

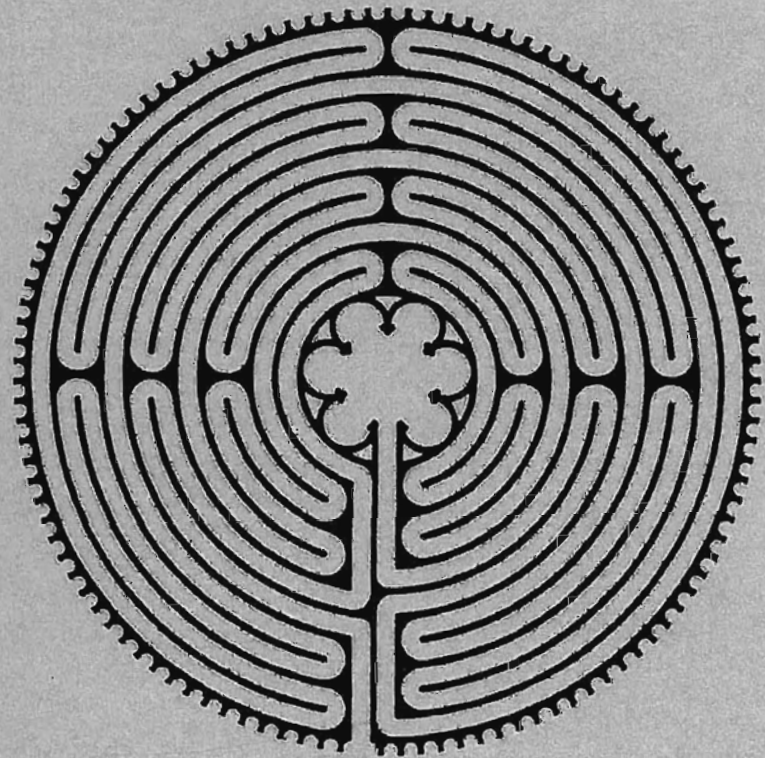
Labyrinth Pathways

*A Journal focusing
on the Labyrinth
in Spirituality,
Health & the Arts*

*Established 2007
Published Annually*

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LABYRINTH PATHWAYS



2nd Edition : July 2008

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Contents

Cover : Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth	
2008 TLS Gathering : an announcement.....	3
Grandpa's Flower : Clem Nagel.....	4
Praying the Labyrinth in the Republic of Congo : Jill Geoffrion.....	5
Some Sticks & a Spiral: the Labyrinth : Thorn Steafel.....	8
Walking the Labyrinth : Catherine Gonick.....	22
Country Retreat Labyrinth : Carol Maurer.....	23
Sacred : Marnie Sears Bench.....	25
The Labyrinth of Recovery : Jo Cook.....	27
Dialogue with a Labyrinth : Erwin Reissmann.....	29
Commonly Reported Effects of Labyrinth Walking : John W. Rhodes, Ph.D....	31
ADHD Children & Finger Labyrinths : Neal Harris.....	38
The Labyrinth Society : Kimberly Lowelle Saward, Ph.D., TLS President.....	40

*Labyrinth Pathways 3 is due for publication June 2009
submissions by 1st April 2009 please*

*Labyrinth Pathways is published annually
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Can you say something to us?

I teach you the wisdom of the way,
the long way, the slow way, the pedantic way,
the way of changes, transformations, bends, turns,
the way of purification, of illumination, of love,
the way to move on, to know, the way of life, of death,
walk the way.

Let yourself be caught by the circle,
go inwards, concentrate yourself,
go outwards, become eccentric.

I teach you the wisdom of the gut,
I carry you on my white stones like a mother,
you can grow up and be born anew.
I take my bearings from the moon,
I look to the towers with the sun and the moon on its point,
I look to the west portal with the blessing Christ,
and the rosette above the tree windows,
you can orient yourself.

Crossing my centre you arrive at the heart of the cathedral,
at the crossing of nave and transept,
with the north and the south portal and its rosettes.
I am a mathematical model,
hidden inside me is the game of the numbers, the flower of the life,
the circle, the square, the triangle,
the straight line, the bent line,
the beginning, the end, the centre.

I am a circle, I am many circles,
a sun cross, a St. Andrews cross,
melody and harmony in space and time,
toothed with the earth, radiating like the sun.

In my centre:
Theseus and Minotaur,
the mystic wedding,
the six-petalled flower,
the new Jerusalem.

You may become quiet, be amazed, you may listen and look.
You cannot understand the labyrinth, you only can walk it.

Erwin Reissmann, Würzburg, Germany

website: www.mymaze.de

Commonly Reported Effects of Labyrinth Walking

John W. Rhodes, Ph.D.
TLS Research Committee Chair

The "Bibliography of Articles and Studies Related to Labyrinth Research" that is posted on the Research Page of the Labyrinth Society's Website cites nearly 50 articles and studies related to the growing field of labyrinth research. Many of these articles and studies relate to the historical, archaeological, sociological, and contextual locations and uses of labyrinths around the world.

However, 16 studies included in the bibliography are action research and/or empirical studies that report research into the effects of walking or otherwise interacting with labyrinths. Collectively these studies report the impact of the labyrinth on 38 physiological, psychological, mental, and dispositional traits (see "Matrix of Topics Addressed by Selected Labyrinth Research Studies" on the Research Page of the Labyrinth Society's Website: www.labyrinthociety.org/useful-research-resources).

Results of these action research and/or empirical studies form a base of research into the so-called and often-reported "labyrinth effects." Of these 38 topics, 15 topics have been addressed by two or more research studies. To respond to the growing number of requests for such information, what the research says at the present time about these 15 topics is summarized below. Abstracts for the studies cited are included in the bibliography mentioned earlier in this article.

Summary of Research on Commonly-Reported Effects

Agitation

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 58% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" agitated following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 69% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" agitated following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Anxiety

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 63% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" anxious following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 73% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" anxious following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Blood Pressure

Sandor and Froman (2006) found that systolic and diastolic blood pressure showed essentially no effect size differences when pre-labyrinth walk and post-labyrinth walk measures were compared.

Wood (2006) reported that walking the labyrinth equalized patients' blood pressure.

Calming

Danielson (2004) reported that walking the labyrinth creates a calming, meditative state that opens one up to one's intuitive, creative nature, and allows for a shift in consciousness.

Fairbloom (2003) studied the impact of walking the labyrinth on healthcare professionals in workplace settings. Eleven participants were interviewed. Participants found the labyrinth offered "time out" in a hectic workplace environment and created opportunities to "re-energize," "re-focus," "reduce stress," "seek clarity," "facilitate calm," and "nurture the soul."

In a study by Mariscotti and Texter (2003), 11 respondents reported feeling "calm" following the labyrinth walk compared to only three participants reporting feeling "calm" prior to the labyrinth walk.

Centeredness

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 75% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" centered following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 81% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" centered following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Clarity

Fairbloom (2003) studied the impact of walking the labyrinth on healthcare professionals in workplace settings. Eleven participants were interviewed. Participants found the labyrinth offered "time out" in a hectic workplace environment and created opportunities to "re-energize," "re-focus," "reduce stress," "seek clarity," "facilitate calm," and "nurture the soul."

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 59% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" clear following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 62% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" clear following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Demographic Characteristics

In his 2006 study, Rhodes reported no statistically significant differences between groups of respondents on the basis of age, gender, race/ethnicity, or religious/spiritual affiliation/preference. Additionally, no significant differences were shown between first time and experienced walkers, or, for experienced walkers, the frequency with which they walked a labyrinth.

In his 2007 follow-up study, Rhodes reported no statistically significant differences between groups of respondents on the basis of age, gender, race/ethnicity, or religious/spiritual affiliation/preference. Additionally, no significant differences were shown between first time and experienced walkers, or, for experienced walkers, the frequency with which they walked a labyrinth.

In her 2004 study, Rice reported that several independent sample *t*-tests demonstrated that gender, ethnicity, and employment did not significantly impact relaxation, contentedness, health and friendliness.

Openness

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 64% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" open following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 72% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" open following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Peace

In a study by Mariscotti and Texter (2003), 27 respondents reported feeling "peaceful" following the labyrinth walk compared to no participants reporting feeling "peaceful" prior to the labyrinth walk.

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 74% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" peaceful following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 87% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" peaceful following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Quiet

Mariscotti and Texter (2004) explored similarities and differences in reported responses and levels of relaxation among four groups of participants. Regarding "mental quiet," and using the states measured by the Smith relaxation inventories, those participants who only listened to music did not report higher post-test levels of mental quiet. Those participants who walked, but walked without following a set path (did not walk a labyrinth) and walked without listening to music, reported higher post-test levels of mental quiet, as did those who walked seven-circuit and eleven-circuit labyrinths while listening to music.

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 68% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" quiet following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 85% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" quiet following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Reflection

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 68% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" reflective following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 80% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" reflective following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

Relaxation

Mariscotti and Texter (2004) explored similarities and differences in reported responses and levels of relaxation among four groups of participants. Regarding "physical relaxation" and "mental relaxation," and using the states measured by the Smith relaxation inventories, those participants who only listened to music reported higher post-test levels of physical and mental relaxation. Those participants who walked, but walked without following a set path (did not walk a labyrinth) and walked without listening to music, reported higher post-test levels of physical relaxation, as did those who walked seven-circuit and eleven-circuit labyrinths while listening to music.

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 74% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" relaxed following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 88% of the respondents reported that they felt "much more" or "more" relaxed following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a 2004 study by Rice, walking the labyrinth was used as a treatment method to induce relaxation. Several independent sample *t*-tests demonstrated that gender, ethnicity, and employment did not significantly impact relaxation, contentedness, health and friendliness.

Wirth (2005) reported that, of 30 respondents, 28 (93%) reported "some" stress to "lots" of stress prior to tracing the finger labyrinth. After tracing the finger labyrinth, 28 (93%) reported that they were "more relaxed" to "very relaxed."

Stress

Fairbloom (2003) studied the impact of walking the labyrinth on healthcare professionals in their workplace setting. Eleven participants were interviewed. Participants found the labyrinth offered "time out" in a hectic workplace environment and created opportunities to "re-energize," "re-focus," "reduce stress," "seek clarity," "facilitate calm," and "nurture the soul."

Mariscotti and Texter (2004) explored similarities and differences in reported responses and levels of relaxation among four groups of participants. Regarding "somatic stress and worry," and using the states measured by the Smith relaxation inventories, those participants who only listened to music reported lower post-test levels of somatic stress and worry. Those participants who walked, but walked without following a set path (did not walk a labyrinth) and walked without listening to music, did not report lower post-test levels of somatic stress and worry. Those who walked seven-circuit and eleven-circuit labyrinths while listening to music reported lower post-test levels of somatic stress and worry.

In a study by Rhodes (2006), 68% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" stressed following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

In a follow-up study by Rhodes (2007), 80% of the respondents reported that they felt "much less" or "less" stressed following a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk.

A study by Weigel, Fanning, Parker, and Round (2007) reported that incoming Nurse Graduates (Interns) for Mercy Hospital (Oklahoma City, OK) who received training in walking a labyrinth and who walked labyrinths regularly had markedly lower levels of stress and slightly higher levels of job satisfaction than members of a control group who were not trained in labyrinth walking and did not regularly walk labyrinths.

Wirth (2005) reported that, of 30 respondents, 28 (93%) reported "some" stress to "lots" of stress prior to tracing the finger labyrinth. After tracing the finger labyrinth, 28 (93%) reported that they were "more relaxed" to "very relaxed."

Wood (2006) also reported that walking the labyrinth decreased patients' stress.

Wellness/Health

Dunphy, M., Borsdorf, L. & Chambliss, C. (2000) conducted a study of the use of labyrinths as effective wellness tools. This study, which incorporated the use of a control condition for comparative purposes, assessed whether walking an eleven-circuit labyrinth can be beneficial to the wellness of individuals, as compared to focused non-labyrinth walking. Results of the study failed to find a significant difference between groups on the overall measure of wellness. Both types of directed walking were associated with significant improvement on an overall wellness index.

In a 2004 study by Rice, walking the labyrinth was used as a treatment method to induce relaxation. Several independent sample *t*-tests demonstrated that gender, ethnicity, and employment did not significantly impact relaxation, contentedness, health and friendliness.

So What?

Because of the action research nature of most of the studies summarized here, care must be exercised in making generalizations and/or predictions beyond the samples studied. However, the results of these studies, taken together, do appear to lend support to a two-part theoretical construct that might be helpful in understanding the so-called "labyrinth effect."

It appears that walking or otherwise interacting with the labyrinth might enable a set of physical responses (increased calm, quiet, and relaxation; decreased agitation, anxiety, and stress) that allows for the emergence of a set of "state of mind" responses (increased levels of centeredness, clarity, openness, peace, and reflection). In turn, these "state of mind" responses might increase one's receptivity to flashes of intuition, hunches, nudges from one's "inner voice," and other types of insight regarding one's problems, issues or concerns. Additionally, it appears that these responses are not significantly affected by demographic variables nor do they have major or consistent impact on biological variables such as blood pressure.

Researchers and others interested in labyrinths are encouraged to debate the merits of this theoretical construct and to design and conduct research studies whose results will support, refute, and/or modify this construct.

John Rhodes, Ph.D., Lilburn, Georgia, USA, January 2008

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Documents to which reference is made in this article, such as the "Bibliography of Articles and Studies Related to Labyrinth Research" and the "Matrix of Topics Addressed by Selected Labyrinth Research Studies," are available on the Research Page of the Labyrinth Society Website, and may be accessed at <http://www.labyrinthsociety.org/html/research.phtml>.

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