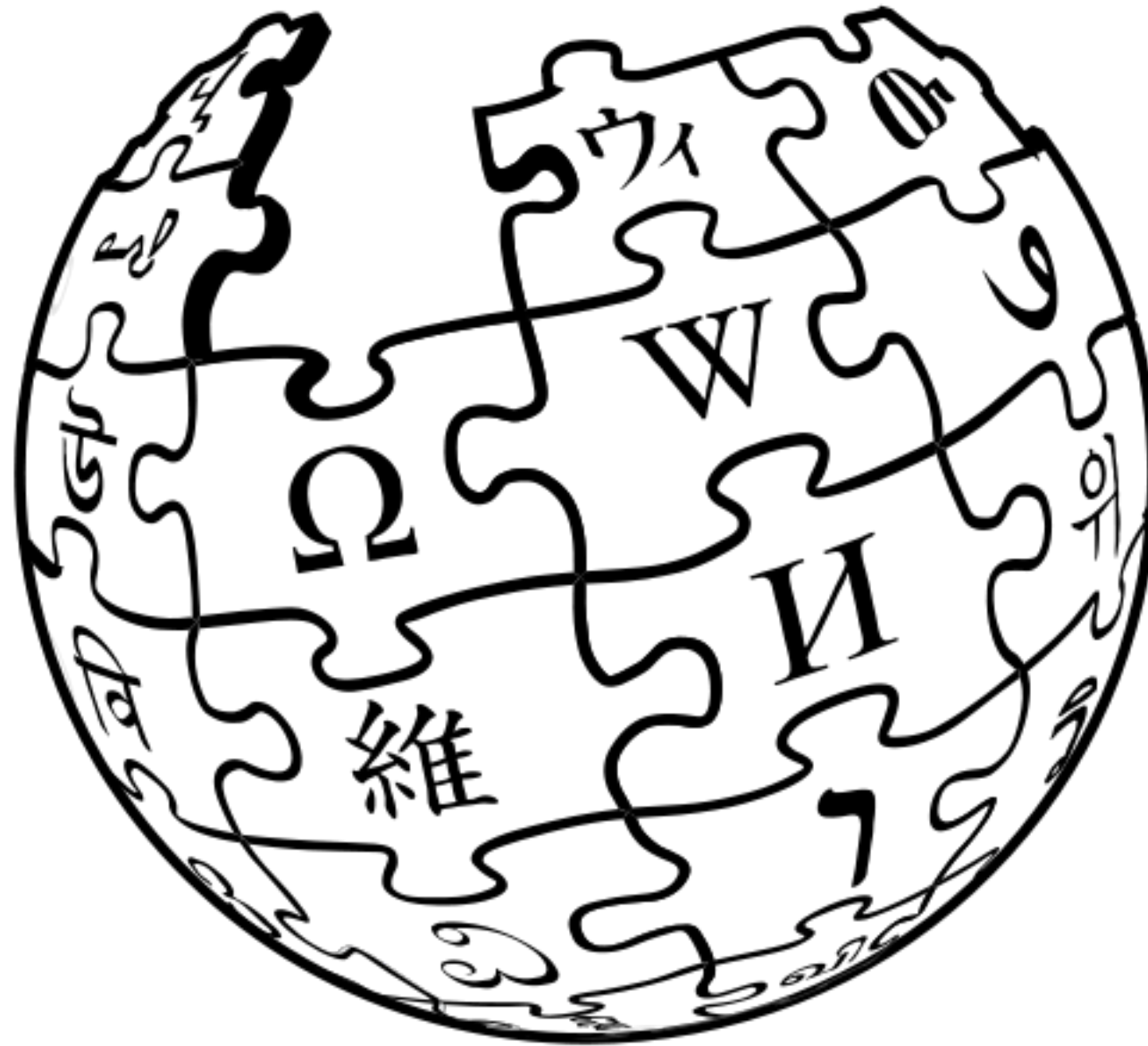# Why do people edit Wikipedia?

Maryana Pinchuk, Steven Walling
Special thanks to the Wikimedia Storytellers and Howie Fung

The prevailing stereotypes

Altruist

Nerd

Troll

Hasn't this been answered already?

We reviewed all peer reviewed papers we could find on this topic, published from 2005-2011, and found no clear answers.

[[Wikipedia:Wikipedians]] and [[Community of Wikipedia]] basically just recap those papers.

So, in a word: **no**.

Interview Round 1

- 23 interviews with very active and experienced Wikipedians

- Collected by the Wikimedia Storytellers as part of the annual fundraiser

Interview Round 2

- 11 interviews with English Wikipedians who had just made their 1,000th edit

- Collected by Maryana Pinchuk as part of an experiment in thanking new contributors

How we studied this

A mixed method analysis:

First, qualitative coding of interviews by multiple people, looking for statements about motivation.

Next, rough quantitative measurement of code data.

Main themes

- Autonomy

- The core mission

- Topical interest

- Audience

- Perfectionism

- Challenge

- Self-expression

- Responsibility

- Addiction

- Recognition

Autonomy

" It's good to be allowed to do what you like. "

" I think it's really beautiful that people can do what they want (within reason, of course). "

The core mission

" I prefer that knowledge should be available to all, knowledge should not be restricted, knowledge should be free for all. "

Topical interest

"It was a pleasure because I was learning new things about the area I like."

Audience

" It makes me feel like my edits might actually be used by somebody. "

" I don't know what I could do that could have that much popularity, that could have that many people reading my writing. "

Perfectionism

" I think it can never be too good. "

" I just feel like I kind of have to. Like, when I see an article that, let's say the grammar or the vocabulary or spelling are written rather poorly, I have to correct it somehow, or any spelling errors, I have to correct them. "

Challenge

" I just went and put my head down
and just figured it out for myself "

" I do it because it's almost like mountain climbing
for me, it's the challenge. I do it because it's there. "

Self-expression

" this is my voice "

" I find it to be a great outlet personally "

Responsibility

" I have to play my part in keeping the Wikipedia pages from being abused. "
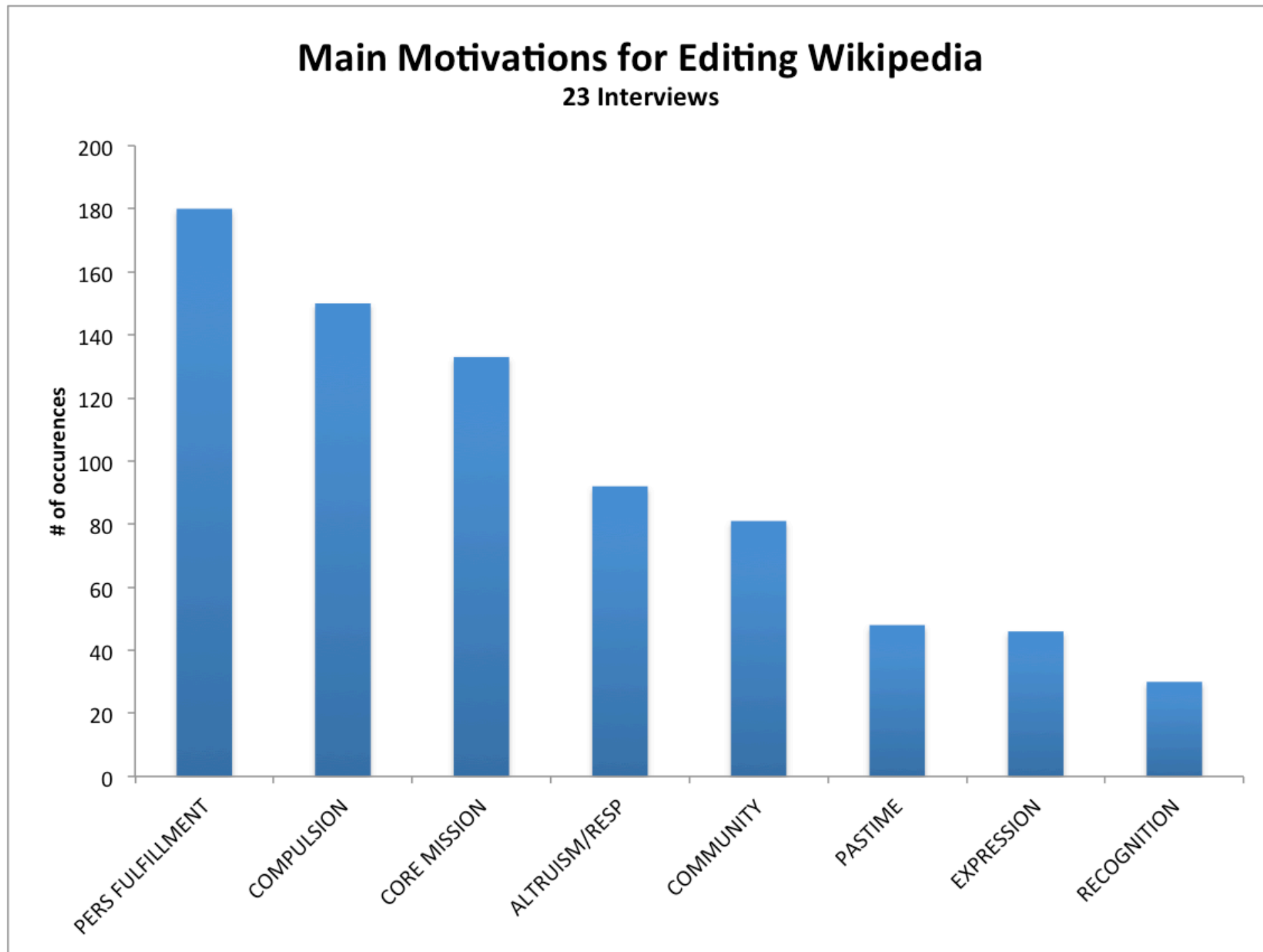
Addiction

"I just got hooked."

"I keep telling myself I'll cut back."

Recognition

> " It's nice to be appreciated. "

> " My favorite part about Wikipedia is the constructive attitude. When you make a mistake, people tell you how to fix it. And when you do a good job, you're praised. "

In conclusion

Main Motivations for Editing Wikipedia
23 Interviews

What do Wikipedians get out of editing?

A lot, actually.

What this means for the Foundation

We need to build features with a spectrum of motivations in mind. We can't assume that the Wikimedia mission and what users need are the same.

What this means for the community

We need to recognize that people aren't in this to be martyrs. If we can't make a community that is fun to be a part of, no one will stick around.

What this means for Wikipedia's image

When we tell the story of Wikipedia to the world, we need to make room for the idea that editing is something that appeals to a wide variety of people.