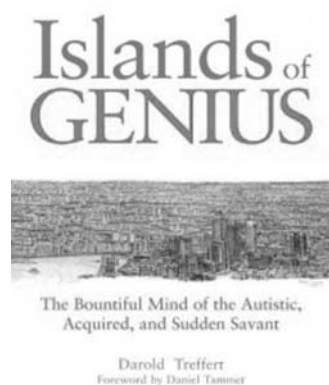


Benedetti breaks down the underpinning conceptualisation of the doctor–patient interaction to four stages: feeling sick, seeking relief, meeting the therapist and receiving therapy. He then takes time to consider how these stages can be affected by various factors, from the nature of engagement with the therapist to alterations in the capacity of people with various illnesses to access this benefit.

The psychosocial context of clinical contact, with the instillation of hope, trust and the expectation of a positive outcome, is shown to be a powerful mediator of the placebo effect. Benedetti extrapolates this to the importance of practical aspects of clear communication regarding interventions and an explanation of the procedure by the clinician. The General Medical Council is rightly concerned that medical students are to be taught the psychosocial skills necessary for an effective clinician. It would be useful for medical students to understand that there is a strong scientific evidence base to the importance of this endeavour. Equally so, doctors who are observed not to take the therapeutic relationship seriously might have to address this in the same way as any other deficit of practice would have to be tackled – with retraining and assessment.

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**Islands of Genius:
The Bountiful Mind
of the Autistic, Acquired,
and Sudden Savant**

By Darold A. Treffert.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2010.
£19.99 (hb). 328pp.
ISBN: 9781849058100

Savant syndrome, a paradox of both mental deficiency and superiority, has been a consuming interest of American psychiatrist Darold Treffert for 47 years. A book by such an authority should be welcomed but unfortunately, despite its authorship, *Islands of Genius* is disappointing.

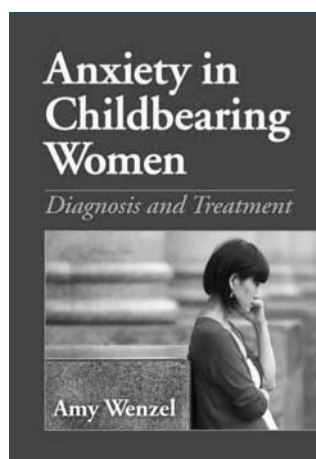
It is not that the subject is dull. Any comprehensive theory of human brain function will need to take into account the existence of savants and the talents of prodigious savants are extraordinary. Kim Peek, who partly inspired Dustin Hoffman's character in the film *Rain Man*, memorised 12 000 books during his lifetime. A century earlier the celebrated musician Thomas Bethune had a repertoire of 7000 pieces despite a vocabulary of only 100 words. The book is rich in detail and thorough enough to satisfy all but the most curious. It is also not afraid to explore the subject's boundaries although, where evidence is lacking, Treffert has a tendency to concentrate on his pet theories rather than adopting a more balanced approach. He never writes of savants as simply

curiosities and the tenderness with which he relates their stories and those of their carers could serve as an example to us all. In part, this book is a championing of their cause: Treffert is critical of IQ scores, for example, which he considers do a disservice to savants and he is at pains to point out that savants can be creative in addition to having extraordinary memory and calculation skills.

Unfortunately, a sentimental streak is often evident in Treffert's writing and this comes close to overwhelming the book's other strengths. This is most marked where savant case histories are presented. These 14 chapters are superlative-laden and their personal-triumphs-against-adversity narratives would be more suited to a glossy magazine. Regrettably, they take up a third of the book. They also sit uncomfortably with earlier chapters about neuroscience, which are predominantly academic in delivery, and later chapters, by guest contributors, which concern the beneficial effects resulting from 'training the talent' of savants. This diversity of styles and subjects leaves one wondering for whom the book is actually intended.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.087296



**Anxiety in Childbearing
Women: Diagnosis
and Treatment**

By Amy Wenzel.
American Psychological
Association. 2010.
US\$69.95 (hb). 275pp.
ISBN: 9781433809002

Amy Wenzel has succeeded in creating a scholarly, immensely readable text, which focuses with great precision on the specific area of perinatal anxiety disorders. This is an area which has often been overshadowed by other psychiatric disorders in the puerperium. Therefore, this book is a welcome addition to the panoply of perinatal psychiatry texts which too frequently pay insufficient regard to this topic.

The text is well structured, with a useful introduction orienting the reader to the subject and the way arguments are to be constructed. This is followed by Part 1, which explores each of the major anxiety disorders sequentially, following a standardised approach. Each chapter looks at the prevalence of the disorder, its effects, potential comorbidity with depression, possible aetiology and a most useful section focusing on practical implications. Each section gives a comprehensive review of the data, explained in easy-to-understand terms. Where limitations in the literature are identified – which is frequent – Wenzel demonstrates a thoughtful application of the evidence obtained in the general population to this specific perinatal population. She eloquently generates hypotheses from the existing evidence base and suggests areas where further research should focus. The chapters are enhanced by robust and comprehensive referencing.