Holly E. A. Sutherland

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Research Profile

British Academy Early Career Researcher Fellow and Junior Research Fellow at Clare College, Cambridge. I work at the intersection of applied linguistics and social psychology, using mixed methods approaches to understand how autistic people (including those with high support needs) socialise and communicate. My work informed the Cabinet Office's 2020 National Risk Register. I regularly deliver autism and neurodiversity training to parents, professionals, and services, both in the UK and internationally.

Employment

British Academy Early Career Researcher Fellow, Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge 2026–29

Junior Research Fellow, Clare College, University of Cambridge 2026–29

Independent fellowship, delivering a mixed methods research programme on autistic conceptualisations of (dis)honesty. Research is planned to include an advisory panel, interviews/focus groups, corpus linguistics/NLP, and quantitative online studies using vignette methods. Planned outputs include academic papers and presentations, a one-day conference on linguistics and neurodiversity, and advisory materials for parents/carers about autism and (dis)honesty.

Research Associate, Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge 2024–26

Postdoctoral Research Affiliate, Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge 2024–26

Named researcher on a Templeton-funded project (project leader: Prof. Leidenhag), in collaboration with the Faculty of Divinity (project co-PIs: Prof. Katsos and Prof. Weiss), to develop and validate a novel measure of linguistic creativity, the Alternative Interpretations Task (AIT), based on midrash (a form of Jewish biblical exegesis). Developed an LLM-based scoring method, including benchmarking of LLM performance for validation. Curated a large dataset and codebase for open-access publication, and produced publications of findings (in preparation/under review).

EDI Intern, Development & Alumni, University of Edinburgh 2023–24

Supported the planning and delivery of initiatives to attract, develop, and retain a diverse staff group, and implemented recommendations to strengthen equality, diversity, and inclusion in the office.

Research Assistant, Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh 2020–21

Managed a team of 10 undergraduate medical students as research assistants on a study of Medical School staff and student experiences of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Co-designed online surveys, conducted semi-structured interviews, and analysed data using thematic analysis, including developing a coding scheme. Produced a literature review on student equality, diversity, and inclusion in university medical departments.

Research Assistant, Winton Centre, University of Cambridge 2019–20
Ran two 1,000+ participant online studies assessing risk matrix designs for improved communication of risk. Produced a publication of findings, including recommendations for a novel risk matrix design. This was used by the Cabinet Office in the 2020 UK National Risk Register. Also produced a systematic literature review on communication of quality of scientific evidence to the public; and assisted with public engagement activities including talks and workshops.

Research Assistant, Department of Informatics, University of Sussex 2018–19
Developed cognitive profiling measures of individual differences in diagram comprehension, deployed via online survey, and a novel diagram taxonomy. Assisted development of a behavioural coding scheme for videos of diagram production, and produced a literature review on individual differences in diagram comprehension.

Education

Clinical Brain Sciences, PhD, University of Edinburgh 2020–25
4-year PhD funded by Medical Research Scotland and Scottish Autism. Thesis title: "'The same but entirely different': reframing autistic social communicative (dys)function through mixed methods research". Supervised by Prof. Fletcher-Watson and Dr. Crompton (University of Edinburgh) and Dr. Long (Scottish Autism). Examined by Prof. Pickersgill and Dr. Pearson.

Theoretical & Applied Linguistics, MPhil (Distinction), University of Cambridge 2017–18
Thesis title: "The link between executive functioning deficits and impaired metaphor comprehension in high-functioning autistic spectrum disorders". Supervised by Prof. Katsos.

Linguistics, BA Hons (1st), University College London 2014–17
Thesis title: "Impaired metaphor comprehension in individuals with autistic spectrum disorder as symptom of impaired interhemispheric coordination and functional connectivity". Supervised by Prof. Breheny.

Grants & Funding

British Academy, Early Career Researcher Fellowship £337,493 2026–29
Autistic conceptualisations of lying: A mixed methods study of the (dis)honesty of non-literal language and social talk (PFSS26\260091). fEC: £474,438.

Clare College, Junior Research Fellowship £5,000 2026–29
Awarded as a stipendiary fellowship (£110,000); held alongside British Academy fellowship as non-stipendiary (research/travel funding only).

Medical Research Scotland, PhD studentship £134,199 2020–24
Reducing health inequalities for autistic people by understanding interactional rapport (PhD-50092-2019). With Scottish Autism as an external partner organisation and funding contributor.

Awards & Prizes

- Travel award, INSAR ($1,500) 2024

Publications

Journal articles

- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Axbey, H., Sharp, M., Ropar, D., Fletcher-Watson, S., Crompton, C.J. (2026). How successfully do autistic and non-autistic raters guess the diagnostic status of autistic and non-autistic people having conversations? *Neurodiversity*, in press.
- Tan, D.W., Blasko, G., Girolamo, T., Grant, A., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Ryan, J., Kapp, S.K., Jaswal, V.K. (2026). Making space for Autistic people with 'complex support needs': Recommendations for inclusive research practices. *Autism in Adulthood*, advance online publication.
- Donald, S.*, **Sutherland, H.E.A.***, Fletcher-Watson, S. (2026). Doing research in services for autistic people with complex support needs: Challenges and considerations based on UK experiences. *Autism*, *30*(1), 3-8. [*Joint first authors]
- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Crompton, C.J., Long, J., Fletcher-Watson, S. (2025). 'A difference in typical values': autistic perspectives on autistic social communication. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, *27*(1), 313-329.
- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Crompton, C.J., Long, J., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2025). 'Read My Lips, Not My Body': A Thematic Analysis of Autistic People's Social Communication Preferences, Experiences, and Expectations. *Neurodiversity*, 3.
- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Recchia, G., Dryhurst, S., & Freeman, A.L. (2022). How People Understand Risk Matrices, and How Matrix Design Can Improve their Use: Findings from Randomized Controlled Studies. *Risk Analysis*, *42*(5), 1023-1041.

Book chapters

- **Sutherland, H.E.A.** The Problem of the Double Empathy Problem: including autistic people with profound intellectual disability in the relational turn. In N. Redmore (Ed.), *Autism & Profound Intellectual Disabilities: Searching for Inclusion for Society's Most Marginalised Group*. Palgrave Macmillan. *In preparation.*

In preparation & under review

- McKinney, A., Keating, C.T., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Field, R., & Lei, J. Losing nuance in camouflaging research: the unintended harms for research, clinical practice, and public discourse. *Under review.*
- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Fletcher-Watson, S., Crompton, C.J., Lane, R., Long, J. An autistic ethnography of two social care services for autistic adults with complex support needs. *In preparation.*
- Leigh, R., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Katsos, N., Weiss, D. The Myth of Midrashic Exceptionalism: Rabbinic Interpretation, Experimental Linguistics, and Everyday Human Language-Processing. *In preparation*.

Peer-reviewed conference proceedings

- Stockdill, A., Raggi, D., Jamnik, M., Garcia, G.G., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Cheng, P.C.H., & Sarkar, A. (2020). Correspondence-based analogies for choosing problem representations. In *2020 IEEE Symposium on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing (VL/HCC)* (pp. 1-5). IEEE.
- Raggi, D., Stockdill, A., Jamnik, M., Garcia, G.G., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, & Cheng, P.C.H. (2020). Dissecting representations. In *International Conference on Theory and Application of Diagrams* (pp. 144-152). Springer, Cham.
- Stockdill, A., Raggi, D., Jamnik, M., Garcia, G.G., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Cheng, P.C.H., & Sarkar, A. (2020). Cross-domain Correspondences for Explainable Recommendations. In *ExSS-ATEC@IUI*.
- Cheng, P.C.-H., Garcia, G.G., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Raggi, D., Stockdill, A. & Jamnik, M. (2019). Elucidating the Cognitive Anatomy of Representation Systems. In *CogSci*.

- Raggi, D., Stockdill, A., Jamnik, M., Garcia, G.G., **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, & Cheng, P.C.H. (2019). Inspection and selection of representations. In *International Conference on Intelligent Computer Mathematics* (pp. 227-242). Springer, Cham.

Other writing

- **Sutherland, H.E.A.**, Zahir, R., McKinney, A. (2024). It takes all kinds of minds: organising an accessible conference. *The Psychologist,* 26-27.

Talks & Presentations

Invited talks

- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2026, December). *What can neurodiversity tell us about autistic people with high support needs?* Oxford Neurodiversity Special Interest Group, online.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, November). *Doing ethnographic research with autistic people with high support needs.* Methods@Manchester, University of Manchester, Manchester, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, September). *Human-AI teaming: Whose voices are missing?* Centre for Assuring Autonomy Symposium, York, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, May). *"Communicatively resourceful, interpretatively curious": (mis)communications in social care settings for autistic people with high support needs.* As part of the panel *Neurodivergence-Affirming and Inclusive Research Practices for Autistic People with High Support Needs*. International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting, Seattle, USA.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, January). *Ethnography, neurodiversity, and high support needs.* Methods North West Seminar, University of Manchester, online.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2024, September). *Friendships, fear, and (double) empathy.* Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2024, April). *Social communication and interaction: what autistic people want you to know*. College of Psychiatrists of Ireland Spring Conference, Mullingar, Republic of Ireland.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2023, March). *Peer communication amongst neurodivergent people*. Edinburgh Psychiatry Society Neurodiversity Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2023, March). *Whose 'support' is it anyway? A critical look at supportive environments*. It Takes All Kinds Of Minds Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2022). *'I was brought up in an NT-speaking household': autistic perspectives on autistic communication.* British Psychological Society Seminar Series on Double Empathy and Autism, online.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2021, November). *Neurodiversity: similarities vs. differences panel discussion.* Salvesen Annual Lecture, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Conference & seminar talks

- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2026, June). *On the "cultural metaphor" and neurodiversity.* Listening Beyond Words, Leeds, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A., Weiss, D., Leigh, R., Katsos, N. (2026, June). *God, Language, and Linguistic Creativity*. Cambridge Linguistics Forum, Cambridge, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, September). *The double empathy problem in support services for autistic people with high support needs: a UK-based ethnographic study.* Autism Europe Congress, Dublin, Republic of Ireland.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, January). *An ethnographic exploration of cross-neurotype socialising and communication in a high support needs context*. Autism ResearCH seminar series, King's College London, online.

- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2024, September). *Friendships, fear, and (double) empathy*. Learning Disabilities and Autism Group seminar series, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A., Axbey, H., Sharp, M., Ropar, D., Fletcher-Watson, S., Crompton, C.J. (2024, June). *How does social context affect observers' ability to identify autism in others?* Neurodevelopment Annual Seminar, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A., Crompton, C.J., Long, J., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2023, August). *"Read my lips, not my body": the joys and challenges of autistic social communication*. Scottish Autism Research Group Conference, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2023, April). *Social communication in autism: the autistic perspective*. Centre for Autism Research Science Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2022, June). *The key is acceptance: Exploring autistic adults' social communicative wants, needs, and expectations.* Autism ResearCH Showcase, King's College London, London, England.

Plus ten poster presentations at the International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting (2022, 2023, 2024, 2026), the Autism-Europe International Congress (2022), and the Autistica Research Festival (2022).

Public engagement talks

- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2026, March). *Understanding autistic social communication, from autistic people's perspective.* GRRAND UCL x Autism Central, online.
- Weiss, D., Sutherland, H.E.A., Reuven, L., Katsos, N. (2025, September). *God, Midrash, and Linguistic Creativity.* Alumni Festival, Cambridge, England.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2025, March). *What is neuro-affirming practice?* National Autistic Society Annual Conference, online.
- Sutherland, H.E.A. (2023, October). *Autistic perspectives on autistic communication.* Scottish Autism Annual Conference, online.

Knowledge Exchange & Practitioner Training

- *Teaching for Every Mind: Embracing Neurodiversity in the Classroom*. (2025, November). Practitioner training provided for Middletown Centre for Autism, Middletown, Northern Ireland.
- *Neuro-affirming support for autistic people with high support needs: What's different?* (2025, April). Training provided for Middletown Centre for Autism, online.
- *Neuro-affirming support for autistic people: Some basic principles*. (2025, April). Training provided for Middletown Centre for Autism, online.
- *How does the double empathy problem impact care/support services for autistic people with high support needs?* (2025, March). Training provided for the Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, online.
- *Talking to autistic people: what autistic people want you to know.* (2023, November). Professional training provided for Euregionaal Congresburo, online.
- *Neuro-affirming support and intellectual disability: where do we start?*. (2023, October). Training provided for the Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, online.
- *What's the risk? A new risk matrix design for improved comprehension.* (2022, November). Knowledge exchange event co-hosted with R. Protopopescu for the University of Cambridge's Winton Centre Finale, London, England.
- *Communicating Benefits and Risks in Health Information.* (2019, March). Knowledge exchange workshop co-hosted with L. Finikarides for Patient Information Forum's Health Literacy Training Workshop, London, England.

Teaching & Administration

Teaching

- Guest lecturer, Autism Studies MA, Mary Immaculate College *(scheduled)* 2027
- Guest lecturer, Autism and Neurodevelopmental Conditions Research MSc, University of Stirling 2024
- Undergraduate tutor, Medicine MBChB, University of Edinburgh 2023–24

Administration

- Conference organisation team member, XPrag conference 2025
- Administrative intern, ITAKOM conference 2023
- Cohort representative, Medical Research Scotland doctoral students 2022–24

Key Research Skills

Qualitative methods: interview and focus group design; participant observation and ethnographic methods; thematic, framework, and grounded theory analysis.

Quantitative and computational methods: online and in-person surveys and experiments; developing novel measures; cognitive testing; linear modelling; corpus linguistics and NLP; LLM-based scoring and benchmarking.

Inclusive and open research: participatory research, advisory boards, and community engagement; working with autistic people with high support needs; preregistration; open data and code; systematic literature reviews.

Proficient with R and RStudio, Git and GitHub, LLM access via API, Qualtrics, NVivo; familiar with E-Prime, Stata.