The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire

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The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire (LWQ), Research Results and Implications: 2005-2018

Abstract

The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire is a non-intrusive instrument that allows respondents to report the effects of their labyrinth-walking experience on several variables. Participants are invited to complete the short questionnaire after concluding a labyrinth walk by responding to the stem statement, "Comparing how I felt before I walked the labyrinth with how I feel now, I feel: … ." (Participants respond to the statement by circling a number on a Likert Scale.) Other items allow respondents to list and rate additional variables that are relevant to their walk, list and rate environmental factors affecting their walk, and provide pertinent demographic information.

This article summarizes and reports data collected using the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire from September 2005 through December 2018. It represents data provided by 1,250 individuals participating in 128 labyrinth events on three continents. These are action-research results, that is, the data were collected following real-life labyrinth walks rather than labyrinth walks conducted in controlled, experimental situations.

According to the results reported here, for a majority of walkers who completed questionnaires, labyrinth walking increased levels of

- relaxation (86% of 1,250 respondents),
- peacefulness (83% of 1,250 respondents),
- reflectiveness (80% of 1,250 respondents),
- centeredness (78% of 1,250 respondents),
- quiet (72% of 1,250 respondents),
- clarity (68% of 1,250 respondents), and
- openness (68% of 1,250 respondents).

Labyrinth walking also decreased levels of

- stress (71% of 1,250 respondents),
- anxiety (70% of 1,250 respondents), and
- agitation (63% of 1,250 respondents).

Background

The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire was developed in response to a need identified by the Labyrinth Society Research Committee at the Labyrinth Society's 2004 Gathering at Camp Courage, Maple Lake, Minnesota. At that time interest in labyrinth research was just beginning to emerge. The research committee was interested in providing a means by which individuals could participate in and contribute to the nascent field of labyrinth research without having a background or training in research. A questionnaire that could be made available at labyrinth events, completed by participants, and mailed to a central address for compilation appeared to the author to be a reasonable approach to address this need.

The Instrument

The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire is a non-intrusive instrument that allows respondents to report the effects of their labyrinth-walking experience on several variables. The 10 variables used in the questionnaire were selected by an informal review and count of words used to describe potential or expected effects of labyrinth walking. Sources used were two of the primary sources of labyrinth information at the time: *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool*, by the Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress [1996], and *The Way of the Labyrinth: A Powerful Meditation for Everyday Life*, by Helen Curry [2000].

The questionnaire's initial word list contained 16 words. After pilot testing the questionnaire at a labyrinth walk and discussing the word list with the participants in the pilot test, words that appeared to be ambiguous or whose meanings were close to those of other words on the list were eliminated. From this exercise the list was reduced to 10 words and the questionnaire was revised. Next the questionnaire was field tested at the Labyrinth Society's annual Gathering in Lenox, MA, in November 2005. Based on the comments of those who walked the 10 labyrinths at the Gathering and completed the questionnaire, as well as a discussion of the instrument at a meeting of the Labyrinth Society Research Committee and others interested in labyrinth research, no changes were recommended to the list. The comments of the walkers and the consensus of the group discussions indicated that the list was satisfactory for a "general use" instrument such as this.

Other questionnaire items allow respondents to:

- List and rate additional variables that were relevant to their walk.
- List and rate environmental factors affecting their walk.
- Provide pertinent demographic information.

Participants also have the opportunity to respond to two open-response items:

- General comments about your labyrinth experience today
- Did you walk the labyrinth today with a specific purpose, question, or intention?

Participants respond to each item by relating the stem statement to a six-point Likert Scale and circling the appropriate point on their questionnaire. The stem statement is, "Comparing how I felt before I walked the labyrinth with how I feel now, I feel: …."

The six points on the Likert Scale are

- Much More,
- More,
- About the Same,
- Less,
- Much Less, and
- Not Applicable.

The points on the Likert Scale are not weighted because weighting points on the scale would indicate that some points are more desirable responses than others. No "score" is produced from the Likert Scale ratings.

The Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire appears to have both content and construct validity for its intended purpose.

Procedure

Following the 2005 Labyrinth Society Gathering, the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire, as well as instructions for its use, were posted in the Research Resources Section of the Labyrinth Society's Website.

Labyrinth event facilitators were instructed to, "Have copies of the two-page questionnaire, a set of simple printed instructions for participants, similar to those included here, and some pens available on a table where the labyrinth event is being held." Facilitators also were instructed to, "Have a box to hold completed questionnaires," and to, "Modify the instructions for participants … to fit your particular event and circumstances." (Note: The questionnaire was not modified for any of the events included in this study.)

Labyrinth event participants were invited to participate voluntarily in an on-going labyrinth research study. They were invited to complete the short questionnaire after they concluded their labyrinth walk. They were instructed, "When you finish your labyrinth walk, please take a blank questionnaire, complete both sides, and put the completed questionnaire in the box marked 'Completed Questionnaires.'"

Labyrinth event facilitators who used the questionnaire were instructed to mail the set of completed questionnaires and a description of the labyrinth event to the author of this article for compilation. During the period 2005 through 2018 the author received sets of completed questionnaires from 128 labyrinth events. A total of 1,250 completed questionnaires were received. The questionnaire data from each event were compiled and response percentages to each item were calculated. This produced a data summary document for each labyrinth event. The data summary documents then were combined to produce a single data summary document that summarized percentage responses, by item, for the entire data set. These data are the basis for the research results presented below.

Results

Data produced by instruments such as the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire are best presented in tabular form. Tabular data presentations are both more understandable and more economical. For these reasons, 13 data tables are included in this section, sometimes with very little connecting narrative.

Effects of Labyrinth Walking

Table 1 summarizes the major findings of the study related to the 10 physical, emotional, and psychological variables being investigated. For the summary, as in most of the subsequent tables, the categories "Much More" and "More" have been combined, as have the categories "Less" and "Much Less" for ease of understanding. For this table the variables are ranked in order of descending effect.

Table 1		
"Comparing how I felt before I walked the labyrinth with how I feel now, after walking the labyrinth, I feel:"		
More/Much More	**N**	**%**
Relaxed	1039	86%
Peaceful	1013	83%
Reflective	969	80%
Centered	952	78%
Quiet	872	72%
Clear	832	68%
Open	821	68%
Less/Much Less		
Stressed	864	71%
Anxious	841	70%
Agitated	768	63%

Table 2 is a detailed presentation of the same data. In this table, the categories "Much More," "More," "Less," and "Much Less" are presented separately as well as combined. The categories "About the Same," and "Not Applicable" also are included. For this table, the variables are listed in the order in which they are listed on the questionnaire, rather than being ranked in order of descending effect. Please note that in this table, as in other tables in this article, rows will not always sum to exactly 100% because of rounding errors and because every respondent did not necessarily respond to every item.

Table 2

"Comparing how I felt before I walked the labyrinth with how I feel now, after walking the labyrinth, I feel:"

	Much More	More	More/ Much More	About Same	Less	Much Less	Less/ Much Less	N/A
1. Relaxed	37%	49%	86%	11%	1.3%	0.4%	2%	1%
2. Anxious	0.6%	3%	4%	10%	36%	34%	70%	12%
3. Clear	22%	46%	68%	24%	2%	1%	3%	3%
4. Peaceful	38%	45%	83%	12%	2%	0.2%	2%	2%
5. Centered	30%	48%	78%	15%	3%	0.6%	4%	2%
6. Stressed	0.2%	3%	3%	9%	33%	38%	71%	13%
7. Open	27%	41%	68%	25%	2%	1%	3%	3%
8. Quiet	29%	43%	72%	21%	3%	1%	4%	3%
9. Agitated	1%	2%	3%	7%	25%	38%	63%	23%
10. Reflective	42%	38%	80%	14%	1%	1.4%	3%	3%

In addition to the 10 primary variables listed on the questionnaire, respondents also had an opportunity to include other words that appropriately described their labyrinth walking experience. This item served two purposes. It enabled walkers to tailor their responses to reflect the personal nature of their labyrinth walk. Also, it served as an internal content validity check for the questionnaire. If a high percentage of respondents had added the same word(s) to describe their walks, it would have shown that some important variables had been omitted from the questionnaire. This was not the case.

Table 3 shows all additional descriptors that were added by more than 1% of the walkers. "Grateful" and "connected" were the only descriptors added by more than 2% of the respondents. These additions were insufficient to warrant making changes to the questionnaire and helped confirm the validity of the original 10 variables.

Table 3		
"If there are words that could describe your labyrinth experience today that are not included above, please add them to the blank items below and rate them in the same way you did the preprinted items."		
More/Much More	**N=1,250**	**%**
Grateful	30	2.47%
Connected	29	2.39%
Aware	23	1.89%
Calm	22	1.81%
Joyful	21	1.73%
Happy	18	1.48%
Loving	15	1.23%
Focused	15	1.23%
Energized	13	1.07%

Environmental Factors

The next section of the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire asked respondents to rate common environmental factors that might affect their labyrinth walk. Respondents were asked to rate the overall environment in which the labyrinth was located, as well as the presence of music and candles. Music and candles probably are the two most commonly-used additions to the environment. Table 4 summarizes the responses to this item in terms of whether the factors were helpful or unhelpful. A very high percentage of respondents rated the overall environment as "helpful" or "very helpful" to their walk. The presence of music also was rated as being "helpful" or "very helpful." However, it should be noted that music and, particularly, candles were not present at every event, thus influencing the percentage of responses.

Table 4		
"Rate the following conditions as they affected you during your labyrinth walk:"		
Helpful/Very Helpful	**N=1,250**	**%**
Overall Environment	1037	85%
Music	867	71%
Candles	467	38%
Unhelpful/Very Unhelpful		
Overall Environment	53	4%
Music	15	1%
Candles	7	0.6%

The importance of the environment in which the labyrinth is located and the care with which the environment is prepared and maintained cannot be overemphasized. Please note that whereas 85% of walkers responded that the overall environment was "helpful" or "very helpful," 4% also responded that the overall environment was "unhelpful" or "very unhelpful," thus underscoring the importance of the labyrinth environment to the effectiveness of the labyrinth walk.

Respondents also had an opportunity to list other environmental factors that positively or negatively impacted their labyrinth walking experience. Although many of the factors listed are event-specific, some were mentioned frequently enough to warrant including. These are listed below in Table 5. Lighting was the most frequently mentioned environmental factor positively affecting the labyrinth walking experience. Nearly 6% of respondents mentioned that the lighting in the labyrinth environment was "helpful" or "very helpful." On the other hand, crowding on the labyrinth was the most frequently mentioned factor negatively affecting the labyrinth experience. More than 4% of respondents mentioned crowding as being "unhelpful" or "very unhelpful." Additionally, nearly 2% of respondents mentioned that noise in or near the labyrinth environment had negatively affected their labyrinth experience.

Table 5		
Other Respondent-Supplied Environmental Factors That Affected Their Walk:		
Helpful/Very Helpful	**N=1,250**	**%**
Lighting	69	5.68%
Outdoors	43	3.54%
Crystals	26	2.14%
Quiet/Solitude	13	1.07%
Energy	12	0.99%
Unhelpful/Very Unhelpful		
Crowded	52	4.28%
Noise, etc.	22	1.81%

Table 5A			
Impact of an apparently difficult, noisy, crowded environment:			
More/Much More	**N=34**	**%**	**Composite %**
Relaxed	23	68%	86%
Peaceful	22	65%	83%
Reflective	20	59%	80%
Centered	22	65%	78%
Quiet	17	50%	72%
Clear	21	62%	68%
Open	21	62%	68%
Less/Much Less	**N**	**%**	**Composite %**
Stressed	17	50	71%
Anxious	18	53	70%
Agitated	20	59	63%

The data in Table 5A are an example of the degree to which a crowded, noisy environment negatively affected the experience of the walkers at one labyrinth event. Several of the 34 respondents to the questionnaire for this event mentioned that the labyrinth was located in a difficult, crowded, and/or noisy environment. For example, the data compilation

for this event showed that only 68% of respondents reported feeling "more" or "much more" relaxed after walking the labyrinth than before walking, compared to 86% for the total sample. Likewise, only 50% of respondents reported feeling "less" or "much less" stressed after walking the labyrinth than before walking, compared to 70% for the total sample. Table 5A above summarizes the remainder of the reported effects.

Demographics

Page two of the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire provided an opportunity for respondents to include some information about themselves. As in the other questionnaire items, response to the items was totally voluntary. Questionnaire instructions told respondents to "feel free not to respond to any of the items if for any reason you would prefer not to respond." For this reason (omitted responses), the total number of responses to each item seldom totals the sample total of 1,250.

Respondents were asked if this was the first time they had ever walked a labyrinth. Those who responded "No," were additionally asked approximately how many times they had walked a labyrinth and how frequently they walked a labyrinth.

50% of walkers responding to the item reported that this walk was not the first time they had walked a labyrinth. 42% reported that this walk was the first time they had walked a labyrinth, so the sample was fairly evenly split between first-time and experienced walkers. Of those who had previously walked a labyrinth, a majority (31%) reported that they had walked 10 times or less. The most commonly reported frequencies of walking were "monthly" (7%), and "several times per year" (7%).

In summary, the most commonly reported age group was 50 – 59 years old (22%), the most commonly reported gender was "female" (73%), and the most commonly reported race/ethnicity was "white/Caucasian" (72%).

The most commonly omitted item was religious/spiritual preference. Of those responding, 28% represented a variety of Christian, non-Catholic affiliations. Although eight countries other than the United States of America were represented, 84% of respondents reported being from various states within the USA. This bias simply represents the locations of most of the labyrinth events for which data were reported.

The data summaries are presented in their entirety below in Tables 6 through 11 without additional narrative.

Table 6		
Demographics: Labyrinth Walking Experience		
First time to Walk	**N=1,250**	**%**
Yes	510	42%
No	604	50%
If no, approximately how many times		
10 or less	371	31%
11 – 50	110	9%
51 – 100	37	3%
101 – 1000	24	2%
> 1,000	13	1%

Table 7		
Demographics: If no, how frequently do you walk a labyrinth?		
Frequency	**N=1,250**	**%**
More than once daily	8	0.66%
Daily	13	1.07%
Several times per week	5	0.41%
Weekly	19	1.56%
Several times per month	17	1.40%
Monthly	86	7.08%
Several times per year	86	7.08%
Annually	36	2.96%
Not enough	16	1.32%
Infrequently	62	5.10%
When available	24	1.98%
Rarely	49	4.03%
Sometimes	4	0.33%

Table 8		
Demographics: Age		
Age	**N=1,250**	**%**
<10	2	0.16%
10 – 19	56	4.61%
20 – 29	170	13.99%
30 – 39	134	11.03%
40 – 49	197	16.21%
50 – 59	269	22.14%
60 – 69	199	16.38%
70 – 70 +	71	5.84%

Table 9		
Demographics: Gender & Race/Ethnicity		
Gender	**N=1,250**	**%**
Male	218	18%
Female	886	73%
Race/Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	875	72.02%
Black/African American	57	4.69%
Asian	13	1.07%
Hispanic	12	0.99%
Australian	8	0.66%
Various Other	31	2.55%

Table 10		
Demographics: Religious/Spiritual Preference		
	N=1,250	**%**
Various Non-Catholic Christian	344	28.31%
Catholic	166	13.66%
None or N/A	95	7.82%
Spiritual	75	6.17%
Unitarian Universalist	36	2.96%
Wiccan	24	1.98%
Buddhist	22	1.81%
Pagan	17	1.40%
Jewish	16	1.32%

Table 11		
Demographics: State or Country of Residence		
	N=1,250	**%**
Various States in USA	1017	83.7%
Australia	21	1.73%
United Kingdom	3	0.25%
Canada	3	0.25%
Greece	3	0.25%
Chile	2	0.16%
Ireland	1	0.08%
Nigeria	1	0.08%
Columbia	1	0.08%

Another item of particular interest to the investigator that was included was an item related to the Myers/Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The item was, "If you have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument, and remember your MBTI type, please enter it here." (The MBTI is an instrument that is primarily concerned

with differences that result in people based on where they like to focus their attention, the way they like to take in information, the way they like to make decisions, and the type of lifestyle they adopt.) This is reported in 12 categories with four dimensions in each category. Although a majority of respondents omitted this item, probably because they either had not taken the MBTI or because they didn't remember their MBTI Type, enough did respond (N=182; 15% of the total sample) to begin to provide some interesting preliminary data regarding MBTI types that are probably most likely to seek out labyrinth experiences. These data are summarized in Table 12 below. However, because of their potential interest and relevance, they will receive a more complete analysis and discussion in another article by this author.

Table 12		
Demographics: Myers/Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)		
	N=1,250	**%**
INFJ	41	3.29%
INFP	28	2.30%
ENFP	21	1.73%
INTJ	18	1.48%
ENFJ	18	1.40%
ISTJ	13	1.07%
ENTP	8	0.66%
INTP	6	0.49%
ENTJ	9	0.74%
ESTJ	5	0.41%
ISFJ	13	1.07%
ESFJ	2	0.16%
ISTP	0	0%
ESTP	0	0%
ISFP	0	0%
ESFP	0	0%

Discussion

Almost since the beginning of the renewed worldwide interest in the labyrinth in the 1990s, the labyrinth has been referenced as a "walking meditation." [Artress 1995, various references] The data presented from this study appear to support this assertion. Although a review of the literature related to the identified effects of meditation is out of the scope of this article, the data presented here do support the meditative effects of labyrinth walking, i.e. decreased stress, anxiety, and agitation, as well as increased relaxation, peacefulness, reflectiveness, centeredness, quiet, clarity, and openness. Labyrinth walking provides the additional aspect of walking and movement. According to Newberg and Waldman [2009, p.35], "the addition of movement to any meditation should significantly enhance the cognitive performance of the brain."

In addition to being referenced as a "walking meditation," labyrinth walking frequently has been associated with holistic health, healing, and well-being. Again, although a review of the literature related to holistic health, healing, and well-being is out of the scope of this article, the data presented here do appear to support these assertions, as well. According to Schultz and Rhodes [2011], "Results show a positive relationship of responses with definitions of healing in holistic nursing literature. … The experience of labyrinth walking supports recovery, renewal, integration of the whole person, and facilitating a sense of harmony." Lauren Artress further asserts, "The labyrinth is a spiritual tool meant to awaken us to the deep rhythm that unites us to ourselves and to the Light that calls from within. In surrendering to the winding path, the soul finds healing and wholeness." [Artress 1995, p.xii]

If, based on the results presented here, one were to attempt to develop a profile of an "average" labyrinth walker, one could conclude that this "average" labyrinth walker is a middle-aged, Caucasian, Christian, female resident of the USA who has walked a labyrinth fewer than 10 times and probably walks a labyrinth only several times a year. If one were to draw this conclusion, one would be absolutely wrong. When you have met one labyrinth walker, you have met exactly one, just as when you have experienced a labyrinth walk once, you have experienced exactly one labyrinth walk. Just as each labyrinth walk is a unique experience, each labyrinth walker is a unique individual, responding uniquely to his/her labyrinth walk.

If, based on the results presented here, one were to conclude that, after completing a labyrinth walk, a walker probably would be in a more relaxed, more peaceful, more reflective, less stressed and less anxious, state than before the labyrinth walk, one probably would be accurate.

However, please note that the effects identified here were identified by labyrinth walkers following a single labyrinth walk. This is not a study of the long-term or residual effects of labyrinth walking.

Care should be exercised regarding interpretation of these data. It is easy to be lulled into the mindset of thinking that because one felt more relaxed, less stressed, etc., following a labyrinth walk that it was a "good" or "successful" labyrinth walk, whereas if one felt less relaxed, more stressed, etc., following a labyrinth walk that the labyrinth walk was not "good" or "successful."

The two open response questions on the Labyrinth Walk Questionnaire often provide key information regarding the "effectiveness" of a labyrinth walk. For example, one walker who returned a questionnaire indicated that she was much less relaxed, peaceful, reflective, etc. and much more stressed, agitated, and anxious following her labyrinth walk than before walking. Taken at face value, one could conclude that either she had misread the directions for marking the questionnaire scale and had reversed her ratings, or that she had an "unsuccessful" or "ineffective" labyrinth walk. The key to interpretation lay in her response to the question, "Did you walk the labyrinth today with a specific purpose, question, or intention?" She responded, "Yes. I walked today to get a particular person off my mind. Now, after completing the walk, I find that I hate him more than ever." Was this a "successful" or "effective" labyrinth walk? You decide.

The data summarized in Tables 4 and 5, and the subsequent narratives regarding environmental factors, can provide useful information for labyrinth facilitators planning labyrinth events. It should be noted that 85% of the 1,250 questionnaire respondents indicated that the overall environment in which the labyrinth was located was "helpful" or "very helpful." Also of note is that 71% of the respondents noted that music was "helpful" or "very helpful" to their walk. Several of the respondents elaborated that "soft music" and "instrumental music" was particularly helpful.

"Crowding" and "noise" were identified most frequently as "unhelpful" or "very unhelpful" to the effectiveness of the walk. Note that the category of "noise" included both noise in the immediate environment in which the labyrinth was located (talking, etc.), as well as extraneous noise "bleeding through" from outside the immediate labyrinth environment. For indoor labyrinths, this could include noise from adjoining rooms or hall noise. For labyrinths located outdoors this could include traffic noise, people passing by, or other sources of extraneous noise. Noise sources within the labyrinth environment usually can be controlled by the event facilitator. The extraneous noise

sources might or might not be under the control of the event facilitator, however, they are worth being noted by the facilitator.

Crowding was mentioned as being "unhelpful" or "very unhelpful" by a little more than 4% of the respondents. Most frequently this can be controlled by the event facilitator maintaining a steady flow of walkers and sufficient space between walkers, as well as the facilitator "holding the space" for the walkers.

Is this study "scientific?" Probably not. No effort was made to control external variables that might have affected the walkers' experiences. A "post-test only" design was used deliberately so the data could be collected in a non-intrusive manner that did not interfere with or possibly "pre-program" the participants' labyrinth experiences. Since there were no pre-post measures taken, no tests of statistical significance were performed.

Are these results useful? Probably so. A strength of the study is that it was conducted using "real" people, at "real" labyrinth events. The participants were expressing their unvarnished, immediate responses to their labyrinth walking experiences.

In closing, one should note that the "labyrinth effect" can be subtle and often can sneak up on one. One casual walker at a public labyrinth event provided an insightful response to the question, "Did you walk the labyrinth today with a specific purpose, question, or intention?" She responded, "Just killing time – but now I have gained a centeredness that I did not start my day with."

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