



# The Street Casino

*Simon Harding*

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Gang violence is on the increase in certain neighbourhoods. There is an urgent need for a fresh perspective that offers insight into gang structure, organisation and offending behaviour to explain this increase. Using the findings from an extensive ethnographic study of local residents, professionals and gang members in south London, and drawing on his vast experience and knowledge of the field, Simon Harding proposes a unique theoretical perspective on survival in violent street gangs. He applies Bourdieu's principles of social field analysis and habitus to gangs, establishing them as a social arena of competition where actors struggle for distinction and survival, striving to become 'players in the game' in the 'casino of life'. Success is determined by accruing and retaining playing chips – street capital. Harding's dramatic and compelling insights depict gang life as one of constant flux, where players jostle for position, reputation, status and distinction. This perspective offers new evidence to the field that will help academics, students, practitioners and policy makers to understand the dynamics of gang behaviour and the associated risks of violence and offending. Simon Harding is currently a senior lecturer in criminology at Middlesex University, UK. He draws on 25 years of experience in research, public policy and project delivery as a crime reduction and community safety practitioner.

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