

Not Just a Hobby:

How the Culture of Collecting Can Escalate Gambling Disorder

Alyx Effron: Collectors MD

Jamie Glick, LCSW, LAC, ICGC-I: Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado

Chigbo Nzoiwu, LSW: Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado



Alyx Effron
Founder
Collectors MD



Alyx is a lifelong collector with more than a decade of experience in the modern hobby and in marketing, advertising, and media. A graduate of Penn State University, he founded Collectors MD to promote responsible collecting through education, advocacy, and lived experience.

Jamie Glick, LCSW, LAC, ICGC-I
Executive Director
PGCC



Jamie is the Executive Director of the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado and a nationally recognized leader in gambling harm prevention, treatment, and policy. He serves on the Board of Directors for the National Council on Problem Gambling and teaches graduate-level coursework on gambling disorder at the University of Denver.

Chigbo Nzoiwu, LSW
Director of Community Engagement
PGCC



Chigbo is the Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships for the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado. He leads statewide initiatives focused on prevention, education, and strategic partnerships to expand awareness of gambling-related harm. Chigbo works with organizations across Colorado to develop innovative outreach strategies and strengthen community responses.

Responsible Gaming
Grant Program



Grant Recipient:
Problem Gambling
Center



Strategic Partner





Responsibilities of Helping Professionals

When working with unfamiliar communities, helpers should:

- Be curious before being corrective.
- Learn the client's **language and experiences**.
- Assess both strengths and risks.
- Understand the **social norms and reinforcement** within the community.
- Seek additional education when needed.



Curiosity is a clinical skill. Understanding a client's world is often the first step toward helping them change it.





Gambling

Risking something you have, in hopes of gaining something you don't have, when the outcome is uncertain.



Gamblified

The integration of gambling-like mechanics into activities that are not traditionally gambling.

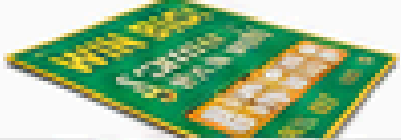
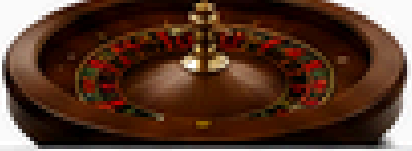
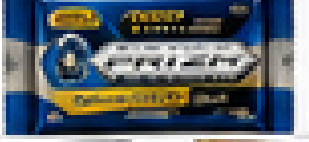
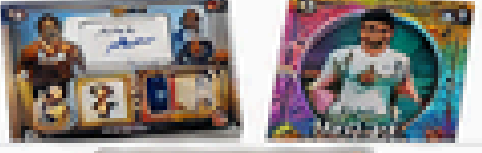
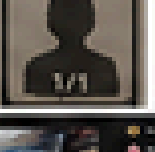
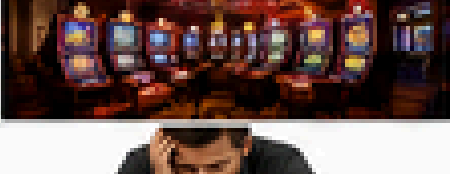
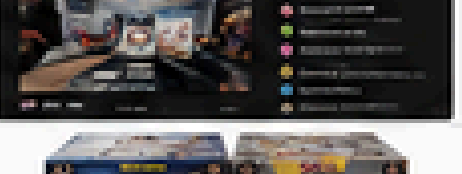
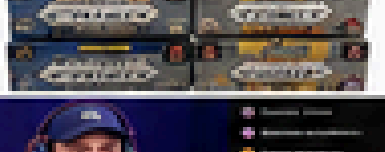
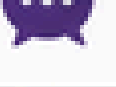
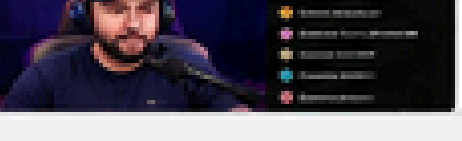


Gamblified Collecting

Collecting that uses gambling-like mechanics to influence purchasing and participation.



MECHANICS OF GAMBLING VS. MODERN COLLECTING

 TRADITIONAL GAMBLING	BEHAVIORAL MECHANIC	MODERN COLLECTING 
 Slot machine	 Chance-based outcomes	Pack opening 
 Scratch ticket	 Small investment, uncertain reward	Mystery box 
 Roulette	 Unpredictable outcome	Breaks 
 Casino bonus	 Incentives to keep engaging	Promotional packs 
 Progressive jackpot	 Big payoff fantasy	Chase cards 
 Near misses	 Psychological triggers	Almost hitting desired card 
 Variable rewards	 Variable ratio reinforcement	Variable rewards 
 High event frequency	 Frequent opportunities to engage	Livestream purchasing 
 Loss chasing	 Chasing losses, recouping	Buying "one more box" 
 Social reinforcement	 Social validation and community	Live chats and streamers 



THE PRODUCTS DIFFER.



THE BEHAVIORAL MECHANICS ARE REMARKABLY SIMILAR.

How A Hobby Became Something More



- Lifelong collector with a passion for sports cards and sneakers
- What began as nostalgia gradually shifted toward chasing hits and ROI
- The hobby became increasingly tied to excitement, escape, and validation
- I didn't realize I was carrying my gambling addiction into collecting





What No One Could See



- From the outside, everything appeared normal
- Behind the scenes, I was hiding debt, shame, and compulsive behavior
- The chase became more important than the cards themselves
- Like many addictions, it slowly took control before I realized what was happening





Turning Pain Into Purpose



HOW GAMBLING & COLLECTING ALMOST DESTROYED MY LIFE



Alyx Effron

Founder, Collectors MD

Support. Accountability. Change.

- Recovery showed me I wasn't alone
- I discovered there were no resources built specifically for collectors
- That realization led to the creation of Collectors MD
- Today, we're helping collectors, families, clinicians, and the hobby itself recognize these risks before more people fall through the cracks



Turning Lived Experience Into Action



From Lived Experience to National Initiative

- 20+ years immersed in hobby environments
- Personally experienced gambling disorder and its migration into collecting
- Founded Collectors MD to address a growing gap in education and support
- Work with clinicians, recovery organizations, hobby businesses, and collectors nationwide
- Growing community reached through peer support, group chats, education, podcasts, and strategic partnerships.



My Experience Wasn't Unique



- The more openly I shared my story, the more collectors began reaching out
- Many described the same patterns: chasing, secrecy, financial harm, shame, and loss of control
- Some had histories of gambling addiction; others had never considered themselves gamblers
- Families, clinicians, and recovery groups often struggled to recognize what was happening
- Different products and language were leading people toward the same consequences
- What I thought was a personal struggle was actually a much larger gap in awareness and support



COLLECTIBLES MARKET

The Collectibles market is now a \$300B + global market projected to exceed \$500B by 2033

Source: Grand View Research

Title: Collectibles Market Size by Category (2023–2033)

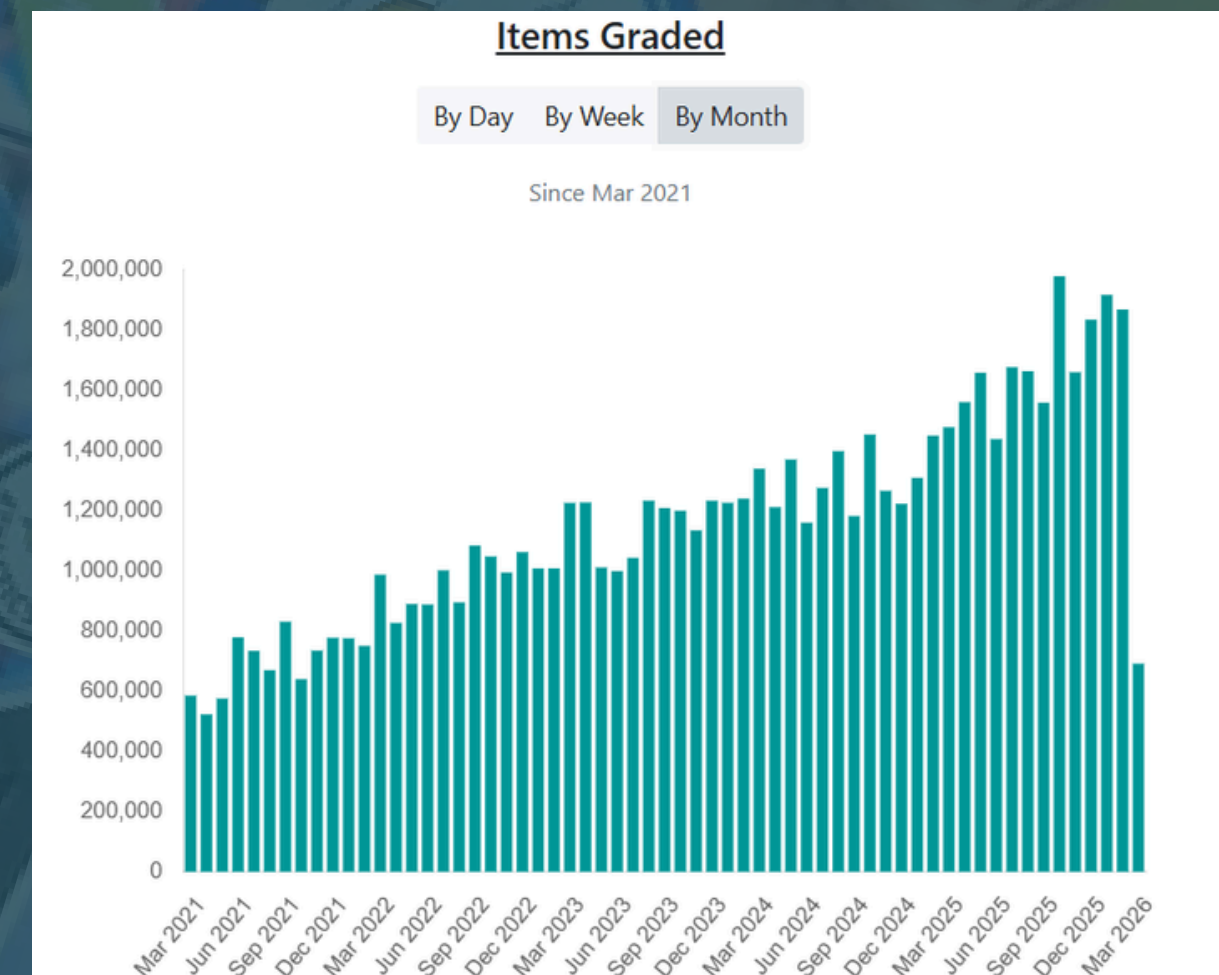
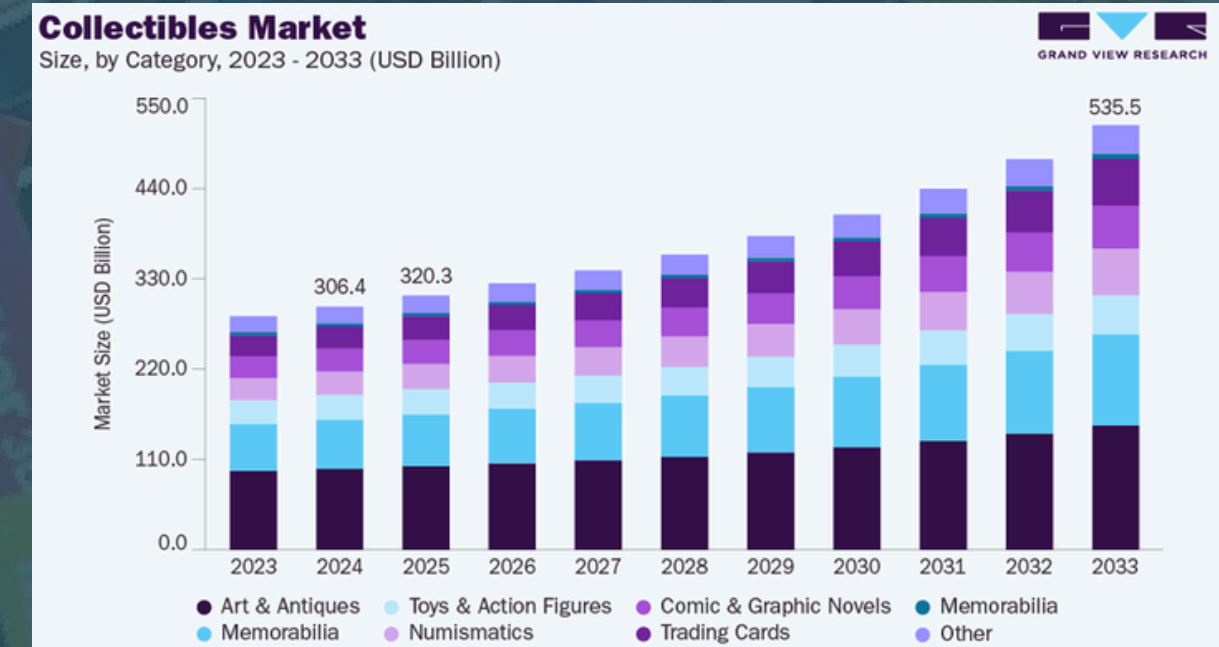
Scope: Global Market Key Numbers:

- 2023: ~\$306.4B
- 2025: ~\$320.3B
- 2033 projection: ~\$535.5B

Categories include:

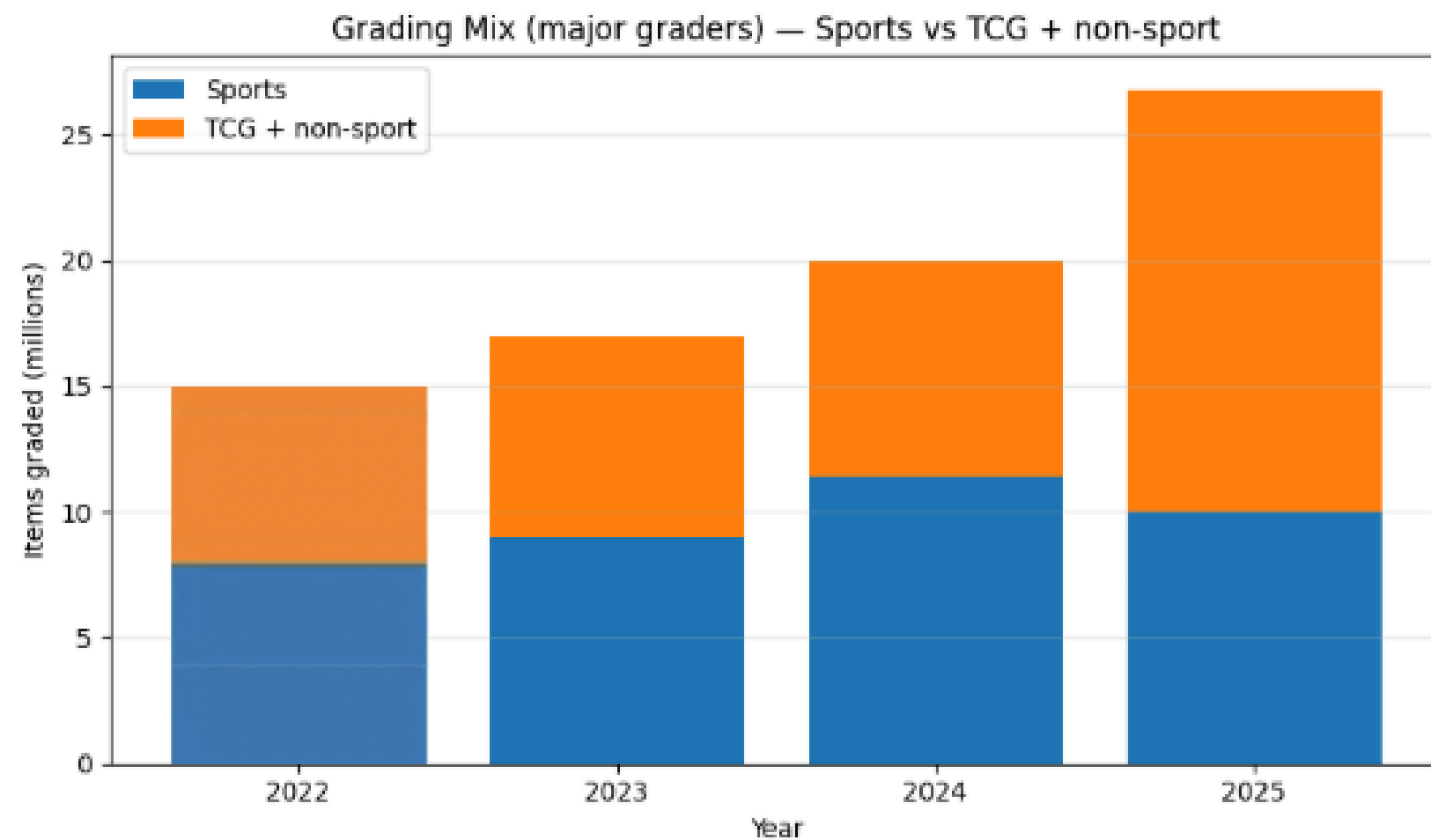
- Art & Antiques
- Toys & Action Figures
- Comic & Graphic Novels
- Numismatics
- Trading Cards
- Memorabilia/Other

Based on Global market size, value not revenue. Includes categories unrelated to gambling adjacent mechanics This is not apples to apples with US gambling revenue.



COLLECTIBLES MARKET

Grading Mix (Major Graders) — Sports Vs TCG + Non-Sport



Collectible Transaction & Demand Signals

- Pokémon cards, sports cards, and other Trading Card Games (TCGs) command high sale prices at auction including rare Pokemon and Magic cards from hundreds of thousands to millions.
- Retail activity now flows heavily through platforms (eBay, Whatnot, StockX), and trading card sales (bundled with sneakers & luxury) are major drivers of growth.



Growth Trends (Volumes)

Most definitive trend metric for hobbyist & investor engagement remains card grading throughput (a proxy for secondary-market interest):

YearTrading Card Grading Volume (Major Graders)

- 2022 ~15M items graded
- 2023 ~17M
- 2024 ~20M
- 2025 ~26.8M

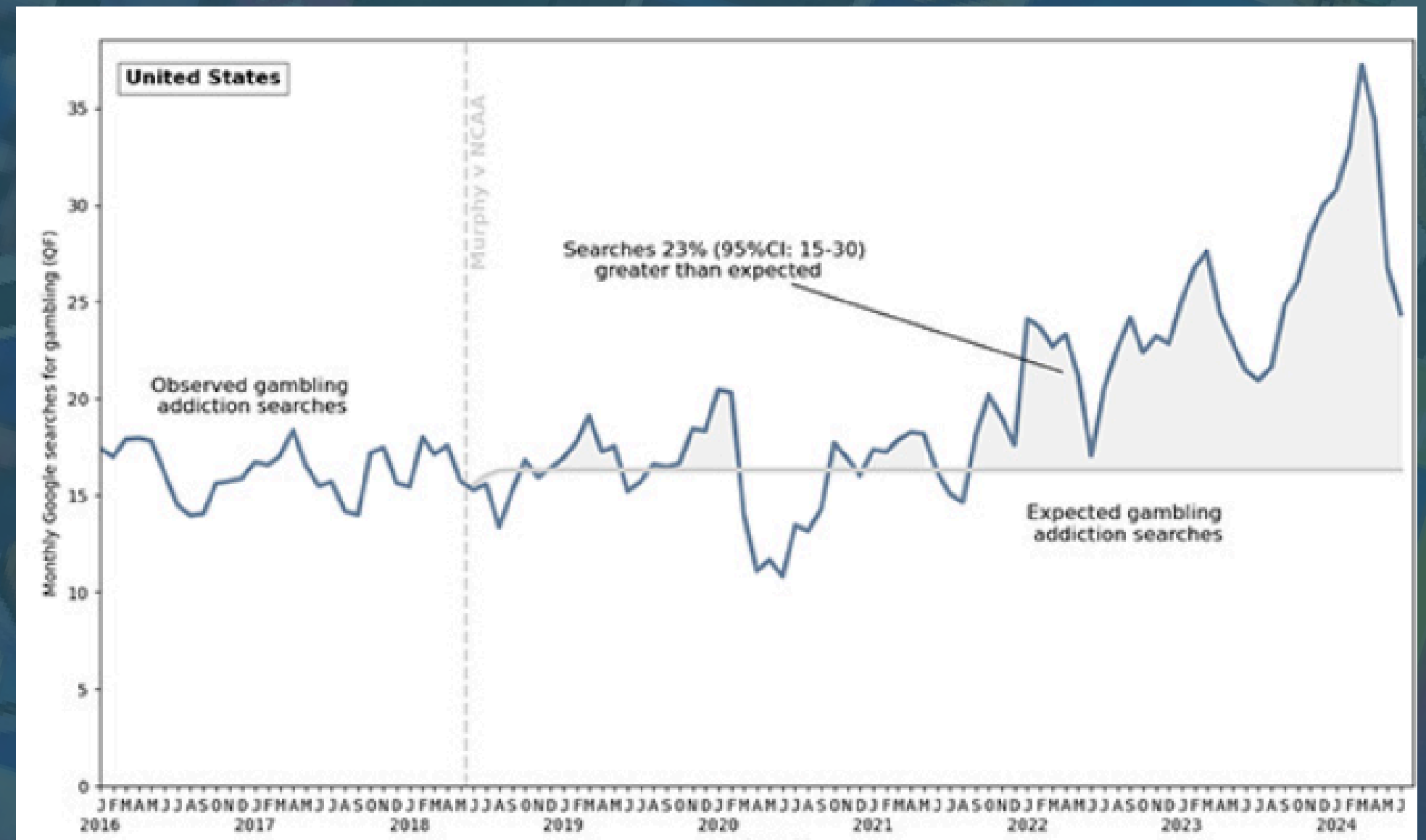
DOUBLE BLIND SPOT

“Despite gambling addiction as a recognized disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it remains largely overlooked in healthcare and public health with no formal ongoing surveillance” - Kevin Yang, M.D.

Record Levels of Gambling Addiction Help Seeking

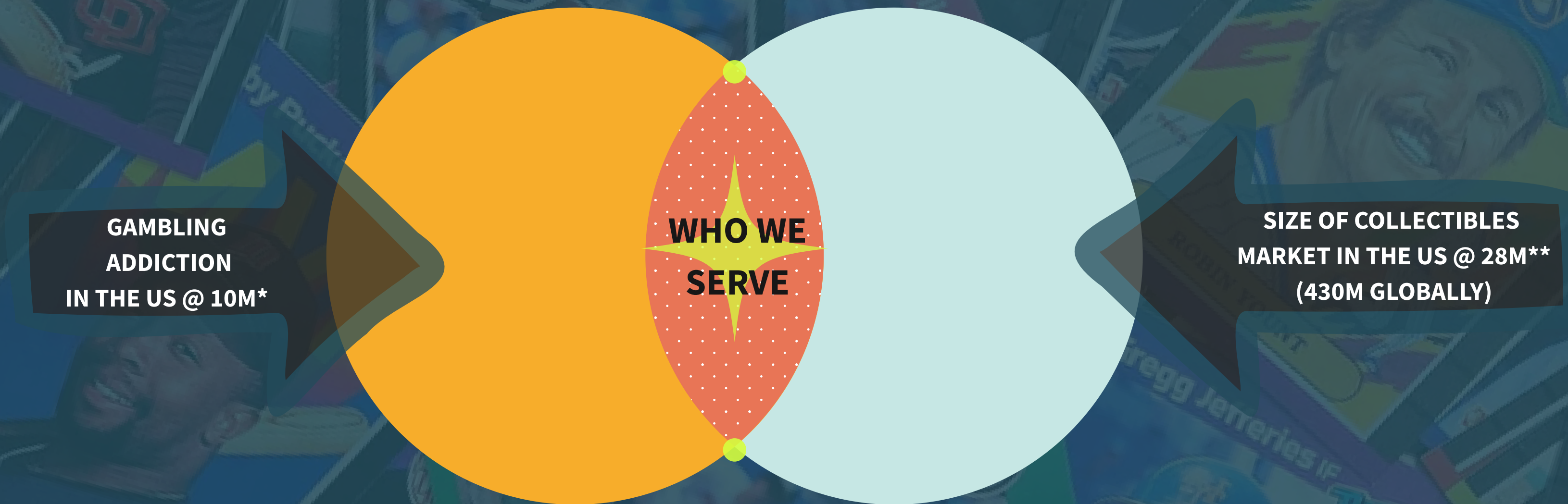
- Roughly 7 million searches for gambling addiction help-seeking nationally, with 180,000 monthly searches at its peak.
- When online sportsbooks became available, searches surged 61%; a significantly greater and more sustained increase that persisted for years.
 - <https://today.ucsd.edu/story/study-reveals-surge-in-gambling-addiction-following-legalization-of-sports-betting>

Collectibles (sports cards) have a strong overlap with both gambling addiction and sports books



HOW MUCH OVERLAP?

We know gambling addiction is a growing problem and the market for collectibles with many gambling style elements is enormous, but we don't know how big the overlap is. However, if we use a conservative estimate of a 5% overlap, we're looking at a potential population of 500,000.



**Estimated number represents population of problem gambling behaviors reported; <https://www.ncpgambling.org/news/national-council-on-problem-gambling-survey-shows-drop-in-problem-gambling-risk-highlights-ongoing-challenges/>*

*** <https://www.kfyrtv.com/2026/01/02/trading-card-popularity-isnt-slowing-down/>*

THE CURRENT STATE

(of the hobby)

SHIFT IN PURPOSE

- From nostalgia-base collecting to chance-driven participation

MAINSTREAM INTEGRATION

- Gambling-like mechanics are now embedded in hobby culture
- Live breaks, chase products, and resale markets drive reward-seeking behavior

RAPID MARKET EXPANSION

- Fast growth with limited transparency and few standardized protections

GAMBLING-LIKE MECHANICS

- Random outcomes, loss-chasing, and “breaking” reflect gambling systems
- Odds and risk are often unclear or undisclosed



THE MODERN HOBBY

2025 Hobby Year in Review: Deals, Scandals, and Record Card Sales

A look back at the biggest stories that shaped the collectibles space in 2025



2025 Hobby Year In Review | Conor B. McGrath

Shill bidding scandals



Shill bidding on online auctions shook collectors trust in 2025 | elula.online

Shill bidding, the act of bidding on your own auction to inflate prices, took center stage in 2025.

RELATED: [Hobby U: What is 'Shill Bidding'?](#)

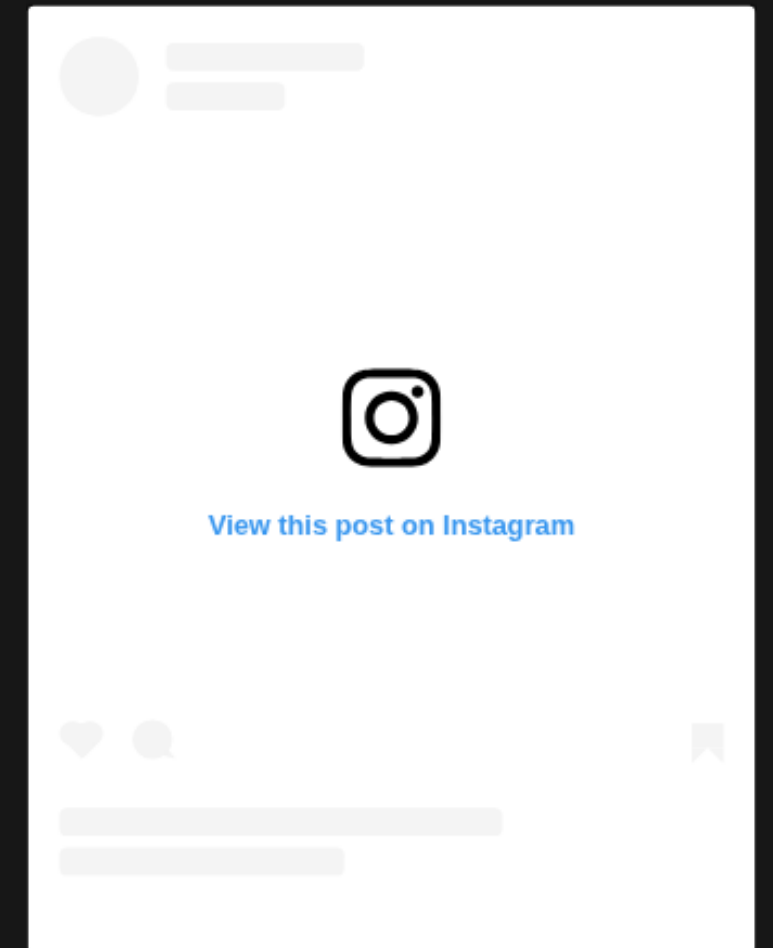
Earlier this year Alt filed a lawsuit against PWCC alleging fraud in multiple card auctions, including those featuring Kobe Bryant and Patrick Mahomes. Alt is asking for nearly \$14 million in damages due to PWCC's fraudulent bids.

Then in October a high-end collector named Patrick Ryan was banned from Fanatics Collect after admitting to bidding on his own auction. This led to an outcry on social media channels and a 160% spike in the topic "Shill bidder" on Google, according to Google Trends data.

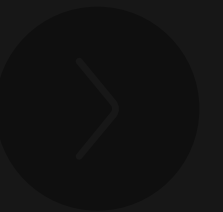
WHAT HARM LOOKS LIKE...



- Bankruptcy
- Relationship conflict
- Debt
- Isolation
- Lying
- Shame
- Depression
- Lost collections
- Loss of identity



These aren't hypothetical. They're stories we've heard over and over.

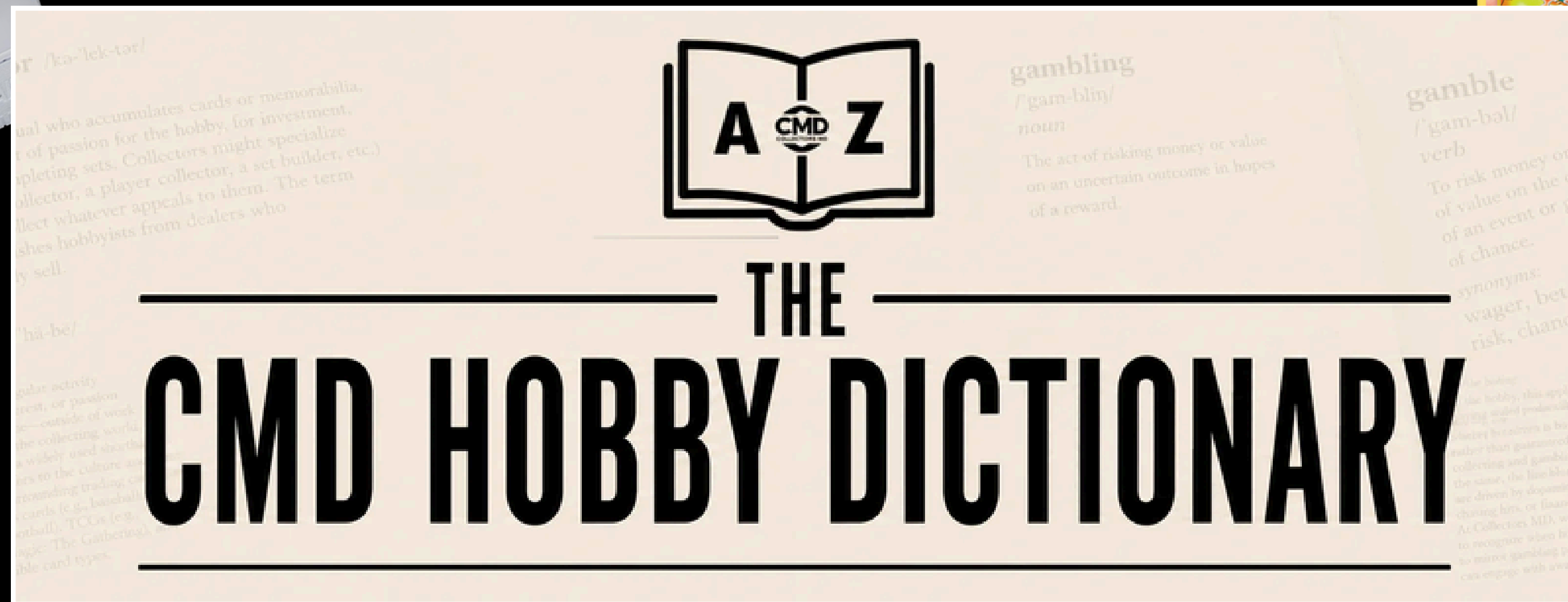




Understanding The Language Of The Hobby

Break | Rip | Wax | Chase Card | Case Hit | Product Hit |
Superfractor | Razz | Filler | Random Team | Pick Your Team |
Short Print | Parallel | Grading | Gem | Comp | Flip | PC | TCG





The CMD Hobby Dictionary.

This isn't just a glossary - it's a tool for reflection. As the line between collecting and compulsion continues to blur, our goal is to promote awareness, provide context, and bring intention back into the hobby. By demystifying commonly used terms and phrases, we hope to give collectors the confidence to participate with clarity and purpose, not confusion or pressure.

Use this dictionary to learn, explore, and check in with your motivations. Collecting should feel meaningful, not overwhelming.





The CARE Framework: A clinical assessment model for gambling addiction through collecting

Do you spend more than you intended?

Have you tried to cut back but found it difficult?

How often do you buy impulsively?

Do you feel driven to buy rather than choosing to buy?

What emotions typically lead you to buy?

How do you feel while opening packs or participating in breaks?

How do you feel afterward?

Does collecting help you escape stress, loneliness, boredom, or anxiety?

Is it the item or the excitement of obtaining it?

How important is the "hit" or finding a rare item?

How much time do you spend watching breaks or thinking about your next purchase?

Do you feel compelled to keep trying after a disappointing outcome?

What are the consequences?

**finances
relationships
work or school
sleep
emotional distress
secrecy
debt
lying
conflict
neglecting responsibilities**



Traditional Treatment Interventions

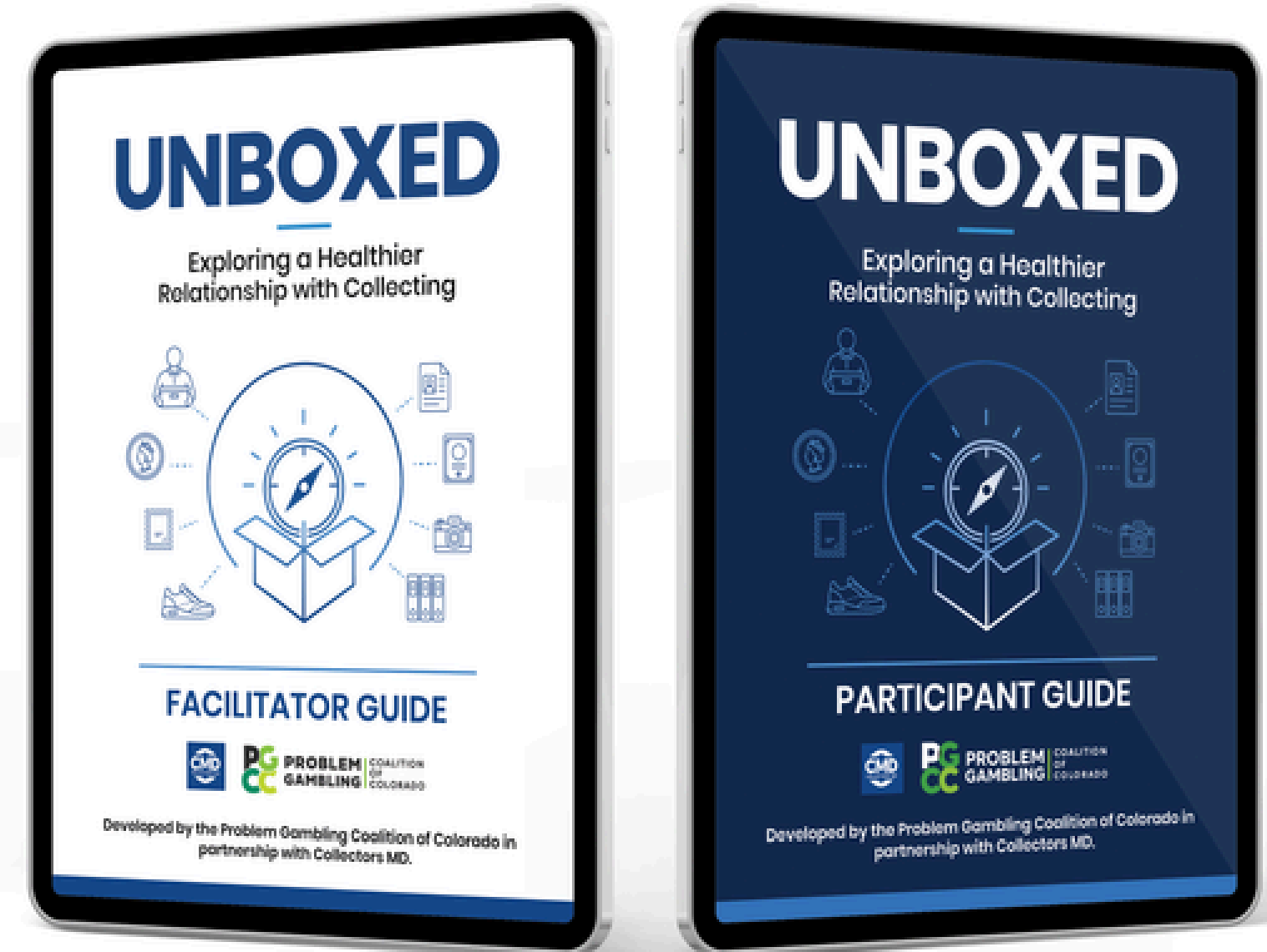
Evidenced based/informed gambling addiction interventions can be used

- **Limit access to money and/or financial accountability**
- **Limit access to the behavior**
- **Restitution**
- **Traditional therapeutic interventions (CBT, MI, DBT, etc.)**
- **Relapse prevention**
- **Psychoeducation/support groups**



Specialized Treatment Intervention

Unboxed: Exploring a Healthier Relationship with Collecting is a free, 10-session educational program designed for individuals whose collecting has become difficult to control or is causing harm. Drawing from evidence-based approaches used in gambling disorder treatment, the program helps participants develop healthier habits and build a more balanced relationship with collecting. **The program includes both a Facilitator Guide and a Participant Guide, making it easy to use in individual, group, or self-directed settings.**



collecting.cogamblerhelp.org



THE MISSING PIECE: PEER SUPPORT



- Recovery doesn't end when therapy ends.
- Most collectors have no community that understands these behaviors.
- Isolation reinforces compulsive collecting.
- Peer support normalizes conversations around shame, relapse, spending, and recovery.
- Community creates accountability and long-term behavior change.





COLLECTORS MD LIFELINE



Education

- Original Daily Content
- Podcasts & Social Impact
- Strategic Partnerships
- Guides & Dictionary

Support

- Peer Support Meetings
- Access To Tools & Resources
- Accountability Partners
- Referral Network

Industry

- Industry Reform Advocacy
- #RipResponsibly
- The Healthy Hobby Initiative
- National Media Coverage

Research & Advocacy

- Clinical Partnerships
- National Petition
- Live Events
- The CMD Foundation



TRADITIONAL GAMBLING RESOURCES...

Collect With Intention. Heal With Support.



THE MODERN HOBBY GUIDE

...**AREN'T
ENOUGH**

Collectors MD is a peer-led support and education initiative focused on the gambling-like behaviors emerging within the rapidly growing, multi-billion-dollar collectibles industry ("the hobby").

As the hobby increasingly mirrors gambling, many of its associated risks fall outside traditional gambling prevention frameworks.

**Are You Struggling With
Hobby Addiction?**



COLLECTORS MD

Support. Accountability. Change.

**Weekly Meetings
Every Wednesday
8PM to 9PM ET**

Virtual, No Camera Required



**Free Tools & Resources
Curated Editorial Content
Dedicated Podcasts
Monthly Newsletters
Strategic Partnerships
Advocacy For Hobby Reform**

**Collect With Intention.
Heal With Support.**

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ADAPTING THE FRAMEWORK

Core Pillars:

- **Peer Support:** weekly meetings + group chats
- **Content:** editorial, video/audio + tools & resources
- **Partnerships & Referral Network:** connections with recovery organizations, therapists, and platforms.

Who We Serve Now:

- **Demographics:** 90:10 M/F, A21-55, gambling-adjacent, heavily engaged in breaks, live apps, sports-related content
- **How People Currently Find Us:** Social media (IG, Facebook, X, Reddit), podcasts (our own & shoutouts/mentions), word-of-mouth, Collectors MD Flyer

OUR RECOVERY & SUPPORT PARTNERS

We believe raising awareness grows with education and collaboration.

That's why we work alongside recovery organizations, clinicians, and advocacy groups who share our commitment to supporting individuals and families affected by gambling-adjacent behaviors within the hobby by increasing awareness, education, and access to resources.

- 800-GAMBLER
- Ascent Wellness Group
- Better Way of Miami
- Birches Health
- Evive
- Gamban
- GamFin
- New York Council on Problem Gambling (NYCPG)
- NewForm
- North Jersey Recovery Center
- ODAAT Gambling Awareness
- Open Recovery
- Parents Standing Together
- The Phoenix
- The Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado
- Right Choice Recovery
- SOS for Addictions
- Stop Predatory Gambling
- Zepf Center
- Collectors MD Referral Network

Partnerships are expanding and getting more diverse. CMD positioned as Connector not Competitor.

For the most current list of our recovery partners, check out our website at www.collectorsmd.com

Where Do We Go From Here?

For Clinicians:

- ✓ Learn the hobby
- ✓ Ask better questions
- ✓ Screen for collecting behaviors
- ✓ Refer to peer support

For Organizations:

- ✓ Partner with CMD
- ✓ Bring education to your state
- ✓ Share tools & resources
- ✓ Integrate responsible messaging



For The Hobby:

- ✓ Normalize conversations
- ✓ Promote #RipResponsibly
- ✓ Build healthier environments
- ✓ Collect with intention

For Individuals:

- ✓ Sign up for peer support
- ✓ Join a group chat
- ✓ Link with an accountability partner
- ✓ Sign the petition

KEEP CONNECTED WITH US



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