

RECOVERY: THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND HOPE (ASH)  
ON INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

by

Jenifer Ann Williams

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) on men who have recovered from Internet pornography (IP) addiction. This study was conducted to understand the lived experiences of individuals who completed a recovery program for IP addiction, and it included eight men in Central Louisiana area as participants. The central theory guiding this study was the 12-step Model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA). The four research questions for this study were: In what ways has engagement in accountability impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? How has experience in engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? In what ways has experiencing the installation of hope impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sex Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography? A purposeful, convenient sampling of eight men was used for the study. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. Data analysis procedures were conducted based on procedures demonstrated by Moustakas (1994). The results of this study indicated that the participants in this study perceived that ASH and the 12-step model of SAA are essential in recovery from IP.

*Keywords:* accountability, hope, addiction, sexual addiction, spirituality, Internet pornography, recovery.

## Copyright Page

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Accountability, Spirituality, and Hope (ASH)

Alcohol Anonymous World Services Inc. (AAWS)

Internet Pornography (IP)

King James Version (KJV)

Sexual Addicts Anonymous (SAA)

Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is over self.” Aristotle

### Overview

One of the most controlling addictions that has taken America is Internet pornography (IP) (Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Sniewski, Farvid, & Carter, 2017). According to Sniewski, Farvid, and Carter (2017), IP is defined as the online viewing or downloading of pictures and videos of people having sex with their genitals exposed. Although pornography has been around for ages, the secretive activity of viewing pornography has dramatically affected the world, predominantly men, since the invention of the Internet (Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Ross, Mansson, & Daneback, 2012; Sniewski, Farvid, & Carter, 2017). Bouton (2008) argues that IP is powerful, and many people partake of pornography in this form because of its accessibility. Unfortunately, scores of individuals have found themselves addicted to IP and are desperately seeking avenues for recovery.

This chapter includes background information on IP usage, characteristics of addiction, and factors that impact recovery from IP. Having knowledge of key recovery factors and integrating these factors into the client's treatment regimen is essential to professionals who assist individuals in recovery from IP (Zitman & Butler, 2005). Additionally, skilled clinicians should seek to help their clients understand the role of individual factors such as accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) in recovery. Recovery will never be accidental; instead, it usually involves participation in a planned program. Laudet, Morgen, and White (2006) state that most individuals do not successfully recover from any addiction without the use of a structured program. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of accountability,

spirituality, and hope (ASH) on the recovery of males addicted to IP. The purpose of investigating through structured interviews is to use qualitative research to attain results leading to implications for clinicians and recommendations for future studies. This transcendental phenomenological qualitative research will provide insight regarding recovery from IP, add to the pool of knowledge regarding recovery from IP, and provide recommendations for future research.

### **Background**

Research has shown that pornography viewers have been searching for new and unique ways to purchase and view pornographic material (Coopersmith, 1998). The invention of the Internet has been instrumental in helping pornography viewers in their quest by providing a means to view and a venue to purchase it (Ropelato, 2006). Because of the creation of the Internet, billions of people can communicate globally, and the extent and distribution of pornography have grown; pornography is accessible daily around the world (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015).

Numerous individuals in the world experience stress, and some studies have shown that viewing IP has become a way to de-stress, escape pressures, and ease tensions in viewers' lives (Cooper, 1998; Cooper, 2002; DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015; Shaw, 1999). Modern technology has provided quick access to the Internet through the use of smartphones, iPods, tablets, laptops, and personal computers, which give IP users an immediate escape route from their world of stress (Murray & Campbell, 2015). In addition to the easy access to the Internet through modern technology, the anonymity of the Internet has also been instrumental in causing many to become addicted to pornography (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Hassan, Ayub, Hawafi, & Ghoroghi, 2017; Sahni & Swasti, 2018; Wery & Billieux, 2016).

Studies have shown that Internet pornography is addictive and has become a global epidemic that has significantly altered the world (Sniewski, Farvid, & Carter, 2017). When a person compulsively views pornography and disregards essential things in life, then he/she is said to have an addiction. Addiction is defined as a mood-altering experience in which individuals are no longer in control of their lives (Cojocaru & Dima-Cozma, 2014; Efrati & Gola, 2018; Goodman, 1992). Cojocaru and Dima-Cozma (2014) state that addiction is a complicated disease that is multifaceted and very complex to manage. While some researchers have reported that there is no clearly established addict profile and that addictions can affect all races, genders, and levels of socioeconomic status, there seems to be a clear consensus on what addiction is. It has been ascertained that addictions are expressed as repetitive behaviors, regardless of the harmful consequences and are commonly subject to relapse (Cojocaru & Dima-Cozma, 2014; Perry & Schleifer, 2019).

Ropelato (2006) describes IP as an addiction that is driving society to spend millions of dollars, and he states that millions of Internet users diligently seek and create pornographic sites around the world. Other researchers assert that viewing IP is very similar to substance abuse and that viewers desperately crave this activity despite its consequences (Blum, Badgaiyan, & Gold, 2015). So, IP addiction is a prevalent addiction, and it ruins lives just as other addictions do. Many who are addicted to IP often feel hopeless, which usually affects every area of their lives. The physiological, psychological, and relational effects of IP addiction are severely debilitating, thus leading many to seek recovery (Cash et al., 2012; Short, Kasper, & Wetterneck, 2015). Although recovery from IP is complicated, research has indicated that there are vital factors such as accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) that are instrumental to a successful recovery

(Bassett, Lloyd, & Tse, 2008; Rodda, Booth, Vacaru, Knaebe, & Hodgins, 2018; Worthington Jr et al, 2011).

Most research supports the importance of accountability in recovery (Hannush, 2018; Rodda, Booth, Vacaru, Knaebe, & Hodgins, 2018). Hannush (2018) asserts that recovery begins when individuals gain a deep understanding of who they are and intentionally choose self-denial over self-indulgence. Since self-denial does not come easily, it is often necessary for individuals with addictions to secure accountability assistance (Hannush, 2018; Rodda, Booth, Vacaru, Knaebe, & Hodgins, 2018). For many individuals who have recovered from IP, the use of accountability partners has been instrumental in fostering responsibility through check-in sessions (Hall, 2019). Check-in sessions is a proven accountability plan, and without these sessions, most individuals addicted to IP do not have the adequate support they need to sustain recovery; without check-in sessions, they are at a higher risk for relapse (Hall, 2019; Hannush, 2018). Accountability is a necessary step to recovery. However, accountability alone is not enough; there are additional factors that are also important in the recovery from IP.

A second factor that the literature discusses as essential in recovery from IP is spirituality. Wnuk (2017) indicates that religion and spirituality are vital and have shown to be robust treatment techniques in recovery from IP. Worthington Jr, Hook, Davis, and McDaniel (2011) go further and argue that it is not religion, but spirituality (defined as closeness to a sacred being) that helps individuals overcome addictions. Spirituality plays an integral role in recovery and Kelly, Stout, Magill, Tonigan, and Pagano (2011) argued that increasing spirituality practices yields better treatment outcomes. However, there are some individuals who adamantly doubt the importance of spirituality in recovery. Kelly et al (2011) discussed the prevalence of skepticism in their study and stated while skepticism regarding spirituality continue to exist,

there has been a number of addicts and clinicians that attest to recovery through spiritual awakenings that involve prayer and meditation. Alongside this relationship with a divine being and the accountability previously discussed, hope is also a critical factor in recovery.

Studies have shown that, although hope is often challenging to define, it is highly instrumental in addiction recovery (Bassett, Lloyd, & Tse, 2008). According to Selvam (2015), hope can be defined as expecting the best and working to achieve it. Moore (2005) argues that hope is critical to recovery and should thoughtfully be included in assessment and treatment because it is often the vehicle that guides therapists to become more perceptive to the spiritual needs of clients. Ultimately, without hope, a person loses the will to try, and recovery from the addiction to IP is not attempted. Although recognizing key factors that are significant in recovery from IP is imperative, understanding the addictive cycle and utilizing a structured program such as the 12-step Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) is also essential (Carnes, 2001; Plant & Plant, 2003).

Carnes (2001) states that individuals addicted to sex funnel all of their interactions through a sexual filter and are trapped in a cycle of addiction, which includes:

**Preoccupation.** The trance or mood wherein the addicts' minds are entirely engrossed with thoughts of sex. This mental state creates an obsessive search for sexual stimulation.

**Ritualization.** The addicts' routines that lead to sexual behaviors. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement.

**Compulsive sexual behavior.** The actual sexual act is the end goal of the preoccupation and ritualization. Sexual addicts are unable to control or stop this behavior.

**Despair.** The feeling of hopelessness addicts have about their behavior and their powerlessness (pp. 19-20).

When an individual enters the despair phase of addiction, severe psychological distress occurs. According to researchers, despair leaves some individuals with feelings of shame, hatred towards themselves, and thoughts of suicide (Carnes, 2001; Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000). The psychological distress of hopelessness often leads individuals to seek treatment, which usually entails gaining an understanding of the stages of recovery (Carnes, 2001).

Carnes (2000) identifies six stages of recovery. Knowing these stages can help addicts and their supporters understand how change can occur. The six stages include: developing, crisis, shock, grief, repair and growth.

In the developing stage, the sexual addict admits that viewing pornography is problematic and that action has to be taken to rectify the addiction. The second stage of recovery is crisis. In this stage, the addict becomes committed to and works towards changing addictive behaviors. In the third stage which is shock, the addict starts to experience feelings of hopelessness about life. In order to help the addict focus treatment it is necessary to keep treatment basic. The fourth stage of recovery is grief. In this stage addicts began to feel the pain of what has been lost because of the addiction. When individuals in this phase become fully aware of their losses, they usually experience internal struggles as they seek ways to regain control of their lives.

The fifth stage of recovery is repair. This stage occurs when addicts survive the tough stage of grief. In this phase the addict looks within, acknowledges deficits and start living life differently. During this stage the addicts will become more responsible, accountable and set realistic goals for themselves. The final phase of recovery is the growing stage. In this stage, addicts understand how to set boundaries, become more self-aware and confident about themselves. This phase is very positive and old relationship renewed. (Carnes, 2000 pp. 8-9).



As individuals addicted to IP progress through the stages of recovery, the strong desire to participate in a structured program such as the twelve steps of SAA usually develops and the commitment to remain in the program is forthcoming (Carnes, 2001). The 12-steps of SAA is a program that has been proven to help individuals recover from IP.

In summary, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be highly stressful, and many individuals find themselves continually seeking to escape from the pressures of life. While the easy access to the Internet provides a quick escape for individuals wishing to de-stress, it has also become a tool that can lead to IP addiction. Addiction to IP can be devastating, and individuals who are trapped by this compulsion often seek recovery. Hall (2019) states that, although some individuals self-treat IP addiction, studies have shown that most sustained recovery takes place within a structured program. Although substantial evidence indicates that the 12-steps of SAA, accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) are anchoring agents that help individuals successfully recover from IP, the literature does not state how these factors have been specifically utilized simultaneously to facilitate recovery.

### **Situation to Self**

As a licensed mental health professional supervisor and licensed clergy member in the region where the research will occur, I have participated in scheduled meetings with sexual addiction therapists, mental health professionals, clergy, and other clinicians seeking to help individuals addicted to pornography. Over the last decade, and more recently in the last five years, I have personally felt compelled to gain a deeper understanding regarding this population and to build a nonjudgmental knowledge base to help those struggling with pornography addiction. As a member of the clergy, I know firsthand how quickly individuals are often judged harshly for succumbing to various addictions such as pornography. I have also looked into the

eyes of individuals who feel utterly hopeless regarding their recovery. Thus, I came to the study fully aware of my perspective concerning individuals with addictions to IP and have gained a passion for utilizing my professional skills to help those in this population recover from this life stressor.

Additionally, as a skilled clinician and member of the clergy, I have observed aggressive efforts to search for knowledge and effective treatment for recovery from IP. For these reasons, I have been motivated to conduct this qualitative study to understand and learn more about the involvement and lived experiences of individuals who have recovered from IP addiction. I believe that gaining an understanding of the critical factors that have contributed to the successful recovery of IP can be beneficial to clinicians and those seeking to begin an IP recovery program. I examined the use of the transcendental phenomenological viewpoint, which, according to Creswell and Poth (2017) provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and is centered on the description of the lived experiences of individuals.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of this study will be the perceptions of lived experiences by men who have self-identified as completing a recovery program from IP. While there is an enormous amount of literature regarding the effects of viewing IP, there is a scarcity of studies that focus on the impact that accountability, spirituality, hope, and a structured program have on recovery from IP (DuPont & McGovern, 1994; Efrati & Gola, 2018; McCarthy, 2002; Milrad, 1999; Twohig & Crosby, 2010). Gaining information regarding factors that are linked to recovery from IP addiction would be beneficial in helping clinicians develop effective treatment programs and raise awareness to individuals who are seeking recovery avenues to address IP addiction (Carnes, 2001).

## Purpose Statement

IP is a world epidemic and many addicts desire to break free from this addiction (Twohig & Crosby, 2010). Within the past decade, researchers have concluded that IP is costing the world billions of dollars and creating problems with meaningful relationships (Doran & Price, 2014; Ropelato, 2006). Unfortunately, adult men have been most impacted by IP, and religious men are the ones that usually perceive themselves as addicted (Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, & Mathy, 2004). Thus, due to the severe impact of viewing IP and the scarcity of research regarding recovery from IP addiction, it is noteworthy to conduct studies that focus on factors that help individuals recover from IP (Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, & Mathy, 2004; Dominguez, Ferrell, & Kweel, 2007). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of ASH on men who have recovered from IP addiction. This study will seek to understand the lived experiences of men in Central Louisiana who have completed a recovery treatment program for IP addiction.

At this point in the research, IP will be defined as utilizing the Internet or other digital technologies to intentionally view sexually explicit material (Sniewski, Farvid, & Carter, 2017). The theory and recovery model guiding this study are Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT), as it emphasizes that behaviors are learned based on observation, and Carnes's (2001) 12-step Model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA). Since there is currently little research that gives attention to recovery and discussing the lived experiences of individuals suffering from IP addiction, this new knowledge may improve recovery interventions and treatment efforts and reduce or prevent IP addiction.

### **Significance of the Study**

Sufficient research has not yet been produced in the study of IP addiction that specifically highlights the elements of ASH as significant components of the recovery process. Therapists who assist this population of clients need treatment protocols that are effective in addressing IP addiction. While there has been an immense amount of literature that discusses the negative impact of IP, there are still gaps in the research regarding factors of recovery from IP addiction.

Information provided in this research will be obtained from the lived experiences of those who have completed recovery programs from IP. The knowledge gained from the present study will add to the current literature on recovery from IP addiction. Secondly, the knowledge obtained can lead to further research in the area of recovery and be useful in helping clinicians develop an effective treatment for individuals that are at-risk for becoming or are currently battling IP addiction. This research is necessary because it will bridge the gap and provide crucial information obtained from the lived experiences of those who have recovered from IP addiction.

### **Research Questions**

In order to conceptualize the problem and purpose of the study, various research questions will be presented. The four questions posed will be used to explore how ASH helps individuals who were addicted to IP in the success of their recovery. Conclusively, one question seeks to find information regarding the impact of a structured program on the successful recovery from addiction to pornography.

**RQ 1:** In what ways has accountability impacted the recovery from Internet pornography?

**RQ2:** How has the engagement in spirituality impacted the recovery from Internet pornography?

**RQ3:** In what ways has hope impacted recovery from Internet pornography?

**RQ 4:** In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sex Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography?

### **Definitions**

The following terms and their explanations are provided to give clarity to their use in the study.

1. *Accountability*-Building a supportive relationship through agreed-upon commitment and decisions made jointly (Kruk & Banga, 2011).
2. *Addiction*-An advanced-stage chronic disease; a stage at which an individual is no longer in control of his life (Efrati & Gola, 2018).
3. *Hope*-Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about (Selvam, 2015).
4. *Internet pornography*-The online viewing or downloading of pictures and videos with clearly exposed genitals in which people are having sex (Sniewski et al., 2018).
5. *Internet pornography addiction*-Problematic pornography consumption that leads to and/or produces compulsive viewing, downloading, and trading online of pornography, or engaging in adult fantasy role-play which is associated with interpersonal isolation, response to low mood or stress, relational problems and another significant negative interpersonal, vocational, or personal consequences for the user (Cacioppo, Gori, Schimmenti, Baiocco, Laghi, & Caretti, 2018; Sniewski et al., 2018).
6. *Pornography*-“Writing about, or displaying in some medium such as television, videos,

literature on the Internet, nudity or sexual activity that excites sexual feelings."

(Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Laaser & Gregorie, 2003).

7. *Recovery*-The experience a process and sustained status through which individuals, impacted by IP utilize internal and external resources to resolve their problems voluntarily, actively manage their continued vulnerability to such problems, and develop healthy, productive, and meaningful lives (White, 2007).
8. *Sexual addiction*-Behaviors that produce gratification and provide an escape from discomforts (Goodman, 1992). A set of maladaptive behaviors that are uncontrollable, that bring negative consequences upon the addicted individual, and that harmfully affect those involved with the addicted individual (Hagedorn & Juhnke, 2005).
9. *Spirituality*-Transcendence concerning both of self and a higher being, a sense of communion or connection, faith or beliefs, and hope with a higher power (Siddall, Lovell, & MacLeod, 2015).

### **Summary**

Sexual addictions are controlling, and IP has entrapped many individuals. Researchers have attested that the invention of the Internet has been a substantial factor in contributing to addiction due to its anonymity and accessibility (Bouton, 2008). Studies have also shown that among those entrapped by IP, men are more addicted than women (Dominguez et al, 2007). Some researchers have noted that damaging psychological and problematic behavior issues occur due to IP, and often individuals feel hopeless and helpless when they are bound by this addiction (Carnes, 1983; Casado & Montejo, 2019).

For this reason, many seek pathways to recovery to change their addictive behaviors and take full control of their lives. The research that was reviewed consists of information regarding

the necessity of a structured program for sexual addiction (Carnes, 2001). The reviewed literature also includes detailed information regarding the 12-steps program to recover from sexual addictions and how accountability, spirituality, and hope are significant in recovery. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of ASH on the recovery of men who are currently addicted to IP. Although the research indicates that these factors are important in recovery, it does not explain how these factors are utilized simultaneously to promote and sustain recovery. Thus, the goals of this study are to gain insight from lived experiences of how each of these critical factors contribute to recovery, to provide additional knowledge to clinicians and individuals in the helping profession, to promote awareness, and to develop an effective treatment for individuals who are addicted to IP.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Overview**

Sexual addiction is a severe epidemic and has been compared to gambling and substance addictions (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2017; Yau & Potenza, 2015). Blum, Badgaiyan, and Gold (2015) note that pornography is similar to substance abuse in that participants find themselves craving this activity despite harmful consequences. Research has shown that 87% of people addicted to sex also have other addictions as well (Carnes, 1983). Also, other studies have revealed that problematic computer use is a growing social problem and that addiction to IP is corrupting lives by causing neurological deficits, psychological instability, and social challenges (Cash, Rae, Steel, & Winkler, 2012). Understanding recovery paths from IP is a challenge for clinicians in the helping professions who are seeking ways to assist this population.

The review of the literature explores sexual addiction, which includes an explanation of the difference between sex and sexual addiction. Second, an overview of pornography and IP are examined. Next, the psychological and behavioral aspects of pornography are explored. The review then examines the impact the use of IP has on adult males. Following this section, the review explores significant adverse effects of viewing IP, which include personal and social relationships. The review then transitions to discuss recovery, which entails the pathway to recovery and factors that impact recovery. The review concludes by exploring how the factors of ASH affect the recovery outcome of men addicted to IP.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this transcendental qualitative phenomenological study focuses on the lived experiences and feelings of individuals who have completed a recovery program for IP addiction. Seeing recovery from a lived experience perspective gives researchers



a more in-depth understanding of the meaning of addictions and provides insight into what works and what does not work in recovery. Furthermore, this theoretical framework is based on a paradigm of personal knowledge of the individual's perception and will aid in the understanding of sex addicted individuals' motivations and actions without presupposing knowledge of the lived experiences (Converse, 2012; Englander, 2016; Lester, 1999).

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of IP has become addictive for many individuals (Sniewski, Farvid, & Carter, 2017). Practical ways to assist these individuals to understand their behaviors and gain recovery is paramount. There will be two theories that will be used in this study to formulate the theoretical framework. The foundation of this research will be formed by the theoretical framework and will be used to support the findings of this research. The two theories that will be discussed are Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SLCT) and the 12-step Model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) which has been adopted by permission from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

**Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT).** Albert Bandura, in 1977, developed his social learning theory in which he described that behavior is learned in the environment through the process of observational learning. In 1986, he revised his theory and renamed it social cognitive learning theory (SCLT) to formulate a better description of how a person learns from observations and social experiences (Smith, 2014). There are four interrelated processes proposed by Bandura in this theory which drive individuals to imitate a behavior or not.

According to Smith (2014), these four processes are attentional, retention, reproduction, and motivational. In the attentional process of viewing IP, attention is grabbed by what is seen on screen with the intention of not just observing but to receive some form of physical gratification from what is being observed. From this inception, the subsequent processes of

retention, reproduction, and motivation are gained and maintained due to IP viewers being successful in the attentional process. For example, when IP viewers attend to images, pictures, and videos on the screen, they retain or form a memory of what they have viewed and enjoy the positive reinforcement of feeling gratification during and after viewing the pornography; this reinforcement in turn produces addiction to IP (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Love, Laier, Brand, Hatch, & Hajela, 2015). Interestingly, in the same manner in which addictions are formed, recovery is obtained.

In the attentional process of recovery, the individual's attention is grabbed by the recognition of being powerless to stop viewing IP, possessing a desire to change, and observing positive behaviors of individuals who have recovered from IP (Bell, Montoya, Richard, & Dayton, 1998; Smith, 2014). From this awakening, individuals retain in their productive memory behaviors observed in recovered individuals and initiate reproduction of these behaviors (DiClemente, 2018; Smith, 2014). Reproduction of the observed behaviors elicits the feeling of power, which in turn motivates individuals to complete recovery (Smith, 2014).

**12-step Model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA).** The 12-step recovery program for sexual addicts has been in existence for decades and has appealed to millions as a solution to recovery from addiction (Carnes, 2001; Spiegel & Fewell, 2004). Carnes, a pioneer in research for sexual addiction, was first introduced to the 12-step program through his employment, assisting clients with substance addictions. Carnes noted that the 12-step program for AA was a proven path to recovery and affirmed that these steps could also be used as a model for recovery from sexual addiction (Carnes, 2001). In 1983, Carnes authored a book entitled *Out of the Shadows*, and in this definitive text he discussed gaining permission from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc. (AAWS) to modify their 12-step model to address recovery

from sexual addictions (Carnes, 2001). The 12-step model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) is a structured program that has proven to be effective and has become a gold standard for recovery from sexual addictions (Borkman, 2008; Carnes, 2001).

Sexual addiction is powerful and controlling and most individuals require a structured program to assist with recovery (Berridge, 2017; Carnes, 2001; Carnes, Murray, & Charpentier, 2005; Duffy, Dawson, & Das Nair, 2016; Efrati & Gola, 2018; Sniewski et al., 2018; Young, 2011; Young 2007). Carnes identified six stages of recovery and indicated that sexually addicted individuals usually seek a 12-step program in the first stage of recovery (Carnes, 2001). In summation, recent studies emphasized that, although sexual addiction as a mental health problem is gaining acceptance, the need for individualization in treatment that is supplemented by group work should be present in the goals and objectives outlined in the treatment plan to holistically treat the specific symptoms and promote recovery (Buhrman, Syk, Burvall, Hartig, Gordh, & Andersson, 2015; Center, Summit, Summit, Congress, Care, Care, & Care, 2016; Chen, 2010; Coleman, Dickenson, Girard, Rider, Candelario-Pérez, Becker-Warner, & Munns, 2018; Courtois & Weiss, 2017; Des Roches, Balachandran, Ascenso, Tripodis, & Kiran, 2015).

The lense through which this study will be measured is the theoretical framework of the 12-step Model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), which includes the following steps:

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior; that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power higher than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives (SAA, n.d.).

The SAA 12-step program points out many measures of recovery and uses the twofold model of disease and spirituality to treat individuals with sexual addictions (Efrati & Gola, 2018). The SAA 12-step program offers participants a set of healthy guidelines which includes the accountability element of taking personal inventory, a spiritual factor which claims the sexual addict's need to depend on a higher power to help him/her restrain from sexually addictive behaviors, and the hope element of believing that a Power higher than themselves can facilitate recovery (DuPont & McGovern, 1994; Efrati & Gola, 2018).

### **Related Literature**

Due to the increase in IP addiction and also an increase in individuals seeking recovery, factors in recovery such as accountability, spirituality, and hope are worthy of investigating (Cooper, 2002; DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015; Doran & Price, 2014; Pittaro, 2017; Ropelato, 2006; Twohig & Crosby, 2010). Also, the use of a structured program such as the 12-steps in Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) should be explored as a tool in completing recovery. The absence of effective treatment strategies has the potential to negatively impact recovery from IP; thus, clinicians should have a clear understanding of the factors detrimental to recovery (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Twohig & Crosby, 2009). A review of the literature indicated that relevant factors of accountability, spirituality, and hope are indispensable in recovery and that a structured program promotes confidence, ignites change, and helps individuals sustain recovery (MacLeod, 2015; White, 2000; Zitman & Butler, 2005). However, it is virtually impossible to understand sexual addiction without having a basic understanding of the aspect of sex.

**Sexual Addiction.** Sex is a natural aspect of human life. According to Sharp (2003), sex is complicated to understand or describe, and the emotional elements that encompass the desire for sex are incomprehensible. Halperin (1989) stated that sex in itself has no history but is a natural part of the function of the body. In the King James Version of the Bible, Genesis revealed that sex was established as a natural part of life, and humanity was given the commandment by God to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth (Genesis, 1:28, KJV).

However, in contrast to sex, according to Karila, Wéry, Weinstein, Cottencin, Petit, Reynaud, & Billieux (2014), sexual addiction is not natural but is an out of control sexual behavior that drives individuals to become preoccupied and obsessed with sex or sexual activity. In recent years, researchers have indicated that sexual addiction has similar features to substance

addictions and has been characterized by individuals experiencing abnormal sexual urges, fantasies, and behaviors that are recurrent and intense, often interfering with life's daily functioning (Grubbs, Sessoms, Wheeler, & Volk, 2017; Karila, Wéry, Weinstein, Cottencin, Petit, Reynaud, & Billieux, 2014; Jokinen, Boström, Chatzittofis, Ciuculete, Öberg, Flanagan, & Schiöth, 2017). Sexual addictions are controlling, and frequently, individuals who are addicted to sex view pornography (Laier, Pawlikowski, Pekal, Schulte, & Brand, 2013).

### **Overview of Pornography**

Pornography is not a new word in the English language, and neither is it a new practice in American society. The word "pornography" first appeared defined in the English language in the Oxford Cambridge Dictionary in 1857 (Hunt, 1993). At that time pornography was associated with conflict and change and aligned with immorality and the need to protect society (Hunt, 1993).

The modern meaning of pornography has its roots in the re-discovery of Pompeii in the mid-eighteenth century (Campbell & Kohut, 2017). Currently, pornography is widely used, produced, and distributed in the United States and around the world (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). Studies have shown that pornography, which entails writing about or displaying nudity (in some form of media such as television, videos, or literature) to excite sexual feelings, has been around for centuries and that sexual imagery is nearly as old as symbolic representation (Campbell, & Kohut, 2017; Hunt, 1993; Laaser, 2003). Other researchers have attested that pornography emerged as a distinct category due to the spread of print culture and that its sole objective is to heighten sexual pleasure or arousal (Kraus & Rosenberg, 2014; McNair, 2014). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, pornography has been given a new set of wings to use in flight. The invention of the Internet has taken pornography above and beyond its previous avenues of distribution.

**Internet pornography.** Internet pornography is easily accessible and has made an enormous impact on our world because it has given pornography a platform on which to perform (Perry & Schleifer, 2019; Sniewski et al., 2017). Because of the Internet, the extent and distribution of pornography are prevalent. At any moment of the day, anyone can access pornography with just one click on the computer keyboard. Presently, pornography can be accessed at any time on a daily basis all around the world (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). The Internet is unique, and it offers both free and paid access to millions of pornographic sites. Although most pornography site servers are stationed abroad, the United States has risen to become the leading exporter (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2015). Many researchers have stated that accessibility, affordability, and anonymity have been the key factors that have ballooned the use of IP (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Hassan, Ayub, Hawafi, & Ghoroghi, 2017; Sahni & Swasti, 2018; Wéry & Billieux, 2016).

Manning (2006) states that the Internet is the catalyst that individuals are using to access pornography easily and that, with one click on the device, viewers can have their sexual desires and cravings immediately satisfied. Currently, if preferred, individuals can view pornography from various media devices such as smartphones, notebooks, tablets, laptops, and personal computers. Statistically, men tend to view pornography three times more than women (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). Looking at IP, researchers have shown that it has become a way for individuals to escape from reality, deal with stress, and find support in managing sexual problems (Cooper, 2002; DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). Bridges & Morokoff (2011) state that women are significantly less likely to view pornography than men and, when women do view pornography, it is usually purchased by a partner and viewed with a partner. However, some women also become addicted to IP and desire recovery. Unfortunately, many individuals who

are addicted to IP feel psychologically drained, with no hope of sustained recovery. The following section will discuss the research on the psychological aspect of pornography.

**Psychological aspects.** Understanding the psychological aspects of IP and how it affects viewers of pornography is crucial in today's society. Many IP viewers have reported marked symptoms of depression and anxiety because of IP use. Some researchers have noted that pornography viewers experience depression, fear, and guilt due to religious conflicts and inner struggles regarding committing unforgivable sins (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000).

Researcher Patrick Carnes states that sexual addicts experience isolation stages where they detach themselves and withdraw from social interactions with friends, family, and other close relations (Carnes, 2001). Exline et al. (2000) argues that, due to a large percentage of people viewing pornography alone, pornography viewers often severely isolate themselves from others which can, in turn, lead them into clinical depression. The Bible says that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). Thus, if individuals have negative evaluations of themselves because of pornography viewing, whether addiction is present or not, the very perception of the use and thoughts of addiction can cause psychological distress (Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014).

Since the invention of the Internet, employers have also reported psychological distress among employees who view pornography and have documented that often these individuals procrastinate completing their work and habitually spend time on the clock secretly watching pornography on their devices or work computers (Schneider, Weiss, & Samenow, 2012). It is noteworthy to include that, while the psychological consequences of IP may not be obvious, they can be grave. The next section will cover the behavioral aspects of pornography.



**Behavioral aspects.** With the invention of the Internet, pornography viewing has become more normalized in modern society (Chowdhury, 2018). Research has shown that among behavioral addictions, IP has frequently been cited as a possible risk factor for sexual dysfunction (Mollaioli et al. 2018). According to recent studies, the word porn has been the most searched keyword for the past few years, and, in the United States 79% of males and 76% of females over the age of eighteen admitted to viewing IP (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). These researchers further state that over 57% of those viewing pornography view pornography weekly, and viewing IP has triggered many of these people to behave aggressively (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). Among those viewing pornography, research has shown that men view pornography more often than women (Dominguez, Ferrell, & Kwee, 2007).

**Internet pornography and adult males.** A review of the literature affirms that more men struggle with the use of IP than women, and males are three times more likely to be addicted to IP than females (Ross, Mansson, & Daneback, 2012). Research suggests that addicted males are drawn to the screen daily to receive their fix and view sexually explicit images online (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015; Dominguez et al., 2007). Studies have also shown that 70% of men find viewing pornography acceptable, and they report that the thorough satisfaction they receive when viewing pornography keeps them repeatedly returning to pornographic websites (Olmstead, Blick, & Mills III, 2013). Studies have indicated that, although some of these men are married or involved in a relationship with someone, the drive to engage in IP is stronger than the drive to be committed to their relationship (Laaser & Gregoire, 2003).

However, some of these adult males are ashamed of their behavior, and some of them are God-fearing men who are leaders with strong Christian values (Laaser, & Gregoire, 2003; Reid,

Harper, & Anderson, 2009). For God-fearing Christian men, viewing pornography is even more devastating because it is at odds with their beliefs that are rooted in the teachings outlined in the Bible (Laaser & Gregoire, 2003). These individuals are well aware of the biblical principles of marriage and abstinence and the commandment by God to set no wicked thing before their eyes (Psalm 101:3). When spiritual men are unable to resist pornography, they find themselves with inner struggles (Laaser & Gregoire, 2003), wanting to do good but finding evil present with them (Romans 7:21, KJV). The struggle to overcome IP addiction is real, and there are various adverse effects of this phenomenon.

### **Negative Effects of Internet Pornography**

While there have been some studies that report either positive effects of viewing pornography or no proven effects at all, the majority of the literature indicates that there are devastating effects and many negative consequences that IP addiction has on individuals (Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Doran & Price 2014). Furthermore, Mckee (2007) reports that significant adverse effects of viewing pornography might include men viewing women in a negative light. Mckee (2007) also states that viewing IP could cause increased unrealistic sexual expectations, trigger relationship problems, cause loss of interest in sex, and possibly lead to addiction. In addition to these negative effects of IP, there are specific personal negative effects that are associated with viewing IP.

### **Personal Negative Effects**

Manning (2006) states that the Internet is the catalyst that individuals are using to access pornography easily and that, with one click on the device screen, viewers can have their sexual desires and craving immediately satisfied. Currently, individuals can view pornography from various devices such as "smartphones, notebooks, tablets, laptops, and personal computers"

(DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015, p. 6). Unfortunately, countless individuals who view IP become addicted and feel entrapped with no hope of sustained recovery, yet they desire to be free from the bondage of this addiction. It is imperative that these individuals, who desire help, receive it and experience sustained recovery.

Research has indicated that a noticeable strong personal negative effect of viewing IP is the feeling of guilt, which in some cases may increase the likelihood of individuals perceiving themselves as addicted (Patterson & Price, 2012). Although Leonhardt et al. (2017) argues in their study that IP viewing has a minimal indirect effect on anxiety, other studies indicate that not only is there a definite correlation between IP viewing and anxiety but symptoms of depression are associated with viewing pornography as well (Brand, Laier, Pawlikowski, Schächtle, Schöler, & Altstötter-Gleich, 2011; Young, 2004).

Another personal negative effect of viewing pornography has been the experience of shame. According to Trumbull (2003), shame is defined as a severe stress response to an unacceptable examination of oneself based on another's perspective. The feeling of shame in man is an innate mechanism and usually occurs when unacceptable behaviors are present. Dhuffar and Griffiths (2014) state that shame disrupts the natural functioning of the self, and sexual addiction generates a short-term fix of pleasure but is accompanied by elevated levels of shame. Furthermore, Gillian et al. (2011) attest that guilt and shame are significantly reported by participants seeking treatment for compulsive pornography.

Similarly, Reid, Harper, and Anderson (2009) argue that compulsive pornography users tend to withdraw from others and mentally attack themselves due to their secret shame. Recent studies conducted by Chisholm (2015) also highlight that there are high levels of shame that occur with individuals who view IP, and shame often leads to a feeling of hopelessness with

regard to change (Chisholm, 2015). The personal negative effects of viewing IP are devastating, and, unfortunately, there are also negative social and relational effects.

### **Social Negative Effects**

The social impact of pornography is breathtaking. Today it seems as though pornography has touched every home, every family, every employment, and every church. Around the world, it is staggering, “that a large number of individuals, literally millions, have become affected by pornography” (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015, p. 4). Usage of IP is global, and has found a home in secular arenas as well as religious arenas. Unexpectedly, many churches have reported an increase in the number of laities, leaders, and clergy who have fallen prey to viewing pornography. Researchers have explained that the reason why IP viewing among religious individuals is so shocking is that it is unexpected and unaccepted and because Christians are taught to live a set-apart life for others to follow (King, 2003; Sumerau & Cragun, 2015).

In America, religion is a social aspect of life which affects family and other relationship connections (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham, Beach, 2010; Lambert & Dollihite, 2006; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Willfinger & Wilcox, 2008). According to Grubbs, Exline, Pargament, Hook, & Carlisle (2015) and Leonhardt, Willoughby, & Young-Petersen (2015), individuals who view IP are more likely to view themselves as addicted and have strained social interactions with church members and their leaders. Also, some studies argue that evangelicals who view IP often isolate themselves, experience a feeling of guilt from viewing, and report a decrease in church attendance (Perry, 2016; Thomas, 2016; van Prooijen & van Lange, 2016). In addition to these negative effects on American churches, the viewing of IP has also been linked to increased crime incidents in society (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015).

Research has shown that the viewing of IP has been directly related to an increase in violence and a decrease in safety for women in the world (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015; Romito & Beltramini, 2011). According to DeKeserdy and Corsiano (2015), “men are more likely to become aggressive and violent after viewing IP” (p. 57). Furthermore, although violence is sometimes under-reported, Romito and Beltramini (2011) state that there are multiple correlations between viewing IP and violence, and there are strong associations between exposure to violent pornography and men’s attitudes about rape and aggressive behavior. Paralleled to the negative social impact of violence that occurs after viewing IP, there is an untold amount of funds that society is spending on IP.

Socially, some individuals are spending more time viewing pornography than doing any other activity, and the monetary resources that are spent on pornography are an economic waste to society. Researchers have concluded that the astronomical revenues that are received from pornography are higher than the profits of many other large businesses combined (DeKeserdy & Corsiano, 2015). According to Ropelato (2006), every second of the day \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography, 28,258 internet users are viewing pornography, and 372 internet users are typing adult search terms into search engines. Statistics further reveal that every 39 minutes a pornographic video is created, and this wide-spread creation and usage generates worldwide pornography revenues of over 97 billion dollars in the year 2006, which place the revenues of this industry above Microsoft, Google, Amazon eBay, Yahoo, Apple, and Netflix combined (Ropelato, 2006). Also, Blum, Badgaiyan, and Gold (2015) note in their research that pornography is similar to substance abuse and participants find themselves craving this activity despite harmful consequences. Other studies have shown that problematic computer use is a

social issue that is increasing, and addiction to IP is corrupting lives by causing neurological deficits as well as psychological, relational, and social disturbances (Cash et al., 2012).

### **Relationship Negative Effects**

Recently, there have been many studies that have examined how viewing pornography could affect relationships. Doran and Price (2014) surveyed 20,000 individuals to study the impact viewing pornography had on marriages and committed relationships. This study reveals that viewing pornography interferes with the frequency of sex and the depth of happiness in marriage, and it causes negative relationship interactions among couples. Additionally, Doran and Price (2014) state that married individuals who view pornography are more likely to get divorced and have an extramarital affair. Relationally, couples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not fear physical infidelity alone but also cyber infidelity (Zitzman & Butler, 2005). Smith (2011) further reports that even when there is no in-person or physical contact, cyber affairs can trigger feelings of jealousy, frustration, and insecurity in committed relationships. Sadly, for some, IP has so adversely affected their physical desire for intimacy that addicted viewers are starting to seek isolation and lose the natural desire for normal couple sexual intercourse (Berner & Bridges, 2002). Zitzman and Butler (2005) report that pornography disrupts intimacy and dislodges the attachment between spouses, which is supposed to be the most reliable attachment of any relationship. Schneider et al. (2012) indicates that IP significantly impacts relationships and states that 71% of partners affected by cybersex have no trust in their mate and have no hope of recovery for their relationship.

### **Recovery from Internet Pornography**

Often individuals who are entrapped by IP addiction desire to be set free. However, the shame that is often associated with IP drives viewers into increased individualism and isolation,

which can hinder recovery (Dhuffar & Griffiths, 2014). Price-Robertson, Obradovic & Morgan (2017) argue that, although recovery is personal, it is also relational. Also, Dumitrescu (2018) states that in a few instances some individuals might achieve a recovery on their own, but overall many seeking recovery require specialized help from family, church, a therapist, or support groups. Price-Robertson et al. (2017) further states that since recovery is relational, it occurs within a social context and that it is through social relationships that the individual can redefine himself as a person as opposed to an addict. One of the first steps in recovery is to believe that there is hope. Then individuals must take the next step and seek help for their addiction.

### **Pathway to Recovery**

Many clinicians in the helping profession have zeroed in on the negative impact that IP is having on society (Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Ross, Mansson, & Daneback, 2012; Sniewski et al., 2017). Numerous IP viewers have become addicted to IP and are currently living debilitating lives. The road to recovery is not always easy. Individuals desiring to change and break free from IP addiction must have a made-up mind to come out and stay out.

Studies have shown that a treatment regimen that has been documented to help individuals in the process of recovery is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) which is an experiential approach to behavioral change developed by Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson (2004). According to research, this type of therapy is the first of its kind and has shown to help individuals successfully recover from IP (Twohig & Crosby, 2009). This intervention is unique because it focuses on strategic interventions and strategies to reduce pornography viewing, and it employs a measure of follow up to ensure sustained recovery (Twohig & Crosby, 2009). Twohig and Crosby (2016) affirm that clients in therapy usually show a 92% reduction in viewing pornography at post-treatment and an 86% reduction at three-month follow up.

Additionally, another distinct element about this therapeutic approach is that it is in alignment with Carnes's 12-step model of SAA. Twohig and Crosby (2010) state that the ACT focuses on recognizing areas in life that are important, moving, and working towards a better life and committing to the process of change. This recognition and commitment are the essence of what Carnes stated as necessary factors in recovery. These factors also include establishing roots of accountability in a caring community and finding support from others to help integrate a changed life (Carnes, 2001).

### **Factors that Impact Recovery**

Certain factors are instrumental in helping in recovery from IP, and some factors hinder recovery from IP. Research has shown that a significant factor that is helpful in successful recovery is mindfulness, which takes place when a person is aware and focuses on the present while simultaneously acknowledging and accepting what took place in the past (Sniewski et al. 2018). According to Carnes (2001), a critical factor that impacts recovery is for the addict to be mindful of the present, acknowledge the addictive sexual cycle and their need for help, commit to sobriety, and commit to a structured program such as the 12-steps outlined in the recovery for SAA.

### **Accountability, Hope, and Spirituality (ASH) in Recovery from Internet Pornography**

In recovery from IP as well as other addictions, there are vital factors that are necessary to be successful. Throughout the literature, it was noted by many researchers that accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) are each individually vital to recovery. Additionally, the literature discusses the importance of being enrolled in a structured program such as the 12-steps of SAA. The next sections will discuss a detailed description of the impact of ASH on recovery and



conclude with a discussion of ASH being a three-fold strand that can be used as a powerful tool in recovery from IP.

**The impact of accountability.** Accountability is a necessary factor that must be present in recovery. IP addiction is primarily a secretive addiction that causes individuals to live a life of deceit, isolation, and lack of commitment (Carnes, 2001). Research has shown that accountability helps a person recover by encouraging communication and support. Thus, setting up accountability resources throughout the recovery process will help individuals gain confidence and make a greater commitment with their natural support system (Hurtz, 2018; Zitman & Butler, 2005).

**The impact of spirituality.** Carnes (2001) indicates that his 12-step model for SAA is to acknowledge helplessness without the aid of spiritual power. Two of the critical factors that have been beneficial in helping individuals cope with life are spirituality and religion. It should be noted that religion and spirituality are not the same. In America, these two terms (religion and spirituality) have been thought of as interchangeable, but the truth of the matter is that they are distinctly different. Worthington et al. (2011) defines religion as an adherence to a particular belief system, and, in contrast, they define spirituality as a feeling of closeness and connectedness to a sacred being. In other words, religion is just following rules, and spirituality is relational and deals with closeness and affection toward a sacred being. Both religion and spirituality have a unique way of helping individuals manage their lives and overcome difficult circumstances (Worthington et al., 2011). It is also interesting to note that prayer, which is a powerful element of religion and spirituality, has shown to be a positive influence in recovery, and it promotes communication in relationships and influences vital dimensions of life, including physical health and longevity, forgiveness, mental health, and happiness (Lambert et al., 2010;

Lambert & Dollihite, 2006; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Perry (2017) concludes that frequent engagement in religious activities might decrease pornography viewing, and Carnes (2001) argues that spirituality plays a significant part in recovery and that a close relationship with God is vital to a successful recovery. Although spirituality is vital, it requires the assistance of hope to make it more potent in recovery.

**The impact of hope.** “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is the crown of life” (Proverbs 13:12). Without hope, we cannot make it in the world. One of the main reasons people enter counseling is because of the feeling of hopelessness in their addiction, which adds to the “pain and shame” (Carnes, 2001, p.5). In the recovery phase, the installation of hope is paramount. Hope is the substance that leads us to faith, and without faith, recovery will never take place (Hebrews 11:1). White (2000) states that hope-inspired interventions help individuals leap into recovery to encourage change and promote individual confidence in the recovery.

### **The Three-Stranded Cord of Accountability, Spirituality, and Hope (ASH)**

“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor [...]. Moreover, if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4: 9, 12). Accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) are powerful tools within themselves, but when placed together, they are an unstoppable team in the face of addiction. When individuals who are addicted to pornography possess each of these recovery factors, they are destined for recovery. Researchers have adamantly argued that clinicians cannot ignore spirituality because the patients state that spirituality plays a crucial role in their recovery (Grodzicki & Galanter, 2006). Also, personal accountability is indispensable in recovery because it helps patients regain autonomy, trust, and self-confidence. The final

ingredient of the three-fold cord is hope, which is the glue that binds everything together and keeps patients holding on and believing that things are going to get better. When assessing for effective treatment outcomes, clinicians should not overlook these factors which are critical in successful recovery from addiction to IP.

### **Summary**

The Internet as a significant contributor to the promotion of pornography was reviewed in the literature due to the impact of the Internet on sexual addiction (Schneider et al., 2012). The literature also reviewed the SCLT and the 12-step model of SAA as theoretical frameworks for this study. Additionally, the literature presented the differences between sex and sexual addiction and discussed the negative psychological and behavioral effects of addiction to IP which debilitates individuals and necessitates treatment and recovery (Mollaioli, Sansone, Romanelli, & Jannini, 2018; Schneider et al., 2012). Studies have shown that males struggle with pornography more than females and that many problematic personal, social, and relationship issues are associated with addiction to pornography. Thus the review revealed that individuals addicted to pornography often experience feelings of hopelessness, which drives them into further isolation or leads them to seek recovery. Conclusively, the review closes with factors that are significant in successful recovery and the need for clinicians to assess how the combination of accountability, spirituality, and hope are significant in treatment outcomes and recovery from IP. Chapter Three will present the methodology of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

This chapter describes the methodology used for this research study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of ASH on the recovery of men in Central Louisiana who completed an IP addiction recovery program. The phenomenology approach is descriptive and seeks to describe the world from the participant's experiences, and the researcher's role is to accept the experience without adding anything to it or subtracting anything from it (Butler, 2017).

The research questions of the study and factors leading to the participant selection are explained, and the researcher's role is discussed. This chapter also discusses the procedure used in conducting the study, data collection, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations (Englander, 2016).

### **Design**

This study followed a transcendental qualitative phenomenological design. According to a number of studies, qualitative studies allow researchers to collect data and analyze it for themes through studying real-life settings (Creswell, 2017; Creswell, Hanson, Clark-Plano, & Morales, 2007; Smith, 2018; Warner, 2013). Additionally, Koerber and McMichael (2008) state that qualitative studies offer a "window-like" or a "mirror-like" view on the specific situation or phenomenon being studied (p. 462). A qualitative study was appropriate given the purpose of this study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of ASH on men who have completed a recovery program from IP addiction.

Creswell (2017) says that phenomenological studies describe the meaning of a combination of individuals lived experiences of a concept. Furthermore, according to Moustakas

(1994), phenomenological studies help researchers achieve a deeper and more meaningful insight of an experience. Since this study followed a qualitative approach, the researcher used Creswell (2017) as a guide and studied a small number of subjects utilizing semi-structured interviews to “develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (p. 58). Examples include individuals living with grief, illnesses, or pain (Creswell, 2017).

Transcendental phenomenological studies are inspirational, give an understanding of the meaning of participants’ experiences, and have a unique way of answering the “what and how” questions regarding the phenomena (Lucas, Fleming, & Bhosale, 2018; Smith, 2018). A critical element in transcendental phenomenological research is for the researcher to utilize bracketing which helps the researcher refrain from personal biases and opinions. Bracketing, which is also called “epoche,” should take place before any interaction with the participants of the study (Butler, 2016). Bracketing was critical in this study in order to gain the real heart of the experiences of the participants (Butler, 2016). As the researcher, I bracketed my biases and looked at this subject through the eyes of the addict (Butler, 2016).

In this study the phenomenon is recovery from IP. This study explored the experiences of eight men who completed an IP recovery program in the Central Louisiana region. Data were collected by utilizing interviews with the men.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** In what ways has accountability impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography (IP)?

**RQ2:** How has the engagement in spirituality impacted the recovery from Internet pornography (IP)?

**RQ 3:** In what ways has hope impacted recovery from Internet pornography (IP)?

**RQ 4:** In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sexual Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography (IP)?

### **Participants and Setting**

A population in research study is defined as a group in which a researcher is interested to take a sample and generalize findings (Warner, 2013). For this study, the population from which the sample was taken consisted of heterosexual men, 18 years of age and older, who had completed a recovery program from Internet pornography (IP) addiction in the Central Louisiana area. Internet pornography addiction is defined as problematic pornography consumption that leads to and/or produces compulsive viewing, downloading, and trading online of pornography or engaging in adult fantasy role-play which is associated with interpersonal isolation, relational problems and other significant negative interpersonal, vocational, or personal consequences for the user (Cacioppo, Gori, Schimmenti, Baiocco, Laghi, & Caretti, 2018; Sniewski et al., 2018).

The researcher contacted two agencies in the central Louisiana area that assist men in recovery from IP and invited them to participate in the study. The directors consented to participate in the study and agreed to contact and invite participants from their agencies to be a part of the study. According to Koerber and McMichael ((2008) this type of approach is utilizing a non-probability, purposive convenience sample. These researchers further state that purposive convenience sampling allows researchers to select readily available participants who are likely to provide information that will help researchers gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Although using a convenient sample was beneficial to gaining research participants, it restricts generalizability (Koerber & McMichael, 2008).

A total of eight men were selected and utilized for the study. To gain information about lived experiences of the participants, the researcher employed a phenomenological design. In qualitative research, the researcher must have a large enough sample to reach data saturation, which is a point where no new information about the phenomenon is being found by the researcher (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). According to Creswell (2017) an adequate number to interview in phenomenological studies ranges between three to ten participants. According to Fusch and Ness (2015) the minimum number to conduct the qualitative study is five, and it was believed that data saturation would be reached utilizing eight participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The researcher chose three conditions for selecting the eight men whom had completed a recovery program for IP to use for the study. First, the participant had to be at least 18 years of age. Secondly and thirdly, the participant had to be heterosexual and a male. Since heterosexual males 18 years of age and older are the group most impacted by IP, the researcher selected participants with these conditions to increase the likelihood of gaining a deeper insight into and understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Procedures**

The data collection procedures for this transcendental phenomenological qualitative followed the procedures demonstrated by Moustakas (1994) consisting of identifying the phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, selecting the participants, conducting the study, describing the lived experiences, and discussing implications and recommendations (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). In order to identify individuals to participate in the study, the researcher utilized contacts made through community interactions with clergy, counselors, consultants, and therapists who are owners/directors of celebrate recovery agencies/programs (for sexual addictions) in the Central Louisiana area. The researcher

scheduled meetings and met individually with the owners/directors of celebrate recovery programs for sexual addiction and discussed the possibility of conducting a research study with clients who have completed a program for IP addiction. Since the researcher spoke face-to-face with the owners/directors of the agencies, issues of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed and permission was granted.

### **The Researcher's Role**

In this study, as the researcher, I played the role of the human instrument. Merrim & Grenier (2019) state that this is a critical role because the researcher can immediately respond and adapt, and the researcher can expand his or her understanding through verbal and nonverbal communication. A critical element in transcendental phenomenological study is for the researcher to bracket biases and personal opinions. Merrim and Grenier (2019) suggest that the researcher's role is to be aware of their biases and not seek to eliminate them. Conclusively, as the researcher, I recorded noteworthy statements and themes that influenced how the participants in the study experienced the phenomenon, and I bracketed out any additional preconceptions and discussed the structure of the collective experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The relationship the researcher had to participants was one of licensed mental health counselor and member of clergy within the community where the participants received services. I, the researcher, am an ordained minister and serve as a resource in the community providing spiritual and counseling services.

### **Instrumentation**

In research study an instrument is a measure used to gather data (Warner, 2013). The qualitative instrument for this study was an interview protocol developed by the researcher. The researcher interviewed eight men whom have completed a recovery program from IP and asked



them each a total of seven questions within a 30 to 45-minute time period. In Chapter II, the reviews of the literature indicated that accountability, spirituality, and hope each had a significant impact on recovery from IP. A thorough review of the literature led the researcher to develop the interview questions outlined in this research. Most of the questions were designed to be open-ended and follow a semi-structured interview format. By using this format style, the researcher prepared questions to guide the interview with the participants. In addition, when information was unclear or difficult to understand, the researcher used structured probes to gain insight to what the participant was stating while simultaneously staying within the parameters of the research questions to ensure validity.

Qu and Dumay (2011) state that conducting interviews is very prevalent in collecting qualitative data, but it requires “the use of various skills, such as intensive listening, note taking, careful planning, and sufficient preparation.” (p. 239). The researcher also followed Qu and Dumay’s (2011) suggestions on how to maintain the quality of the interview by “maintaining the flow of the interviewee’s story, maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee, and avoiding interviewer bias” (p. 248). In addition the researcher primarily followed the Qu and Dumay (2011) interview format where the interviewees were asked only a “series of pre-established questions”; the researcher read “from a script”, and all interviewees were “asked the same question in the same order,” which helped to increase generalizability (p. 244).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

No data was collected until the researcher gained approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was completed through the online university process. The IRB reviewed the purpose statement, research questions, data method, instruments, and consent forms to ensure the participant's safety and that the study was ethical. Once approval

was obtained from IRB, the researcher conducted recruitment by sending a letter to agencies that provide services for individuals with Internet sexual addiction in Central Louisiana. The letter included an invitation to participate in the study, a detailed explanation regarding the nature of the research, the issues of anonymity and confidentiality, and the researcher contact information should recipients decide to participate in the study. Each participant who met the requirement to participate in the study and volunteered to participate in the study was provided pertinent information regarding the study and the informed consent form. After consents were received and confirmation was made that each participant met the requirements of the sampling frame, a 30-45 minute block of time to interview the participants was scheduled by the researcher. The structured interviews were comprised of three basic demographic questions and seven total questions (four questions had three parts). **Example:** Please share your thoughts and opinions about your own personal accountability and how it impacted your recovery? Was there any particular time that stands out where accountability determined your decision to continue with your recovery? The interviews were conducted over the phone. The researchers recorded the interview and took handwritten notes during the interview. During the interview, the researcher was empathetic and neutral but took notes regarding the interviewee's long periods of silence, tone of voice and emotions. The researcher afterward transcribed the full interview and analyzed the data.

In qualitative studies, the data analysis must be carefully completed in order to identify patterns and common themes among the interviews which help bring meaning to the data (Groenwald, 2004; Moustakas (1994). The common themes help the researcher gain insight regarding factors in recovery from IP.

The participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts from their interview to ensure that the information was correct. After accuracy was confirmed, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo. NVivo is a specialized software program designed to help researchers code and examine data for themes ( Bandara, Furtmueller, Gorbacheva, Miskon, & Beekhuyzen, (2015).

After the data was assessed for common themes, the researcher solicited the help of a doctorate level coding expert to assist with analyzing the data to gain inter-rater reliability. Research has shown that inter-rater reliability which is sometimes called 'investigator triangulation' is the "most extensively used reliability technique in qualitative studies that aims to ensure results are reliable in the sense of being reproducible" (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p.9). Interrater reliability is the measurement of agreement among multiple coders, and it involves the cross examination of themes to ensure the accuracy of what the researcher saw in the data (Barbour, 2011; Garrison, Gleveland-Innes, Koole, & Kappleman, 2006). This process helps reduce researcher bias and increase reliability of data which is the cornerstone of sound research (Barbour, 2011, Garrison et al., 2006). The expert was given the transcripts and lists of themes to establish the frequency themes and compare findings. According to Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen (2013) an agreement of 70% to 94% is acceptable.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

Validity is essential in qualitative research, and the data must not be distorted by the researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity or trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to "appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data" that assesses "whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome" (Leung, 2015, p.325). In this study, the interview questions were written based on the literature review of IP addiction and its recovery. For further validation, the

researcher ensured that the research purpose, research questions, and the interview questions were all in alignment.

Other contributions to the validity of this study were the personal lived experiences of the participants and the study being conducted across various agencies. In addition, engaging multiple methods such as audio recording each interview and bracketing myself during the transcription of the interview added to the trustworthiness of this study (Groenwald, 2004). Moreover, to enhance rigor and trustworthiness, it is very important for researchers to have time with the data (Krefting, 1991). For this reason the researcher recorded and transcribed each interview and gave each interviewee the opportunity to review their transcript and check for accuracy. Finally, by comparing and triangulating the data, the researcher further strengthened validation by conducting the study with eight different men, on different days, at different times, and “return[ed] to the recording[s] to ensure that the essence of [each] interview had been correctly captured and [made] any necessary modification[s]” (Groenwald, 2004, p.51; Krefting, 1991). These steps guarded the study from researcher bias.

### **Credibility**

Creswell (2017) states that credibility means presenting an accurate interpretation of the participants understanding of a phenomenon. The credibility of the data in this study was sought by ensuring that the participant's experiences were appropriately gathered and that the information gathered was accurate. Almost all research presents with limitations (Bloomberg, & Volpe (2012). In this study, the sample frame was limited to heterosexual adult males in the Central Louisiana area.

### **Dependability and Conformability**

By providing precise details regarding the location and context of the research, dependability and conformability were sought. Also, as the researcher, I documented precisely each step of the study to ensure that subsequent researchers desiring to replicate this study will be able to follow the procedures used to conduct this study (Cresswell, 2017). Additionally, to ensure conformability and to avoid bias, the researcher kept thorough case notes and relied on expert colleagues to assist with interpreting the data (Butler, 2016, Hadi & Closs, 2016).

### **Transferability**

Generalizability of the findings may be deterred due to the study focusing only on heterosexual men in Central Louisiana, which limits the external validity of the study. However, transferability was sought by collecting information across different recovery agencies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The survey required informed consent. Due to the sensitivity of the topic that was discussed in the interviews, participants were reassured that participation in the study was voluntary and that their information would be kept confidential. Participants were also asked to review, complete, and sign the informed consent before the study and the interview procedure began with screening questions to ensure that each participant met the qualifications for being a part of this study. Following the interview, a referral list of local counselors who agreed to provide assistance was provided to each participant to give him access to help in handling painful emotions that may have been stirred up during the interview. In addition to the interviews being recorded, field notes were written after each interview.

## Summary

The study presented was a transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The study examined, identified, and described heterosexual males' experiences regarding recovery from IP. The population was adult heterosexual men who had completed a recovery program for IP. The study utilized a nonprobability, purposive convenience sample from the Central Louisiana area. The research design and the research questions guiding the study were described in detail. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and took field notes to gather the data. The data was coded and analyzed for patterns and themes. Criteria for participation in the study, the number of participants needed and the setting were also discussed. This qualitative study which consisted of semi-structured interviews with heterosexual men in Central Louisiana who completed a recovery program was conducted by the researcher, and the data was coded and analyzed for patterns and themes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) on the recovery of Central Louisiana men who completed an Internet pornography (IP) recovery program. This study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences of those impacted by IP and the steps they took to remain in recovery. The data were reviewed for frequencies, descriptive information, and themes that emerged. Eight participants volunteered to complete the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain data about the participants' perceptions of how ASH impacted their recovery from IP addiction. This chapter includes information about the participants, their demographics, an overview of results, and the themes that developed, and it concludes with a summary of the overall theme.

### **Participants**

This study on the impact of ASH on individuals who completed an IP program provided information about the perception of eight adult males who completed the IP recovery program in Central Louisiana. The participants were recruited from agencies that supported individuals in recovery from sexual addictions. All of the participants were heterosexual males. All of the participants were 30-years-old and older. The participants' years in recovery were one year to over ten years. To ensure that anonymity was not compromised, the researcher gave the participants an assigned number and required minimal demographic information (Table 1).

Table 1

*Demographics of the Participants*

Participant #	Age Range	Range of Years in Recovery
1	50+	5-10 years
2	30-39	1-5 years
3	40-49	1-5 years
4	30-39	5-10 years
5	40-49	10+ years
6	50+	5-10 years
7	50+	10+ years
8	50+	5-10 years

Eight heterosexual males who had completed the IP recovery program were interviewed to obtain the data. The interviews allowed the researcher to gather insights from the participants' lived experiences on the impact of ASH on their recovery. To ensure consistency in the interviews, the researcher followed a specific interview procedure with guided interview questions aligned with the study's research questions. The participants were asked seven questions to understand their perceptions about the impact of ASH on recovery from IP addiction. The participants gave consent to the researcher to record the interviews and were allowed to review their transcriptions and give comments. The data from the interviews were coded for patterns to determine common themes.

### **Results**

This section discusses the results of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) on



recovery from IP. Data collected from the interviews were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) procedures for data analysis, and the research data was discussed in terms of theme development. The last section explains how the interview questions were aligned to answer the research questions and discusses the findings of this study.

### **Theme Development from Research Data**

**Epoche.** The researcher identified patterns and common themes among the interviews by utilizing Moustakas's (1994) procedures for data analysis. Transcendental phenomenological studies are inspirational, give an understanding of the meaning of participants' experiences, and have a unique way of answering the "what and how" questions regarding the phenomena (Lucas, Fleming, & Bhosale, 2018; Smith, 2018). A critical element in transcendental phenomenological research with regard to this study was for the researcher to utilize bracketing, which helped the researcher refrain from personal biases and opinions. Bracketing, which is also called "epoche," took place before any interaction with the participants of the study (Butler, 2016). As the researcher, I bracketed my biases and looked at each subject through the eyes of an addict (Butler, 2016). In order to focus on the experiences of the participants, I bracketed my personal opinions and thoughts. Before conducting the interviews, I read the questions and practiced setting aside my thoughts to ensure that my biases did not affect the interpretation of the analysis of data. Throughout the data collection process, it was helpful to journal to keep track of my thoughts and personal biases.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The data that was analyzed came primarily from semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews were individually conducted. The interviews were based on Qu and Dumay (2011) who stated that conducting interviews is very prevalent in collecting qualitative

data, but it requires "the use of various skills, such as intensive listening, note-taking, careful planning, and sufficient preparation." (p. 239). The researcher also followed Qu and Dumay's (2011) suggestions on how to maintain the quality of the interview by "maintaining the flow of the interviewee's story, maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee, and avoiding interviewer bias" (p. 248). Also, the researcher primarily followed Qu and Dumay's (2011) interview format where the participants were asked a series of pre-established questions, the researcher read from a script, and all participants were asked the same questions in the same order, which helped to increase generalizability.

I conducted over-the-phone interviews with each participant, and each lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. I ensured that the participants were comfortable by speaking in a calm tone of voice. As a member of the clergy and a licensed professional counselor (LPC), I have had years of practice utilizing this skill. Therefore, I felt at ease talking with the participants. All participants agreed to be recorded. After getting the approval to record the interview, I recorded the interview with an Olympus VN-541PC audio recorder.

### **Researcher Journal**

I kept a researcher journal throughout the data collection process and wrote about my experiences after each interview with the participants. I logged thoughts about the vibes I was feeling, whether the participant sounded comfortable, and I noted the tones of voice of participants, specific unique comments by the participants, and thoughts about meeting the participants.

### **Horizontalization and Clustering**

The process of horizontalization and clustering is essential in qualitative studies (Moustakas, 1994). I examined each participant's transcript, analyzed it for significant

statements, and clustered the statements for themes. Every participant statement was treated as having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). The participants were allowed to review the transcripts from their interviews to ensure that their information was correct. After accuracy was confirmed, NVivo was used for coding.

### **Themes**

Significant statements from each participant were identified and clustered during the process of horizontalization. Themes were developed from these clusters that helped answer the research questions. A total of seventeen themes emerged that answered the research questions (Table 2).

This study answered the following research questions: RQ1. In what ways has engagement in accountability impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? RQ2. How has experience in engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? RQ3. In what ways has experiencing the installation of hope impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography? RQ4. In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sex Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography?

The following themes emerged. (a) It is essential to be accountable to and for someone and to utilize accountability as a strategy. (b) Accountability is a learned behavior and having accountability partners is a vital step to recovery. (c) Accountability is life changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction. (d) Connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to remain in recovery. (e) Spirituality is personal; it brings a person closer to God and is the only way to truly recover. (f) Spirituality leads a person to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. (g) Engagement in spirituality fosters

accountability. (h) Spirituality keeps hope alive. (i) Spirituality increases hope and hope increases accountability. (j) Spirituality and hope brought pleasure in coming out of the darkness of addiction, and they allow a recovering addict to celebrate freedom. (k) Hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of thinking related to addiction and accept the process of recovery. (l) Hope is having a determination to keep moving forward. (m) 12-steps are instrumental; they give hope and provide support in recovery. (n) 12-steps provide insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promote spirituality. (o) 12-steps help prevent relapse and give a person strategies in recovery. (p) Practicing accountability and working the 12-steps go hand-in-hand. (q) Being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggle caused by addiction and addresses them as they occur.

*Table 2*

*Themes and Frequency*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency Across Data Set</b>
<b>RQ1.</b> In what ways has engagement in accountability impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?	a) It is essential to be accountable to and for someone and to utilize accountability as a strategy.	29
	b) Accountability is a learned behavior and having accountability partners is a vital step to recovery.	60
	c) Accountability is life changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction.	31

Research Questions	Themes	Frequency Across Data Set
<b>RQ2.</b> How has experience in engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?	d) Connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to remain in recovery.	27
	e) Spirituality is personal, brings a person closer to God, and is the only way to truly recover.	67
	f) Spirituality leads a person to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers.	9
	g) Engagement in spirituality fosters accountability.	12
	h) Spirituality keeps hope alive.	31
	i) Spirituality increases hope and hope increases accountability.	37

Research Questions	Themes	Frequency Across Data Set
<b>RQ3.</b> How has experience in engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?	j) Spirituality and hope brought pleasure in coming out of the darkness of addiction and allowed a recovering addict to celebrate freedom.	20
	k) Hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of thinking related to addiction and accept the process of recovery.	43
	l) Hope is having a determination to keep moving forward.	33
<b>RQ4.</b> In what ways has being involved in a structure program (Sexual Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography?	m) 12-steps are instrumental; they give hope and provide support in recovery.	23
	n) 12-steps provide insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promote spirituality.	19

Research Questions	Themes	Frequency Across Data Set
	o) 12-steps help prevent relapse and give a person strategies in recovery.	19
	p) Practicing accountability and working the 12-steps go hand-in-hand.	9
	q) Being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggle caused by addiction and addresses them as they occur.	83

(a) It is essential to be accountable to and for someone and utilize accountability as a strategy. This theme emerged among all the participants during their interviews. When describing their personal recovery, participants spoke of being accountable to someone and for someone as a critical part of recovery. Participant eight described the significance of accountability in his recovery and explained that "accountability is necessary to grow in sobriety." Another participant echoed the importance of accountability and stated, "Accountability gives you hope and gets you out of a rut."

According to the participants interviewed, identifying triggers and utilizing accountability strategies is essential to a successful recovery. When describing his recovery, one of the participants stated, "I have several accountability partners that I am submissive to, and I have Covenant Eyes on my devices." Other participants stated, "Recovery means having tools to provide hope and freedom and having strategies to offset the addiction."

(b) Accountability is a learned behavior, and having accountability partners is vital in recovery. According to the participants in this study, accountability is not innate, but it has to be learned. Participant three expressed that “accountability is a learned behavior that individuals in recovery must acquire.” Participant five shared the same respect for accountability and explained that “relapse is often an issue in recovery.” He stated, "I finally got an accountability partner and said, this is where I am, and this is what I am struggling with. Whenever I told them, they did everything they could to keep me in line." Participant five further stated, "I sponsor people myself; we have to sponsor someone else. We keep what we have by giving it away. If I share my knowledge with other people, I can keep my serenity."

Several participants discussed that having accountability partners makes the journey of recovery smoother. Participant four talked about being changed and stated, "Reaching out to an accountability partner altered my recovery. It is helpful when you are walking through emotions." Another participant stated, "Realizing that recovery is life long, and knowing that I had someone to call, gave me hope." However, participants did speak of the necessity of utilizing caution when choosing an accountability partner and expressed that it was advantageous to have more than one accountability partner in a recovery program. Participant four stated, “Having a partner that does not judge you is important.” Participant five indicated that accountability “helped to take away his feeling of being alone.” Other participants stated that “joining support groups helps you be accountable, and choosing a sponsor who has been successful in the program will not let you off of the hook but hold you accountable."

(c) Accountability is life-changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction. Several other participants discussed that accountability was necessary and life-changing. Participants explained their desires and needs for change and discussed that accountability was



instrumental in their change process. Participant five talked about gaining success in recovery from seeing others who were successful and being honest with an accountability partner. He stated, "I saw other men experience freedom, and I wanted it. They were my example." Other participants described their experience by stating, "Accountability made me feel free, and it changed my life. Accountability will make you think before you engage in viewing pornography."

(d) Connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to be accountable and remain in recovery. One participant mentioned that being more connected with God and others was extremely beneficial in his recovery. Participant eight described his recovery as a daily journey with God and stated, "My recovery is centered on walking in the Spirit, so I do not fulfill the desires of the flesh. Recovery is learning to lean into Jesus for strength." According to Participant seven, Jesus Christ changed his life. He explained that his recovery centered on talking to Jesus daily. He stated, "I started a prayer life; now I am a totally different person. I found Jesus, and I have intimacy with my spouse." Participant one described his freedom by stating, "I am more connective and more relational. I make the choices now as opposed to the addiction."

(e). Spirituality is personal, brings a person closer to God, and is the only way to truly recover. In addition to being impacted by accountability, the participants discussed the impact spirituality had on recovery. One participant described his encounter with God by stating, "I did not think I could be free from the addiction, and I called out to God, and said, 'God, you are either going to supply a way of escape, or I am not going to escape.' God told me to open up my eyes, and when I did, I found my escape. For me, it was definitely a divine intervention." Another participant explained, "I had to pray and get God into the mix. I said to God, 'This is

who I am, and I am powerless.” Participant three discussed in detail the importance of understanding that “spirituality must be taken personally, and it is a personal responsibility.” Participant one explained that Jesus Christ was his higher power and stated that his “spirituality helped [him] to rest in God.” Recovery programs are designed to help individuals to change and overcome their addiction. Participant eight strongly emphasized that his spiritual connection to Jesus Christ gave him the “strength to overcome,” and stated, “Jesus wants us to lean on him because we gain strength from Jesus.” According to Participant six, “Addiction separates you from your spiritual higher power, but spirituality brings you closer to God. It is the main basis of recovery.”

(f). Spirituality leads a person to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. Having a clear understanding of the difference between attending to church and having a relationship with God was highlighted by one of the participants. He stated, “Spirituality is not going to church; I had a relationship with God before I came to church. Spirituality is personal, and it connects you to God and His principle about life.” Other participants stated that being real with God helped them to be real with themselves about their triggers.

Interestingly, several participants discussed how spirituality and accountability worked hand-in-hand. These participants stated, “Spirituality and accountability work together. Spirituality leads you to be accountable. Spirituality helps me evaluate my triggers.”

(g). Engagement in spirituality fosters accountability. The participants shared their passion for being spiritually connected and explained that it was their spirituality that kept them steadfast in their attempt to be accountable. Some shared their experiences of how their spirituality fostered accountability, and each stated, “Having a relationship with God makes you more accountable.” One participant discussed the importance of “tapping back into God” and

how it helped him to achieve accountability, and another participant indicated that it was "prayer and accountability" that helped him to stay in recovery."

(h). Spirituality keeps hope alive. According to the participants in this study, a person in recovery is "hopeless without spirituality." Participant eight stated, "Hope has to be there before you start the journey of recovery because engaging in IP produces bondage which diminished hope." Participant eight further highlighted that he keeps hope alive by "walking in the Spirit, meditating on overcoming through Scripture, and worshipping God." Participant four explained that he keeps hope alive as challenges present themselves by "turning to God and surrendering to the will of God who has all things under control." Other participants discussed spirituality as the heartbeat of hope and stated, "Without hope, you would live in self-pity." Hope is your "staying power" in recovery.

(i). Spirituality increases hope, and hope increases accountability. During the interviews, it was shocking to hear six out of the eight participants say that spirituality, hope, and accountability were simultaneously used in their recovery. These participants emphasized that spirituality increased hope and hope increased accountability. This claim was made thirty-seven times during the interviews. Participant three discussed his experience by stating, "Hope alone is not good, but it works with spirituality, and hope in God is more rewarding than anything else." Participant one described his hope as hope in God and stated, "My hope is in God, not in people." Participant eight described his life as "miserable without hope." He stated, "Every day you are successful without Internet pornography; it brings you hope. Spirituality increases hope. Hope grows from accountability." Participant five discussed being an eyewitness of what the Spirit can do in recovery stating that "seeing God working in other people can give you hope. I had a hope in God, and therefore, I was not hopeless."

(j). Hope brings pleasure in coming out of the darkness of addiction, and it allows celebrating freedom. About hope, participants discussed that hope helped them to come out of the darkness of addiction and celebrate the life of freedom. According to some participants in this study, recovery meant coming out of a dark world and accepting and working through daily struggles. One participant describing his recovery stated, "I realized that I was in a very dark world, and I got tired." Participants discussed that coming out of the darkness meant getting rid of root causes in order to live in freedom. Several participants described their addiction as living in a "dark world" and expressed the freedom that they experienced from recovery.

Some of the participants stated, "I was sick of being addicted to porn. I threw my favorite electronic device away and put covenant eyes on my devices and parental guidance on my TV: now I am free." The downside of addiction is that you have to "deal with a lot of condemnation." You get tired of juggling back and forth but "working the steps is very rewarding." One participant described his darkness and freedom stating that having a "computer around chained me to my addiction to IP, but thanks be to God, every electronic device that I have is hooked up to Covenant Eyes." I have multiple accountability partners, and having an Internet filter is the best thing that ever happened to me." Another participant described his freedom by stating, "Recovery means clean heart, clean mind, clean spirit, and a clean soul."

(k). Hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of thinking related to addiction and accept the process of recovery. Recovery is a process, and the participants discussed how getting rid of old patterns of thinking helped them to move forward and remain in recovery. Some participants explained that their old patterns of thinking centered around anxieties, feelings of inadequacies, and the need to feel validated. One participant who discussed how he eliminated old patterns of thinking stated, "To remain in recovery, I had to learn to leave the

triggers alone; let my mind get used to doing other things besides porn.” A second participant also discussed eliminating mind triggers, stating, “Most of my challenges centered around denying myself access to my triggers, so I decided I was going to push it away to get myself under control.” Several participants discussed personal challenges to identify triggers and negative emotions in their mind. One participant stated, “All my challenges were in my mind. I learned, by not cracking the door one time, I could have victory over my flesh.”

(l). Hope is having the determination to keep moving forward. Another theme that emerged regarding hope was being committed to moving forward. Participants in this study described their determination by using the word “struggle.” One participant adamantly and repeatedly stated, “You cannot say recovery without saying struggle.” Another participant shared his determination and stated, “I had to come to grips with my addiction. I cannot say OK today it is over. What I have to say is that each day brings a struggle and a fight. I am fighting this battle.” Participant two described his determination and stated, “People struggling with addictions must learn to survive in their surrounding environments. I will always struggle with recovery. It is a daily struggle because of what is out there in the world. We cannot just turn the world off.” Participant eight described his determination as a constant battle, and stated, “Recovery is a daily struggle, with the enemy in the camp, and we must make choices when we fall off the wagon, never give up.”

(m). 12-steps are instrumental, give hope, and provide support in recovery. Of the participants interviewed, seven of the eight participants highlighted the importance of being involved in a structured program such as the 12-steps and attested that it was a powerful tool for providing structure to recovery from IP. Participant four talked about finding support while in recovery and stated, “The 12-steps connects a person with others with similar struggles, gave me

hope, and helps me to know that I am not alone on the journey.” Participant one echoed these remarks by stating, “It helps to be in a group with others who are struggling in similar ways.” Being able to talk to others about addiction is vital in recovery. Participant eight stated, “12-steps helped me to open up and share with others.” Other participants stated, “12-steps gives hope, is key for a successful recovery, and allows others to speak into your life.”

(n). 12-steps provides insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promotes spirituality. Another theme that emerged was that insight, encouragement, and accountability can be gained through working the 12-steps. Most of the participants indicated that the 12 steps were instrumental in promoting increased spirituality and accountability in their lives. Participant three stated, “The 12-steps reconnected me to God.” According to Participant eight, individuals must recognize that humans are not God, and he stated, “The 12-steps helped me to see that I am not God, be more spiritual, and bring the past into the sunshine of God.” Participant four and Participant seven both remarked that, “The 12 steps make you more accountable.” Other participants discussed how the 12-steps helped them to gain an understanding of recovery and addiction and how addiction impacts the world.

(o). 12-steps help prevent relapse and give a person strategies in recovery. Seven of the eight participants indicated that 12-steps gives a person specific strategies which facilitates recovery. According to Participant two, the 12-steps work in honesty and it helps a person understand how to utilize accountability partners. Participant eight discussed how the 12-steps showed him, “How to look inward, open up and share with others, and how to bring the past into the sunshine of God.” According to Participant seven, the 12-steps are very structural and it helped him to break away from things that impairs vision and helped him to outline specific strategies that promote accountability. Participant five discussed how the 12-steps helped him to

take inventory of his life and Participant eight discussed how the 12-steps taught him how to make amends.

(p). Practicing accountability and working the 12-steps go hand-in-hand. According to the participants in this study, one of the foundational components of the 12-steps is accountability. Participant eight emphasized that sexual sobriety and sexual recovery are hinged on accountability. According to Participant two, “being a part of a support group and having personal accountability with an accountability partner” helped him to gain sobriety. Participant three, discussed his success with the 12-step program and stated, “I got into 12-step program, started seeing an accountability person who explained to me that it was going to be hard. The road will be rough, but if you do stick to it and don’t give up you will come clean and be renewed.”

(q). Being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggle caused by addiction and addressing struggles as they occur. Throughout the interviews, the participants established that recovery is a daily struggle. Additionally, the participants continuously described how being involved in a structured program such as the 12-steps was instrumental in their recovery success. Most of the participants in this study explained that the 12-steps helped prevent relapse and gave strategies in recovery. According to the participants in this study, addressing challenges as they occurred helped to keep the struggles manageable. According to Participant 4, “The 12-steps work in honesty, and it is a journey a work in progress.” When Participant one described the impact a structured program had on his recovery, he surprisingly said that the 12-step program for SAA program is just “a step” and should not be considered as all-encompassing. This participant emphatically stated, “The 12-steps is instrumental in helping individuals recover from IP addiction, but it must be kept in mind that

recovery is ongoing and individuals must never stop stepping." Participant four further stated: "The 12-steps is a step. Life is a step. You must go beyond 12-steps and keep moving forward. If I quit walking, I could lose recovery."

**Research Question 1. In what ways has engagement in accountability impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?** Engagement in accountability has a significant impact on recovery from IP. This was evident through the four themes. (1) It is essential to be accountable to and for someone and utilize accountability as a strategy. (2) Accountability is a learned behavior, and having accountability partners is vital in recovery. (3) Accountability is life-changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction. (4) Connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to remain in recovery. The findings reveal that these four themes can be utilized in recovery to remarkably impact the success rate of individuals struggling with IP addiction. Comments such as "we have to overcome," "the computer was my downfall," "Internet accountability (Covenant Eyes) gives me hope," and "having an accountability partner who did not judge me" helped a lot to reveal how accountability significantly impacts recovery from IP. Several other participants said, "An accountability partner is someone you can call during setbacks," and "Accountability means I am not alone."

**Research Question 2. How has engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?** Engagement in spirituality also had a significant impact on recovery from IP. According to the participants, spirituality helps individuals in recovery reconnect with God, Who is the source of all life. The findings revealed five themes that emerged that indicated that engagement in spirituality significantly impacted recovery from IP. These five themes were: spirituality is personal, brings you closer to God, and is the only way to



truly recover. Spirituality leads you to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. (3) Engagement in spirituality fosters accountability. (4) Spirituality keeps hope alive. (5) Spirituality increases hope, and hope increases accountability.

One participant commented, "I must be connected to a higher power who has all power, and that is Jesus Christ." Many other participants explained how spirituality impacted their success in recovery. One participant stated, "Spirituality is the only way to true recovery," and "spirituality means not dying porn addict." All of the participants spoke of not depending upon themselves to be successful in recovery, but stated, "Without the help of God, we have no hope." It was exciting to listen as the participants spoke of having a personal relationship with God. Several of them stated, "On my own, I messed things up, now I am doing it God's way." The participants' comments regarding spirituality being a guide to help them assess triggers was an unexpected finding. One Participant stated, "Jesus directs my life. Spirituality helps me evaluate my triggers." Other participants commented by stating, "I talk to God everywhere. I tell God where I messed up and asked forgiveness," and "walking in the Spirit, helps me not to obey my flesh." Other comments were "someone spiritual and spirit-filled understands the darkness that porn can bring" and "you have to have a personal relationship and talk to God about your addiction. Have to have a higher power that has all power." These comments further support the finding that spirituality significantly impacts recovery from IP.

**Research Question 3. In what ways has experiencing the installation of hope impacted the process of recovery from Internet pornography?** The findings from this study revealed that hope also had a significant role in impacting recovery from IP. Three themes supported this finding are (1) Hope brings pleasure in coming out of the darkness of addiction and allows celebrating freedom. (2) Hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of

thinking related to addiction. (3) Hope accepts the process of recovery, and it has a determination to keep moving forward. When the participants spoke of coming out of the darkness, there was a joy in their voices. Participant three spoke of living in darkness for decades, and, when he received his freedom, he said, "I did not think I could ever break free, but God gave me hope." Other comments regarding hope such as "hope kept me" and "there is value in hope" also support the finding of significance regarding the impact of hope on recovery from IP. Most of the participants in this study concurred that hope makes a person believe in themselves and throw away negative thinking and doubts. According to the participants, when hope is present, recovery is inevitable. One participant stated, "If hope is alive, you believe that you can do this." Participant four indicated that addiction causes fear and darkness, but "hope is your staying power; it is a motivator that will drive a person to recovery."

**Research Question 4. In what ways has being involved in the structured program 12-step Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography?**

Involvement in a structured program such as the 12-step SAA has a significant role in impacting recovery from IP. Five themes emerged that supported the significance of these findings: 12-steps is instrumental, gives hope and provides support in recovery; 12-steps provides insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promotes spirituality; 12-steps helps prevent relapse and gives a person strategies in recovery; practicing accountability and working the 12-steps go hand-in-hand, and being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggle caused by addiction and addressing struggles as they occur. The 12-step program for SAA has received recognition for being instrumental in recovery from sexual addictions for many years. In this study, statements included "the 12-steps helped me to see that I am not God" and "12-steps helped me to gain understanding about recovery and addiction." Another participant

stated, “The 12-steps provides an understanding of recovery and an understanding of the impact addiction has on others and self.” Each of these statements supports the finding that the 12-steps are significant and help impact recovery. The 12-steps program is also unique in that it provides strategies and is a systematic way to help individuals in recovery regain structure, balance, and accountability.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, a description of the participants, procedures that lead to the development of themes and the findings of the study were reported by answering the research questions. This study examined the lived experiences of eight men in the Central Louisiana area who completed a recovery program for IP addiction. Data explored the impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) and the use of a structured program such as the 12-step SAA on recovery from IP. Seventeen themes emerged from the qualitative data. Themes that emerged included: It is essential to be accountable to and for someone and utilize accountability as a strategy. Accountability is a learned behavior and having accountability partners is vital in recovery. Accountability is life changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction.

Connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to remain in recovery. Spirituality is personal, brings you closer to God, and is the only way to truly recover. Spirituality leads you to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. Engagement in spirituality fosters accountability. Spirituality keeps hope alive. Spirituality increases hope, and hope increases accountability.

Hope brings pleasure in coming out of the darkness of addiction and allows celebrating freedom. Hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of thinking related to addiction and accept the process of recovery. Hope is having a determination to keep moving forward.

12-steps are instrumental, gives hope and provides support in recovery. 12-steps provides insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promotes spirituality. 12-steps helps prevent relapse and gives a person strategies in recovery, practicing accountability. Working the 12-steps and accountability go hand-in-hand. Being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggle caused by addiction and addressing struggles as they occur. Finally, the four research questions were answered, and findings were presented to answer each question. In sum, the findings suggest that the three-stranded cord of ASH and 12-step SAA are critical factors in recovery from IP addiction.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine, identify, and describe the perceived impact of ASH on recovery from IP. This chapter summarizes the findings of this study, discusses the relationship between the implications of this study and previous studies in the literature, discusses the implication of the chosen methodology, explains delimitations and limitations of this study, and provides recommendations for future research regarding ASH, the 12-step SAA, and individuals seeking to recover from IP.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study include data that impact recovery from IP. Seventeen themes emerged from the participant's interviews, which answer research questions (RQ) 1-4. Themes developed from the finding of RQ 1 were: it is essential to be accountable to and for someone and to utilize accountability as a strategy; accountability is a learned behavior, and having accountability partners is vital in recovery; accountability is life-changing and critical to successful recovery from addiction; connecting with God and others provides the additional support needed to remain in recovery. Themes developed from RQ 2 were: spirituality is personal, brings a person closer to God, and is the only way to truly recover; spirituality leads a person to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers; engagement in spirituality fosters accountability; spirituality keeps hope alive, and spirituality increases hope, and hope increases accountability. Themes that developed from RQ 3 were: hope brings the pleasure of coming out of the darkness of addiction and allows celebrating freedom; hope allows a person to eliminate the old patterns of thinking related to addiction and helps to accept the process of recovery, and hope is having a determination to keep moving

forward. Themes that developed from RQ 4 were: 12-steps is instrumental, gives hope and provides support in recovery; 12-steps provides insight into addiction, encourages accountability, and promotes spirituality; 12-steps helps prevent relapses and gives a person strategies in recovery; practicing accountability and working the 12-steps go hand-in-hand, and being involved in a structured program helps with accepting the daily struggles caused by addiction and addressing struggles as they occur.

### **Discussion**

The findings were organized and discussed by research questions and derived from the common themes explained in Chapter IV. The results of this study provide information that supports the research stated in the literature review. This section will discuss the results of this study concerning ASH and the 12-steps of SAA. These areas are significant to the recovery of individuals impacted by addiction from IP.

### **Research Questions and Conclusions**

#### **RQ 1: In what ways has accountability impacted the recovery from Internet pornography?**

Research has shown that many individuals addicted to pornography experience shame and isolation and have limited communication with others (Carnes, 2001). Individuals seeking recovery from sexual addictions such as IP require support and accountability (Davies, 2001; Weiss, 2004). All eight participants who completed the study highlighted accountability as a key to recovery. One theme derived from the data in this study was that accountability is a learned behavior, and having accountability partners is vital in recovery.

Research has shown that accountability helps a person recover by encouraging communication and support (Davies, 2003). Among those interviewed, seven out of the eight participants specified the necessity of structured programs and having accountability partners.

Responses from the participants revealed that accountability requires identifying triggers, having planned strategies, and executing the strategies. One participant explained that “accountability helps individuals in recovery to focus and filter out triggers.” Based on the literature, I was not surprised that participants would attest that accountability was vital in recovery, but I was surprised to hear from five of the eight participants that it is impossible to obtain accountability without identifying the triggers of addiction. Price-Robertson et al. (2017) state that recovery is relational; it occurs within a social context, and it is through social relationships that individuals can rebuild their lives. Of the participants interviewed, six of the eight participants discussed relational issues and feelings of loneliness, depression, and isolation. These six participants strongly expressed that finding the right accountability partner is necessary and stated that they found their support partner at a structured recovery meeting. Weiss (2004) comes to the same conclusion and states that people who are needed to assist individuals in recovery from pornography addictions “are most readily found in 12-step sexual recovery programs (p. 248).”

The findings indicate that spirituality helps individuals in recovery to be more accountable. Wnuk (2017), in his study, indicates that religion and spirituality are vital and have been shown to be reliable components in recovery from IP. Among the participants interviewed, four out of the eight participants revealed that spirituality helped them to be more accountable in their recovery from IP. One participant expressed that a “relationship with God makes you more accountable,” and two other participants strongly emphasized that “tapping into God” and praying to God to help them to be more accountable and work their structured program.

**RQ 2: How has the engagement in spirituality impacted the recovery from Internet pornography?**

Worthington et al. (2011), in their study, argue that it is not a religion but spirituality, which is defined as closeness to a sacred being, that helps individuals overcome addictions. All of the eight participants expressed that spirituality was important in recovery. Several of the participants described spirituality as “praying and talking to God,” “reading the Bible,” “attending church,” and “meditating on Biblical scriptures.” The findings indicate that all eight participants in the study also expressed that spirituality is personal, brings a person closer to God, and is the only way to recover. Several participants expressed that "spirituality connects you to God in a relationship that goes beyond going to church." The second theme that emerged was that spirituality leads to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. Perry (2017), in his study, concludes that frequent engagement in religious activities might decrease pornography viewing, and Carnes (2001) argues that spirituality is vital to a successful recovery.

Out of the eight participants, six expressed that spirituality leads to accountability and promotes a thorough assessment of triggers. One participant expressed that “addiction separates, but God and accountability partners can get you through recovery.” Other participants expressed that “strength to overcome” can be gained through Jesus Christ, who is the “higher power that has all power.” Four of the eight participants expressed that spirituality fosters hope, and six out of eight participants expressed that spirituality increases hope, and hope increases accountability. According to the results from Participant three, “God gave me hope, but hope alone is not good.” Participant eight said, “Life is miserable without hope, spirituality increases hope, and hope grows from accountability.”

**RQ3: In what ways have hope impacted recovery from Internet pornography?**



“One of the main reasons people enter counseling is because of the feeling of hopelessness in their addiction, which adds to the pain and shame” (Carnes, 2001, p.5). White (2000) states that hope helps individuals leap into recovery, encourages change, and promotes confidence in the recovery. In the current study, the findings revealed that all eight participants expressed that hope is significant in recovery from IP. Out of the eight participants, five responded that hope brought pleasure in coming out of darkness, and they described their addiction as “a dark world.” Another participant described his addiction to IP as “diminished hope and bondage.” The findings revealed that seven out of eight participants expressed that hope pleased them and allowed them to celebrate recovery. The other participant expressed, “Hope kept me and gave me a determination to never give up.”

**RQ 4: In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sex Addicts)?**

**Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet pornography?**

The 12-step recovery program for sexual addicts has been in existence for decades and has appealed to millions as a solution to recovery from addiction (Carnes, 2001; Spiegel & Fewell, 2004). The 12-step model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) is a structured program that has proven to be effective and has become a gold standard for recovery from sexual addictions (Borkman, 2008; Carnes, 2001). The findings of the current study also suggest that the 12-step recovery program is significant and instrumental in giving hope and providing support in support groups. Some participants indicated that the 12-steps connected a person with others with similar struggles and that the 12-steps gave hope for a successful recovery. These findings aligned with Weiss (2004) who states, “The people that are needed to assist individuals in recovery from pornography addictions are most readily found in 12-step sexual recovery programs” (p. 248).

In the current study, participants indicated that the 12-steps gave hope, provided support, provided insight into addiction, encouraged accountability, promoted spirituality, helped prevent relapse, and gave the participants strategies in recovery. The way the participants described how the 12-steps impacted their recovery was multifaceted. Some of the participants indicated that the 12-steps connected a person to others with "similar struggles" and that being able to talk about their addiction had been a strategy to help overcome the addiction. Other participants indicated that the 12-steps reconnected individuals to God, helped them to bring the darkness of their past into the "sunshine of God" and helped them see the impact addiction had on their lives.

Each of these participants indicated that the 12-steps were very systematic and gave strategies to help gain and maintain a life of recovery. One participant indicated that the 12-step program was a journey that only worked when a person was honest about their addiction. Weiss (2004) states that "in order for change to take place, there has to be an honest self-acknowledgment of the existence of the problem." Another participant indicated that the 12-steps was not the end of the journey but just a step in recovery and that, each day, a step must be taken to ensure recovery is maintained.

### **Implications**

In this section, the implications will be presented. The researcher established a list of implications for action based on the literature review, significant findings, and conclusions. These implications are listed below.

#### **Implication for Accountability**

Practitioners such as clergy, therapists, counselors, and individuals in the helping profession assisting individuals in recovery from IP should ensure that these clients understand the necessity of accountability in their recovery. Practitioners assisting clients in recovery must

help these individuals clearly define accountability, develop treatment modalities that outline accountability goals and objectives, and support the client's endeavors to engage in accountability practices. Price-Robertson et al. (2017) state that, since recovery is relational, it occurs within a social context, and it is through social relationships that the individuals can redefine themselves as a person as opposed to an addict. Thus, practitioners should assist clients with knowledge of how to choose the best accountability partner in their recovery.

### **Implication for Spirituality**

Practitioners should help clients in recovery gain an understanding of the need for spirituality and assist clients to understand that religion and spirituality are different. Spirituality has been shown to be a positive influence in recovery, promotes communication in relationships, and influences vital dimensions of life, (Lambert et al., 2010; Lambert & Dollihite, 2006; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Clients must unequivocally understand that connecting with God, their spiritual higher power, can lead them to hope and strong accountability in recovery from IP. Clients must understand that recovery can only be gained and maintained when they admit powerlessness and submit to the higher power that has all power.

### **Implication for Hope**

This study revealed that hope is the core and driving force of recovery. From the beginning throughout the entire process of recovery, all practitioners should highlight for clients the great role hope plays in recovery and how it is useful in helping individuals stay the course and finish the race. The findings have implications that practitioners should also work effectively with the client to ensure that hope is gained and maintained and that clients are able to clearly articulate their hope and the source from which they draw their hope.

### **Implication for the 12-steps SAA**

The 12-step model of Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) is a structured program that has been proven to be useful and has become a gold standard for recovery from sexual addictions (Borkman, 2008; Carnes, 2001). Carnes (2001) indicates that the 12-step model “helps members restore the living network of human relationships” (p. 26). Practitioners should ensure that the client in recovery from IP is involved in a structured program such as the 12-steps mode of SAA. The results have implications that practitioners should help clients understand that the 12-steps does not encompass everything that is needed in recovery, but it is a step to be included with other treatment modalities.

### **Implication for Three Stranded Cord of ASH and 12-steps SAA**

Practitioners should acknowledge that the three parts of ASH are powerful tools within themselves, but, when combined in treatment, they are an unstoppable team to advance progress in recovery from IP. Researchers have adamantly argued that clinicians cannot ignore the regimens of ASH because they significantly affect the outcome of recovery treatment for IP addiction (Carnes, 2001; Davies, 2003; Grodzicki & Galanter, 2006; Carnes). This study found that a participant’s recovery was significantly affected by ASH, and, when practitioners used these tools to form a three-fold strand and utilized the 12 steps of SAA in recovery from IP, addiction to pornography had to bow.

### **Implications of the Chosen Methodology**

The phenomenon of ASH and how it relates to treatment for recovery from IP, suggests that the appropriate methodology for this study was phenomenological research. The use of interviews provided the opportunity to gather pertinent information and rich descriptions of this phenomenon. Scheduled telephone interviews provided the opportunity for participants to

answer and respond to the questions thoughtfully. Transcription of data and the procedure for data analysis assisted the researcher in gaining insight into this phenomenon.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The limitations of this study involved participants being chosen from one region, the Central Louisiana area. Because the participants were from a specific location, this may affect the generalizability of the study. Although the participants had different backgrounds, all participants were at least 18 years of age. This study was limited to only males who were heterosexual. According to Creswell, 2017, data saturation is met when no new information is being received. This study reached data saturation, and triangulation of data is enough for the study to be replicated. The information received presented a rich description of this population phenomenon.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This section will discuss the recommendation for future research. This study aimed to better understand the impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) on recovery from Internet pornography (IP). With IP being one of the most controlling addictions that has taken America, studies must be conducted to address the phenomenon. Little literature investigated the recovery from IP. Therefore, recommendations for further research based on the results and conclusions of this study will be discussed.

The first recommendation for future research is to replicate the study using females, non-heterosexual individuals, and individuals under the age of 18 to determine how ASH promotes recovery compared to adult heterosexual males. Researching the impact of sexual molestation and IP addiction is the second recommendation for future studies. Some individuals in this study reported issues of molestation in their past. It may be beneficial to look at how sexual

molestation is correlated with IP addiction. The third recommendation for future studies is to study therapists who utilize ASH and the 12-step SAA in the treatment regimen for clients with IP addiction and assess treatment outcomes. A final recommendation for future research is to study the impact of medical disorders, such as increased levels of testosterone, and their impact on IP addiction. Some individuals in the study reported having medical issues (increased testosterone levels) that contributed to their hyper-sexuality. It may be beneficial to study the impact of medical disorders (high testosterone levels) and hyper-sexual behaviors on IP addiction.

### **Summary**

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of eight men in the Central Louisiana area who completed a recovery program for IP addiction. Data explored the impact of accountability, spirituality, and hope and the use of a structured program such as 12-step SAA on recovery from IP. This study provided in-depth insight into the struggles and triumphs of those impacted by IP. There was a gap in the literature related to accountability, spirituality, and hope (ASH) as one unit in recovery from IP. This study was vital because it is the first study that has assessed the three stranded cord of ASH and its impact on recovery from IP. Although the researcher was not surprised by the findings that suggest that ASH and the 12-step program SAA are essential to recovery from IP addiction, listening to the men discuss how these factors are utilized in recovery was breathtaking. Furthermore, the findings of this study enlighten the researcher to understand that these factors can be utilized in the recovery from any addictions such as drug addiction, food addiction, and gambling.

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## Appendix A

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 11, 2019 Jenifer Williams IRB Approval 3806.061119: Recovery: The Impact of Accountability, Spirituality, and Hope (ASH) on Internet Pornography Addiction

Dear Jenifer Williams,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

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## Appendix B

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**CONSENT FORM**

Recovery: The Impact of Accountability, Spirituality, and Hope (ASH) on Internet Pornography  
Addiction

**Jenifer A. Williams**

Liberty University

School of Behavioral Sciences: Community Care and Counseling

You are invited to be in a research study of recovery experiences, involvement, and interactions with individuals impacted by addictive internet pornography use. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a heterosexual male, 18 years of age or older, and have completed a recovery program in the Central Louisiana area. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jenifer A. Williams, a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences/Community Care and Counseling Program at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to find information using an interview that can provide implications for therapists/counselors regarding elements of accountability, spirituality, and hope as major components of the recovery processes for Internet Pornography addiction.

**Research Questions:** **RQ 1:** In what ways has hope impacted the process of recovering from Internet Pornography (IP)? **RQ2:** How has experience in engagement in spirituality impacted the process of recovering from internet pornography (IP)? **RQ3:** In what ways has an engagement in accountability impacted the process of recovering from Internet Pornography (IP)? **RQ 4:** In what ways has being involved in a structured program (Sexual Addicts Anonymous, SAA) assisted in recovery from Internet Pornography (IP)?

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a semi-structured interview over the telephone. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes
2. Review your interview transcription for accuracy. This will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The interview may include experiencing some painful emotions. Following the interview, a referral list of local counselors will be provided to each

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participant to give him access to help in handling painful emotions that may stir up during the interview.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the findings will be added to the pool of knowledge for counselors/therapists who assist individuals with recovery from sexual addictions.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jenifer Williams. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at njroper@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. June Tyson, at jtyson15@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.



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The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

## Appendix C

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions****Demographics:****Age:**

What is your age?

Under 18

18-29

30-39

40-49

50 or older

**Are you a heterosexual male?**

Yes

No

**How long have you been in recovery?**

1-5 years

5-10 years

10 years or more

The interview questions are for the purpose of understanding your personal perceptions and thoughts about the recovery attributes of accountability, spirituality, and hope and their impact on your recovery from IP.

1. Please describe what recovery means to you?
2. How would you describe your own personal recovery?
3. Studies show that there are many challenges to remain in recovery. Did you face any personal challenges? And if so, what were they and how did you overcome them?
4. Accountability means building a supportive relationship through agreed upon commitment and decisions made jointly. It is being responsible for your actions and checking in with your support partner.
  - a. Please share your thoughts and opinions about your own personal accountability and how it impacted your recovery?
  - b. Was there any particular time that stands out where accountability determined your decision to continue with your recovery?
  - c. If so, can you please share what that experience was and describe your perceptions of how that experience impacted your recovery?
5. Spirituality is defined as communion or connection, faith or beliefs, and hope with a higher power.

- a. Please share your thoughts and opinions about your own personal spirituality?
  - b. Was there any particular time that stands out where spiritually that impacted your recovery?
  - c. If so, can you please share what that experience was and describe your perceptions of how that experience impacted your recovery?
6. Hope is defined as expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can happen.
- a. Please share your thoughts and opinions about hope?
  - b. Was there any particular time that stands out where hope impacted your recovery.
  - c. If so, can you please share what that experience was and describe that experience impacted your recovery?
7. Many have found that being involved in a structured recovery program such as the 12 steps for sexual addiction have benefited their recovery.
- a. Were you involved in a 12-step structured program for recovery or similar program?
  - b. Was there any particular time that stands out where that structured program impacted your recovery?
  - c. If so, please share your thoughts and opinions about how that program impacted your recovery?