

Buenos Aires, city of tango and psychoanalysis

August 19 2012, by Oscar Laski

Buenos Aires, the Argentine capital known for its tango bars, has another claim to fame: it may well be the world's capital of psychoanalysis.

For every 120 inhabitants in this bustling metropolis, a psychologist is on hand to help struggling individuals make it through tough times -- or simply lend an attentive ear to accounts of life's daily travails.

"We portenos like to talk more than we like to listen," Marcelo Peluffo, one such disciple of [Sigmund Freud](#) and Jacques Marie Emilie Lacan told AFP referring to residents of this city of three million. "That must be why someone who works to listen is successful."

Andres Rascovsky, president of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA), one of the World's largest with 1,200 members, attributes the penchant for such services to immigrant nostalgia similar to that expressed on the dance floor.

"Psychoanalysis is so much a part of Buenos Aires because the city makes you suffer," the 61-year-old said in an interview in his practice -- near a neighborhood dubbed "Villa Freud" due to its abundance of analysts like him.

The popularity of therapy is also reflected by what sells well on television and in the city's theaters where 10 shows currently deal with the subject.

"The public could relate to a series called 'In Therapy,' which just ended," said Rascovsky, whose office walls are adorned with deer antlers, seen as symbols of wisdom and connections to the spiritual world.

On stage, productions that have drawn full houses include "Knock, Knock" -- a piece about six people who suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder -- and the comedy "The Last Session of Freud." The musical "Almost Normal" about a child's death and its impact on the family has also been a hit.

"These productions do very well because people identify with something you don't see every day but which is latent in all of," Florencia Otero, 22, one of the stars of "Almost Normal" told AFP as her colleagues agreed in unison.

Therapy can also be a useful tool for actors, chimes in Mariano Chiesa.

"My teacher tells me, the more you know about yourself the better an actor you'll be," Chiesa said.

Jealousy, desire and infidelity are the key themes of the bestselling book "Encounters" by psychologist Gabriel Rolon that topped sales in Buenos Aires bookstores. Rolon has popularized psychoanalysis with other chart-topping works such as "The Sufferers" and "Couch Stories."

Country-wide, some 50,000 psychologists compete for business, which amounts to an average of one practitioner for every 690 residents -- three times more than in the United States. Those wanting to pursue the profession can choose from 200 schools in Buenos Aires alone.

To illustrate how mainstream therapy sessions have become, Rascovsky -- whose father Arnaldo was a pioneer of psychoanalysis -- tells an

anecdote about a Mexican couple in town for a conference who were astonished when a taxi driver asked them who had been elected APA president.

Indeed, it is difficult to find people who have not sought the services of a therapist, with even those with modest salaries can get sessions partially reimbursed by social security health plans.

Vera Czmerinski, a 40-year-old actress and journalist, told AFP she has spent two decades trying to find herself in sessions.

"I use therapy to know how far I can go without getting hurt by life," she said.

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