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PRESS RELEASE – Two IIRHD emotion specialists earn doctorates

Shame and guilt: a Luxembourg institute now has two PhD graduates whose research sheds light on these social emotions

Dr Georgios Bouronikos, founder and Managing Director of IIRHD, and Dr Leila Abid, an associate expert at the Institute, have earned PhDs from Manchester Metropolitan University. Their research, conducted across several countries and continents, explores how shame and guilt are expressed.

LUXEMBOURG, 17 November 2026 – How do shame and guilt show up in our interactions?

Two members of the Luxembourg institute, which has specialised in human development since 2008, explored this question. This marks an important step in the development of scientific approaches to behaviour and emotions for assessing credibility and truthfulness.

Shame and guilt: two studies to understand them

Shame and guilt are distinct emotions that people often confuse. Shame prompts people to hide, while guilt prompts them to make amends.

The two researchers asked whether people express these emotions differently across sociocultural contexts.

The studies are among the first attempts to identify these two emotions using a specific system for coding non/verbal cues. The researchers conducted interviews in three culturally distinct countries: South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and Luxembourg. The shame study also included Colombia and Mongolia.

The findings may offer new perspectives for a range of professional settings, including truthfulness and credibility assessment, interviewing, investigations, negotiations, coaching, therapy and leadership.

Next up: jealousy

The next study is already under way. Theodora Bouronikou, an IIRHD associate and behaviour analysis specialist, is also pursuing a PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is studying verbal and non-verbal indicators of jealousy in six national versions of the reality TV show *Love Island*: Greece, Germany, France, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. This project adds a third social emotion to the Institute's research scope.

What this means in practice

For executives, negotiators, coaches and investigators, the implications are practical: missing an emotion means missing information. Undetected shame or guilt can distort a negotiation, weaken a team or conceal a warning sign. The two studies now inform IIRHD's training programmes leading to certification and its behavioural due diligence work for executives and boards of directors.

True to its motto, 'Lead with heart and science', the Institute uses research to give decision-makers a practical advantage.

About IIRHD

The International Institute for Research in Human Development (IIRHD) is registered in Luxembourg. It is certified to ISO 9001:2015 and its training programmes are aligned with ISO/IEC 17024.

The Institute offers ICF-accredited coaching programmes and training leading to certification in human development, emotional intelligence, and the analysis of behaviour and human factors. For more information, visit www.iirhd.com

About Dr Georgios Bouronikos

Worldwide, Dr Georgios Bouronikos shares his expertise through teaching and advises leading figures in politics and finance, as well as institutions, international organisations and multinational groups.

As the founder and Managing Director of IIRHD, he holds a PhD on verbal and non-verbal indicators of shame and an MSc in Communication, Behaviour & Credibility Analysis, both from Manchester Metropolitan University. He also holds an MA in political and social sciences from the University of Lausanne and a Postgraduate Diploma in international relations from the University of Birmingham. He is a certified trainer in emotion management and credibility assessment using Paul Ekman's methods.

An ICF Master Certified Coach (MCC), he has over 30 years of experience as an educator and senior trainer and has taught at the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne since 2012. He is an associate member of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) and a member of the Forbes Coaches Council. He works in French, English and Greek.

About Dr Leila Abid

An IIRHD associate expert, she holds a PhD on verbal and non-verbal indicators of guilt and an MSc in Communication, Behaviour & Credibility Analysis, both from Manchester Metropolitan University, as well as an MA in human resources from Hawaii Pacific University. She is certified in emotion management and credibility assessment using Paul Ekman's methods.

An ICF Professional Certified Coach (PCC), she has more than 20 years of professional experience in human resources and career guidance.

About Theodora Bouronikou

Theodora Bouronikou is an IIRHD associate expert and PhD candidate. She holds an MSc in Communication, Behaviour & Credibility Analysis from Manchester Metropolitan University. She focuses her research on social emotions, particularly romantic jealousy.

Notes to editors

[1] Dr Georgios Bouronikos, '*Identifying shame indicators through verbal and non-verbal behavioural responses*', PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, doctorate awarded on 13 August 2026.

[2] Dr Leila Abid, '*A Multimodal Investigation of Guilt*', PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, doctorate awarded on 9 July 2026.

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