



Eleanor Rathbone Social Justice Public Lecture Series 2024-25

Masculinity, capitalism and violence: Supporting boys and young men to navigate toxic narratives

Dr Laura Zahra McDonald, ConnectFutures

Wednesday 11 June 2025, 17:30–19:30

School of Law and Social Justice Events Space - ([Campus Map](#))



*Eleanor Florence Rathbone, Social and Political Reformer
(12 May 1872 – 2 January 1946)*

Increasing economic uncertainty and shifting social norms – especially in online social spaces – mean that young people are navigating complex and highly dynamic intersections of gender, identity, and structural inequality. Within this, research and practitioner experiences of working with children and adolescents is showing that engagement with exclusionary and harmful perspectives – such as sexism, misogyny, racial prejudice, homophobia and transphobia – is becoming increasingly prevalent.

What are the underlying cultural, political and technological factors that help us understand this problem? Why is it that some boys and young men are attracted to the 'manosphere'? What are the implications for human relationships and wider society of the adoption and reproduction of misogynistic ideas and beliefs?



This lecture explores how boys and young men are specifically impacted, with economic and social contexts shaping young men's vulnerabilities to, and justifications for, engagement with toxic online narratives around masculinity, alongside hustle culture, respect and violence. It examines how these narratives influence both digital spaces and offline social harms, including involvement in criminal activities such as drug dealing and fraud.

The discussion will critically assess how these dynamics contribute to the erosion of the social contract, as young men respond to perceived exclusion and marginalization through alternative, and often harmful, pathways to status and security. By bridging academic research with real-world practice, this session highlights key implications for educators, practitioners, and policymakers working to counter these challenges and foster more positive, inclusive models of masculinity, status and belonging.

Dr Laura Zahra McDonald (PhD) is a founding Director of ConnectFutures, an independent civil society organisation based in the UK, that works with young people, communities and professionals to prevent violence, extremism and exploitation.