs to be undertaken.

One step that might be considered by teachers of psychology at all levels, as well as textbook authors, is to cite only research that has been replicated. This means forgoing introducing some new, novel findings that might entertain students but which are more likely to fail to replicate. Such a strategy could help to support the publication of replications, if their publication was necessary for the advancement of the knowledge of students and other users of psychology. Ofqual and the various exam boards currently select the studies addressed in AS- and A-level exams; the Society could and probably should encourage them to take similar steps.

We hope to hear that the Society, in response to the reports of the Replication Project, is taking a leading role in developing a secure knowledge base in psychology so that the science of psychology will be respected and imitated.

Professor Peter E. Morris

Dr Catherine O. Fritz

University of Northampton

Professor Andy Tolmie, Chair of the BPS Editorial Advisory Group, comments: The Reproducibility Project is without question an important piece of work, and the EAG discussed the implications of its findings and the related Open Science Framework at its last meeting. We believe there is a clear need for a coordinated, discipline-wide response, however, which goes substantially beyond the publishing practices of journals. This includes a searching analysis of the reasons for poor replicability – low *n* research may be a more endemic part of the problem than any



TIM SANDERS

contribute

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Robert Sternberg, Oklahoma State University

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deliberate attempts at massaging data – and the messages for research funders, who commonly hold different expectations about the scale and costs of work in psychology compared to other scientific disciplines, and who regard the funding of replications as a low priority. Journals may need to adopt a different stance to publication of such work, but in fact we actually receive relatively few submissions of this kind – to a large extent, the source of the problem lies further back in the research pipeline.

Professor Daryl O'Connor, Chair of the BPS Research Board, comments: This Project represents an important step forward for psychological science specifically, and science more generally. Other areas of science have encountered problems with reproducibility in the past, for example, clinical medicine and genetics, therefore, psychology is not alone. However, publication of this report is likely to propel psychological researchers forward, improve scientific practice and trigger new ways of working.

A great deal of publicity has been given to the recent findings of the Reproducibility Project, with the *Guardian* summarising: 'Findings vanished when experiments repeated.' The lead author, Brian Nosek, asserted that the study should not be used as a stick with which to beat psychology; if anything, this is an example of science at its best. While I agree, we should not ignore the implications of the problem of lack of replication. Outcome studies on the effects of psychotherapy are rarely, if ever, truly replicated. There are many reasons for this as I discussed in a recent paper (Marzillier, 2014). This is true of systematic reviews and meta-analyses as well as individual research trials.

To take one example, in 2007 on the basis of a meta-analytic review it was confidently asserted that the trauma-exposure therapies and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) were clearly superior to other psychological therapies in the treatment of people with problems such as PTSD (Bisson et al., 2007). This scientific conclusion informed the guidelines to practitioners published by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence. Trauma-exposure therapies and EMDR are the therapies of choice. But are they? A year later and another meta-analytic review concluded that there was no good scientific evidence to conclude that any one form of trauma therapy was more effective than another (Benish et al., 2008). Predictably since then there has been a dispute between the authors of the different reviews (Ehlers et al., 2010; Wampold et al., 2010).

The truth is that we cannot rely on conclusions drawn from reviews of research studies into the effects of psychotherapy for several reasons that I discuss in my article, one of which is few if any studies are actual replications. In this field there is a lot of noise in the system. What was confirmed at one point is almost always later questioned. As psychologists, we should understand this and not pretend that the scientific evidence is better than it is. In particular, we should question the way what is a limited and flawed database is transformed, like base metal into gold, to produce rigid guidelines about which therapies can or cannot be used. This is not science but something else, more to do with vested interests, power and prestige. It should and must be resisted.

John Marzillier
Oxford

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Academic resilience through togetherness

Students often feel alone and isolated joining a new sixth form, which negatively impacts on their academic achievement and their self-concept. In response to your published article on academic buoyancy ('From adversity to buoyancy', September 2015), I wondered if we should consider the significant lessons from Vygotsky. His concept of the ZPD (zone of proximal development) explained how students reached deeper and more advanced levels of learning when they talked, communicated and shared ideas within their small friendship groups. He further proposed the role of the MKO (more knowledgeable other) to access this zone of higher learning.

As a teacher and doctoral candidate, my investigations have found students' buoyancy and resilience to be strengthened by collaboration (in dyads and in groups with an MKO). New students in a transitional term (first 12 weeks of A-level study) were encouraged to engage with others in their 'free periods' on a regular basis. They reported an increased sense of belonging and wellbeing and lowered anxiety resulting in an improved academic attainment and academic self-concept. Recognising the importance of not feeling alone in a transitional time and encouraging academic

study groups was the making of some of my students – so much so that it encouraged them to remain in college, persisting and staying afloat in their academic studies despite it being 'hard' – they knew they could rely on each other for support.

Having videoed many student learning sessions it was satisfying to see older students



Students' buoyancy and resilience are strengthened by collaboration

socratically leading study groups, using a sense of humour and banter, forging friendships and horizontal identities to increase their academic self-concept.

Using an MKO or study-buddies is not a new idea, but perhaps could rise to the surface again to increase academic buoyancy and self-concept... the only problem is getting them to do it – getting a small group of teenagers to meet regularly is rather like herding cats! – worth a try though.

Celia Bone
Full-time teacher,
Chartered Psychologist
and doctoral candidate at
Northumbria University

Alien abduction as trauma substitution

Firstly, I must say how refreshing it was to read the 'Out of this world' feature in the October edition. I found the article titled 'Close encounters of the psychological kind' especially interesting.

As an undergraduate, author and psychological therapist, specialising in stress management therapy, I have a keen interest in the causes of PTSD and how trauma causes individuals to behave.

Some time ago I saw a documentary about alien abduction. Unlike most subjective accounts of the phenomenon, the individuals who took part in the programme sought theoretical explanations for their experiences. One such individual underwent voluntary hypnotherapy, where he was told that his subjective experience of the abduction was very real to him. Something the therapist was unable to do was to explain why this was so. Afterwards he visited a clinical psychologist for assessment, who was able to confirm that he had no diagnosable mental health disorder, which would ordinarily be used to explain such

symptoms as auditory or visual hallucinations. At the time, I was training in hypnotherapy and considered a possible theory for his experience and those of the other individuals who appeared on the programme.

As with this particular man, a couple (man and wife) also claimed to have been abducted. Their experience was quite different. The woman believed herself to have been impregnated by the alien, suffering a miscarriage sometime later. Whilst no physical evidence of an alien abduction was found, her husband was able to confirm that they'd had DNA testing done, and the DNA of the fetus did not match his.

The couple's story was similar to many others that I have since researched out of interest. Most accounts involve either an alien impregnating a woman or aliens leaving one partner incapable of moving whilst taking the other individual away somewhere, bringing them back. Most individuals have been left with visible marks on their skin afterwards, which

they've been unable to explain due to memory loss.

Without wishing to sound as though I have approached this view with anything other than caution and vigorous explanatory research, I would like to offer readers my theory, which as you may have guessed is linked to both trauma and PTSD. Could some abductees be filling in gaps of memory loss with their own interpretations of what may have happened? We are all capable of creating our own memories. Or could some abductees be substituting alien abduction for some other trauma? Perhaps there could be further research into the possibility that violent assault or rape could be willingly interpreted by survivors as alien abduction in order to survive and deal with their ordeal.

I am currently writing on the topic and welcome any interested persons to get in touch: you can contact me on e-mail at louisemullins2010@yahoo.co.uk

Louise Mullins
Bristol

Psychology's contribution

I have followed with interest the many letters and comments in response to Phil Banyard's question 'Where is our non-stick frying pan?' (Letters, September 2015). Banyard feels that when we consider the great advances made by other sciences it's not looking good for psychology. My view is the very opposite, and when I gave my Presidential Address to the Society in 2001 I argued that 'the future belongs to psychology' (MacKay, 2001). I would propose four reasons why psychology is indeed a discipline that in many ways eclipses other sciences.

First, there is the very definition of psychology, which is defined by the Society as 'the scientific study of people, the mind and behaviour'. It is therefore the discipline that is at the very heart of the human welfare agenda and of the world's problems. As such, psychology can make an almost unlimited contribution as a central scientific force in society. In many respects it has already done so, and its insights have frequently given it a central role at the highest level of international negotiations.

Second, the crucial contribution made by some other core sciences has been at the lower levels of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs', such as the struggle to meet the basic physiological requirements of life. As society develops, the focus shifts further up the hierarchy to the levels of esteem and self-actualisation. It is there that the systematic study of the mind and behaviour is of crucial significance and this is an arena where scientific inquiry has been dominated by psychological research.

Third, the centrality of our contribution has been promoted by changing paradigms within the discipline. In the first of their Delphi studies on the future of psychology as a science Helen Haste and her colleagues spoke of two significant changes. The first was an increasing research emphasis on everyday life, quality of life and the whole person; the second was that psychological

research was increasingly moving from the laboratory to real-world settings (Haste et al., 2001). The more this has happened, the more psychology has come to centre stage.

Fourth, the centrality of psychology as a core science is demonstrated by scientific inquiry itself. In a paper entitled 'Mapping the backbone of science', Boyack et al. (2005) looked at citations in over a million journal articles published in 7321 journals. Their aim was to map the various scientific disciplines to determine which have most influence on other areas of inquiry. Seven 'hub' sciences were identified of which psychology was one, the others being listed as mathematics, physics, chemistry, earth sciences, medicine and social sciences.

It is therefore unnecessary that psychology should be seeking to proffer, as Banyard has stated, any 'excuse for the lack of great findings'. I have argued that 'psychology can play a central role in tackling the issue of crime in our cities, litter on our streets, pollution in our atmosphere, breakdown in our international relations, obesity in our children and perhaps ultimately, oppression and injustice in our world' (MacKay, 2008, p.931), and it has already made a very significant scientific contribution in all of these and in many other areas.

Professor Tommy MacKay

Psychology Consultancy Services/University of Strathclyde

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Cold reading and therapy

I am writing because I feel there is an important ethical issue that I've tried to raise with other psychologists but have either been ignored or laughed at. However, I remain convinced that this is an important issue and would appreciate any comments.

Readers with an interest in magic will know of mentalism and most likely 'cold reading', which is '...a deceptive psychological strategy. Among other things, it can be used by someone who is not psychic to give what seems to be a very convincing psychic reading' (Rowland, 2008, p.14). Basically, it is often possible by using these techniques to convince people that you know and understand them.

As far as I am aware, even the most jaded magicians have never suggested that all mediums or clairvoyants learn their 'ability' from a book – most using these skills have learnt them intuitively. However, Rowland talks of many techniques in the cold reader's armoury that can be learnt as opposed to acquired intuitively. For example, he discusses what he calls the 'Rainbow Ruse' – crediting a client with a personality trait and its opposite: 'You can be a very considerate person, very quick to provide for others, but there are times...when you recognise a selfish streak in yourself' (p.32). He goes on to discuss how these techniques can be applied to areas such as selling, romance and criminal



interrogation. Overall, he argues that these approaches can be used to build good rapport and to 'sound perceptive and well-informed' (p.214). Rowland, on his website, claims that 'Teachers and Therapists say that cold reading improves their ability to communicate with their students, clients and patients'.

I would suggest that cold reading has implications for anyone doing any form of therapy and raises a number of questions: First, is it possible or perhaps likely that psychologists considered to be 'empathic' are intuitively using such skills? Second, should psychologists generally be aware of these techniques? Third, if they are made aware of these techniques, should there be an attempt to understand if they have been intuitively using them? Fourth, should these skills be learnt and used in psychotherapeutic contexts if it is felt that they can be useful?

Now I am not suggesting that these techniques be learnt so as to manipulate people, but perhaps we should know about the techniques and if/when we are using such approaches. Psychologist – know thyself!

John Warren

Chandler's Ford, Hampshire

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A terminological issue

The recent article about emotional deficits in schizophrenia ('The flat landscape', October 2015) contains language that appears to contravene your policy on clinical terminology. The latter, as reported by editor Jon Sutton in the November 2009 issue, states: 'Following recent correspondence, the Psychologist Policy Committee...decided that the policy will change in editorial content to adopt the form "with a diagnosis of [psychiatric condition]" to reflect the dominant usage in clinical psychology; and that authors of other matter (features, etc.) will be advised that this is the preferred style' (p.906).

By contrast, the recent piece repeatedly used 'with schizophrenia' 'deficits in schizophrenia', etc. Whilst I know this may appear nit-picking to some, psychologists need to take care not to contribute unwittingly to the ongoing reification of such terms, which are widely accepted not only to be invalid but often damaging to those to whom they are applied (Cooke, 2008; Harper et al., 2013). Such usage arguably also contributes to the continuing belief by many members of the public that phenomena such as hearing voices or holding beliefs that others find strange are

essentially medical rather than psychological (Cooke, 2014).

Anne Cooke

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University*

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Editor's note: You are right: I should have contacted the author to explain our policy and suggest (but not demand) alternative wording. I have now done so and she was happy for me to make those changes – the online version has therefore been amended. Apologies that this one slipped through the net.

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Peter Gannon

peter.gannon@breastcancercare.org.uk

I am a DCLinPsy trainee undertaking research investigating how clinical psychology considers **the wider context of clients' lives** and how this relates to clinical practice. Qualified clinical psychologists are sought to take part in a qualitative study involving face-to-face, telephone or Skype interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. All data will be anonymised. For more information, please contact me.

Heather Spankie

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obituary

Thomas Mckenzie Caine (1918–2015)

Tom Caine, who died on 8 July at the age of 96, had been a Fellow of the British Psychological Society since 1976. Tom was born in Bebington in 1918. When he was six, the family emigrated to farm in Ontario, Canada. He returned to England in 1940 with the Canadian Army, and participated in the Dunkirk landing. He then took a BA and MA in psychology at the University of Toronto, before coming back to the UK in 1950 as an occupational psychologist with the Department of Employment. He eventually moved into clinical psychology, working in Graham Foulds's Department in Runwell Hospital, Essex before being appointed Head of the Psychology Department at Claybury Hospital, Essex, and, 14 years later, becoming Head of the Clinical Psychology Department at University College Hospital, where he remained until retiring in 1983.



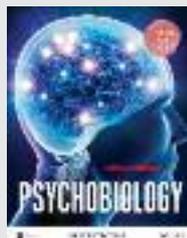
It was at Claybury that Tom carried out his most significant research. Initially, this was for a PhD, obtained from the University of London, on the expression of hostility and guilt, and he collaborated with Foulds in developing the Hostility and Direction of Hostility and Hysteroid-Obsessoid Questionnaires, and on Foulds's (1965) book *Personality and Personal Illness*.

These were exciting times at Claybury, which was undergoing a transition from a traditional psychiatric hospital to a therapeutic community, sparking considerable debate, and this stimulated Tom's subsequent writings. Firstly, in *The Treatment of Mental Illness* (1979) he and David Smail argued that disputes between professionals about the relative merits of different treatments were based not on facts but on fundamental differences in values. Support for this was provided by a research programme on 'personal styles', indicating that the attitudes and responses of staff and clients to different types of treatment, and the symptoms which clients presented, reflected their more general attitudes, adjustment strategies and patterns of construing. Various questionnaires, and even a projective test, were developed during this research, and the questionnaires, published as the Claybury Selection Battery in 1982, differentially predicted outcome in different therapeutic approaches. Specifically, the type of client likely to improve during behaviour therapy was the complete opposite (e.g. outer-directed and conservative) of the type likely to improve during group psychotherapy. The implication that one therapy does not fit all

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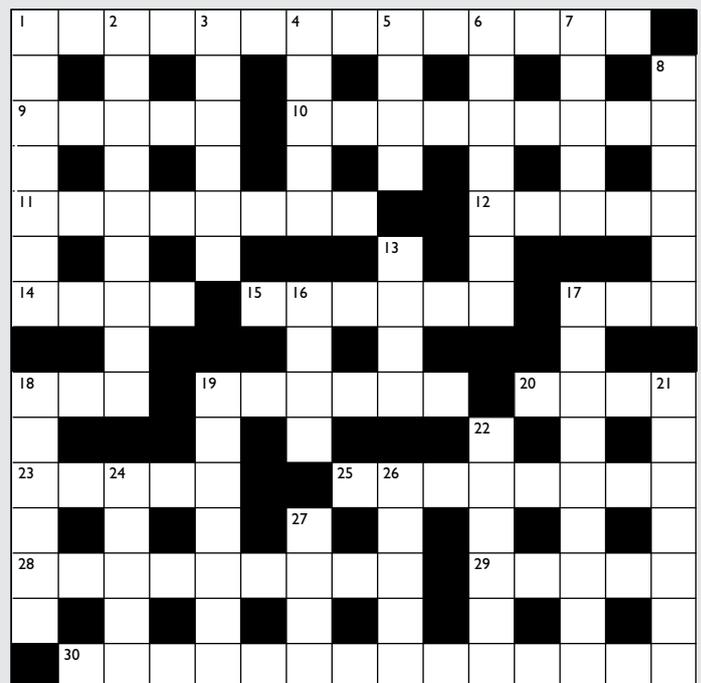
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obituary

Dr John Alban-Metcalf (1940–2015)

is as relevant today, at a time of prescriptive therapeutic services, as it was when the research was first conducted, and this was highlighted by the re-publication in 2014 of *Personal Styles in Neurosis*, the book reporting the research, 33 years after its original publication.

I was fortunate to obtain my first clinical psychologist post in Tom's Department at Claybury, and recall a heady, idyllic atmosphere in which staff would sit on deckchairs on the balconies outside their offices discussing a diverse range of topics. After work many of us, including Tom, who was no mean player, would repair to the hospital tennis courts. This was far removed from the managerialist culture of the current NHS, but staff willingly went the extra mile and probably had much larger caseloads than most contemporary NHS clinical psychologists. It was also an atmosphere in which young people, perhaps seeking their first clinical experience, were welcomed, trusted, and given opportunities to contribute their ideas and develop skills.

In later life Tom became a practising Roman Catholic. He is survived by Maxine, whom he married 60 years ago after meeting her at Edgbaston Tennis Club, and his children Marian, John and Chris.

David A. Winter

University of Hertfordshire

Dr John Alban-Metcalf, Chartered Psychologist, and one of the most influential leadership writers of the past 20 years, passed away on 31 March this year. This was after a year's battle with cancer that he approached with the enormous positive energy that characterised him throughout his life. John and his wife of 43 years, Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalf, created a University of Leeds spin-out company, Real World Group, in 2001 following the publication of their groundbreaking study of leadership that is referred to as Engaging Transformational Leadership.

A graduate of zoology from Oxford University, John later switched to psychology, completed a PhD at the University of Bradford on the subject of cognitive complexity in children. Based on this, he became a Chartered Psychologist. John was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine in the 1990s following his highly influential research into Down's syndrome. He published many peer-reviewed articles on this subject, and on other issues in special needs education, including a book on ADHD in the classroom, now in its second edition. John worked for most of his academic career at Leeds Trinity University, (latterly as a Principal Lecturer) in special needs education and after retiring from the university joined Real World Group in 2001 as Director of Research. Here, he co-authored the majority of Real World Group's leadership diagnostic tools, including the TLQ, which is used around the world.

For the past 14 years, John was a major contributor to large research projects pushing forward the boundaries of understanding leadership

culture and team working, which included two longitudinal studies of leadership and team working in mental health (with King's College, London and the University of Bradford, School of Management), and was a lead author on the reports. His limitless ideas and insatiable passion for research fuelled many areas of product expansion at Real World Group, supported by a wide range of peer-reviewed articles and reports co-authored with Beverly on subjects around leadership including systems leadership, competencies vs. behaviours and team working. John was actively writing research papers right up until the weeks before his passing. Two books that he co-authored with his daughter, Juliette Alban-Metcalf, and colleague, Margaret Bradley, are due to be published next year.

His hobbies were paying tennis throughout the year, and he was also an artist, producing a prolific range of paintings. John will be remembered as a true gentleman, a man of huge integrity, relentlessly-positive energy and humour (though he told jokes badly), love of life (and claret!) and of intellectual pursuits; he was a fabulous husband and father. John passed away peacefully at home with his wife, Beverly, and his daughters, Caroline and Juliette. Colleagues at Real World Group and from his extensive network across psychology and beyond will miss him hugely.

Juliette Alban-Metcalf
Leeds



across

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| <p>1 Polygraph's confused with a coy psi study (14)</p> <p>9 Theorem methodically showing some visitor to Cornwall (5)</p> <p>10 Love no man in rejection of object in singular obsession (9)</p> <p>11 Broadcast bishop at one about rook flying (8)</p> <p>12 Looking back on era with second to last character (5)</p> <p>14 German philosopher's hypocrisy in speech (4)</p> <p>15 Moaning about missing a name of delusion about parentage (6)</p> <p>17 Excellent service from expert (3)</p> <p>18 Hollow stone (3)</p> <p>19 Like fairytale stepmother in audition for yarn (6)</p> <p>20 Exclude second-rate insult (4)</p> <p>23 Proportion of outsiders deserting speech (5)</p> <p>25 Top card in collection held by loose woman (8)</p> <p>28 One of six – the other put back obstruction (9)</p> <p>29 One good card game for White House? (5)</p> <p>30 Gee, returning after expansion upon neurologist's printout (14)</p> | <p>1 Primate researcher organises stuff about dream phase... (7)</p> <p>2 ...with which to stigmatise time with artist (9)</p> <p>3 Sad quality of route shown by map-makers (6)</p> <p>4 Longing to hold me in the country (5)</p> <p>5 Sharpen weeding tool around bottom of garden (4)</p> <p>6 No work graduate left over to send up (7)</p> <p>7 Info on literary style (5)</p> <p>8 Taste head ate the French (4)</p> <p>13 Keen to roll joint (4)</p> <p>16 That is shortly Roman's date (4)</p> <p>17 A limit on piano over girl's singing without backing (1,8)</p> <p>18 Saying wears thin on hearing (6)</p> <p>19 The Spanish into remedy for need to avoid ambiguity (7)</p> <p>21 Promise to marry little woman involves rubbish (7)</p> <p>22 Believing in shopping? (6)</p> <p>24 Not burying nine overcome by venom (5)</p> <p>26 All drink a little at first (5)</p> <p>27 Expression of contempt left in – that's boring</p> |
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