



Those who justify wrongdoings violate norms more consistently

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1. Do ambiguous norms moderate moral licensing?

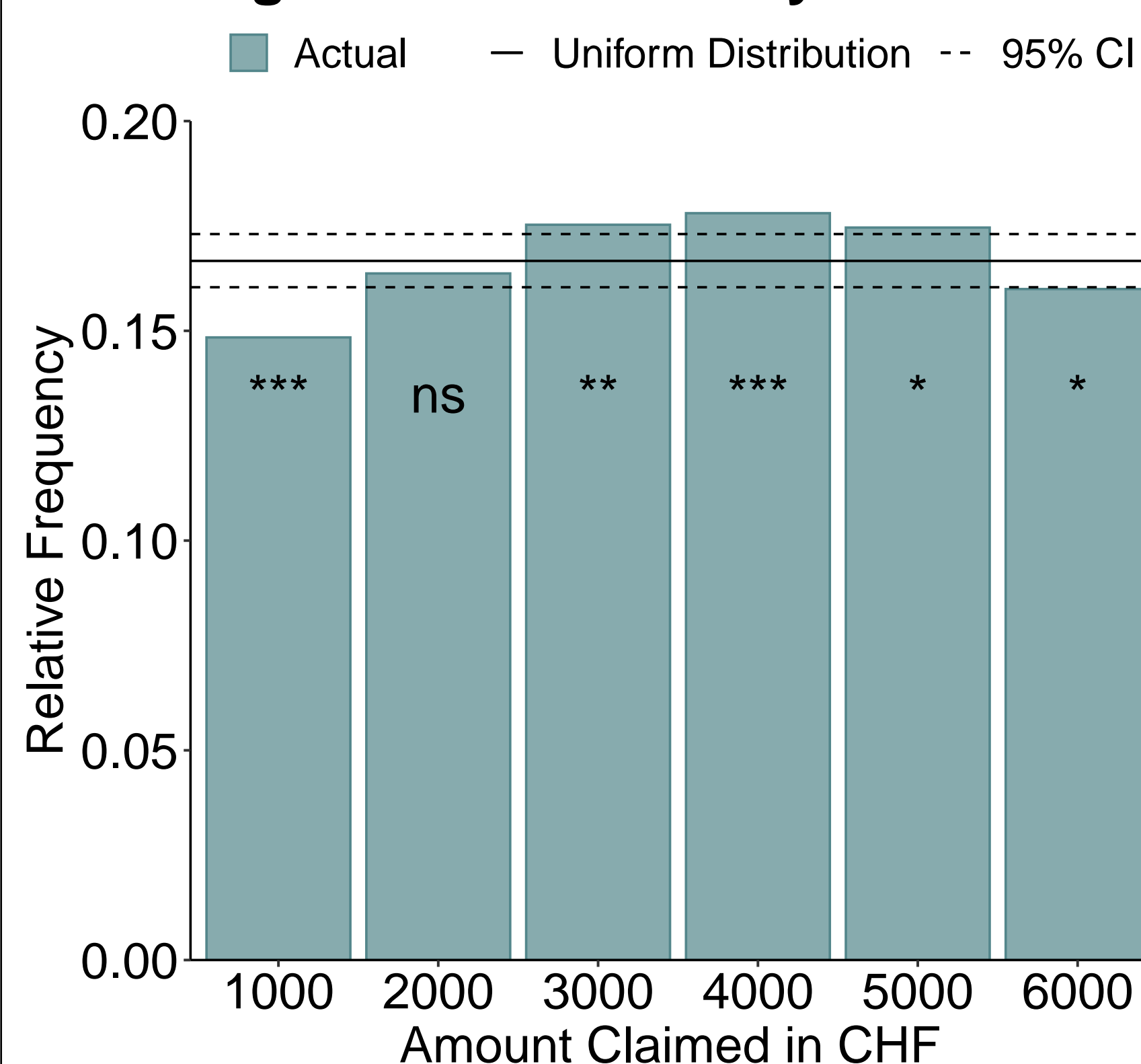
- **Moral licensing:** Ethical behavior leads to subsequent moral transgression .
- **Mixed results:** Evidence mostly from expressed intentions. Hard to establish with behavioral data.
- **Ambiguity as moderator:** Behavior perceived as compliant with moral standards serves as license .
- **Goal:** Combining behavioral data and survey measures on norms to test the role of ambiguity on the effect of honesty on subsequent self-serving behavior.

2. Data

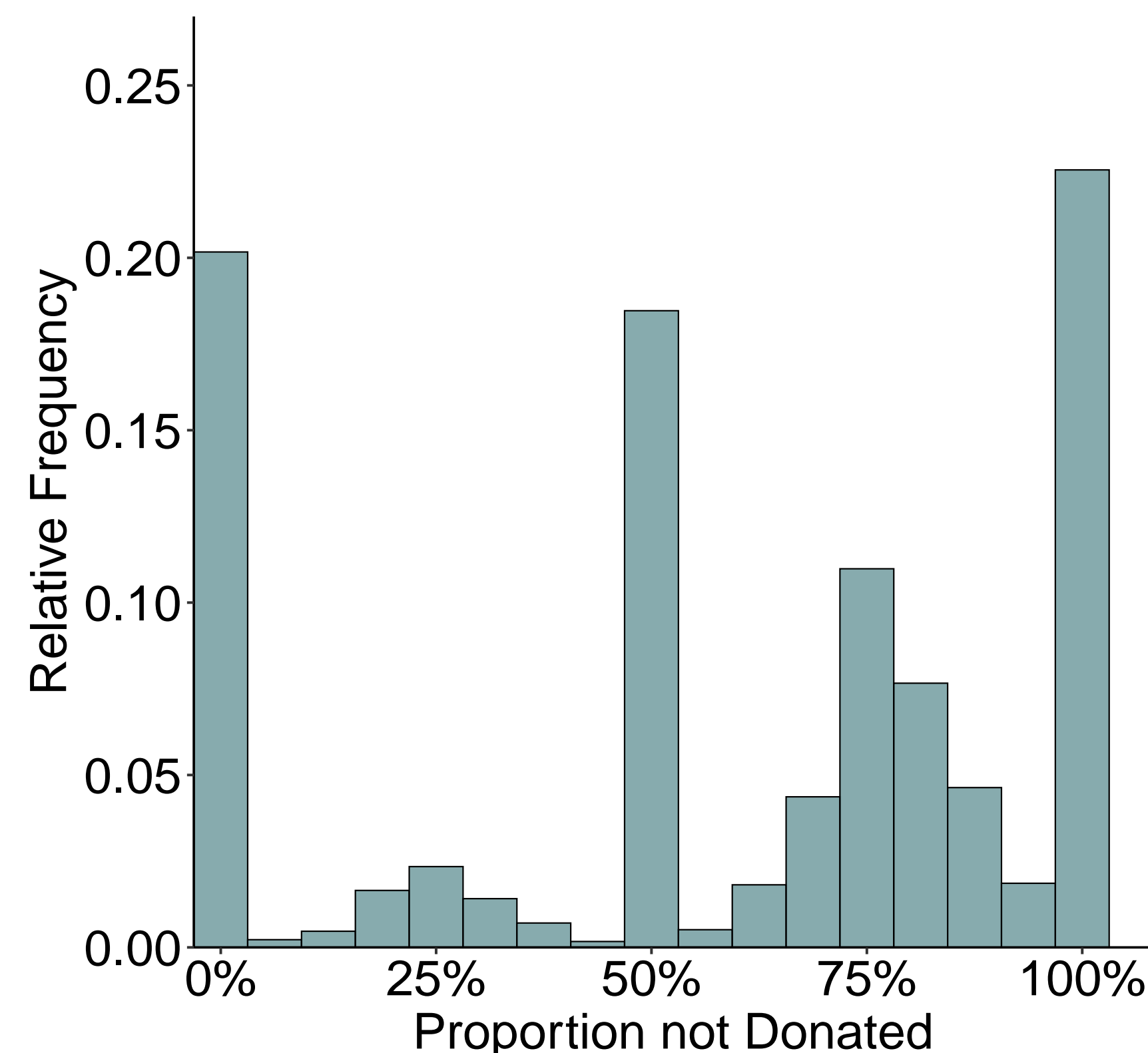
- **Zurich Survey of Academics:** Scientists in DACH (n=13.4k)
- **Honesty:** Participants report potential win in unobserved dice game. Most frequent answers signal least honesty.
- **Self-serving:** Subjects may donate any amount of their win toward charity.
- **Ambiguity:** Survey questions on perceived severity of scientific honesty norm violations and trivializing attitudes.

3. Descriptive Results

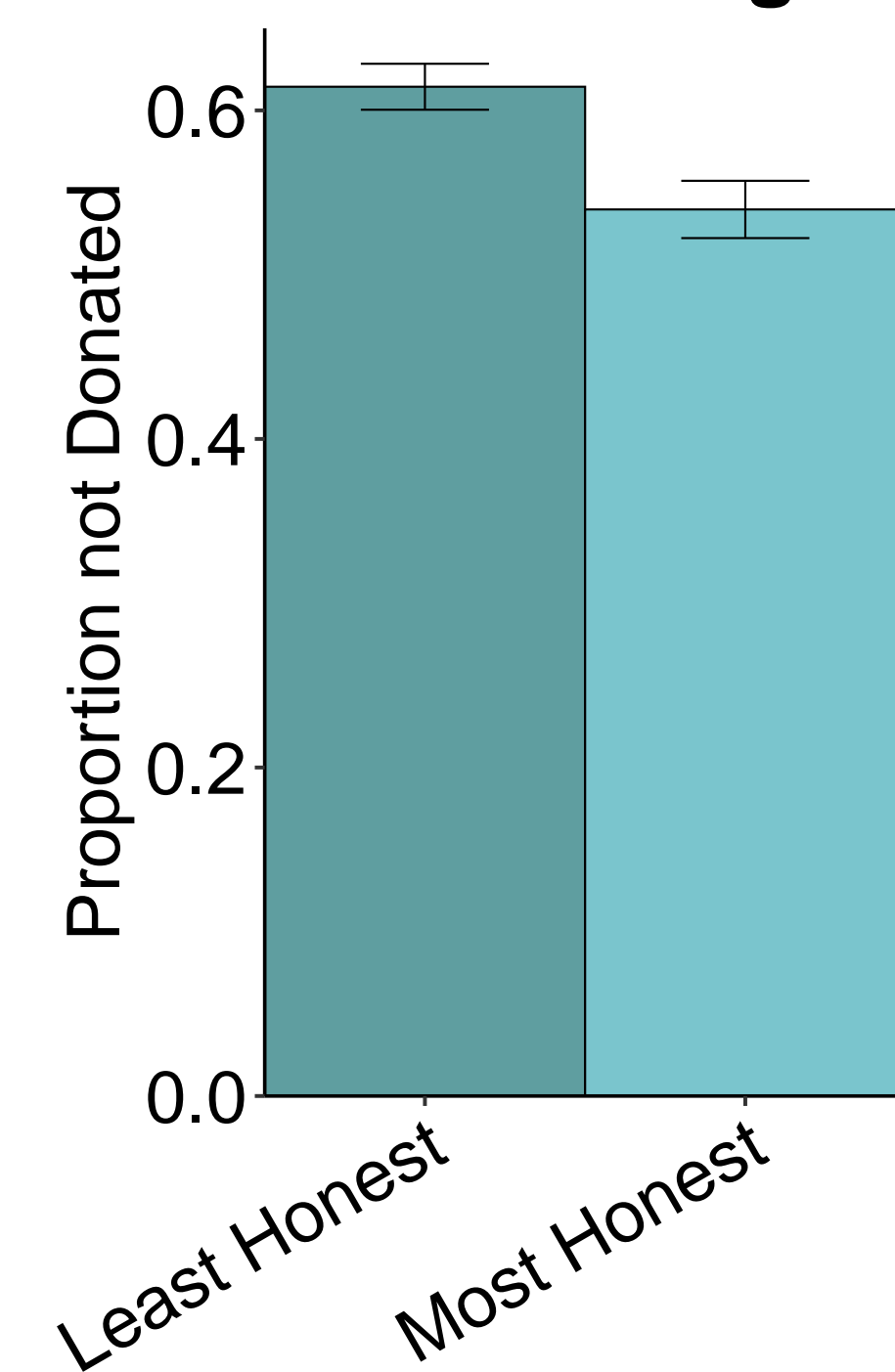
High levels of honesty



Multi-modal donations

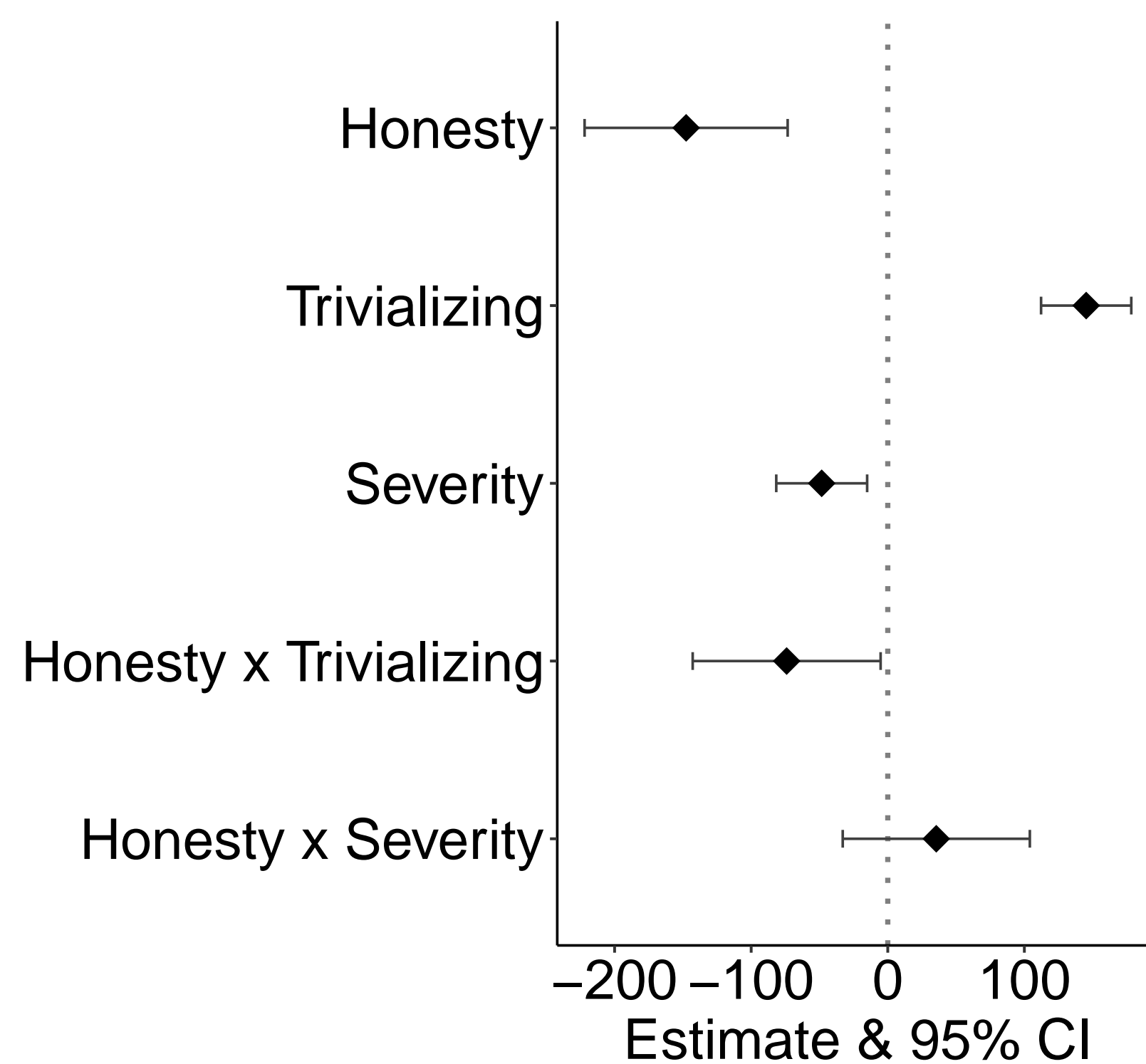


Consistency, not licensing

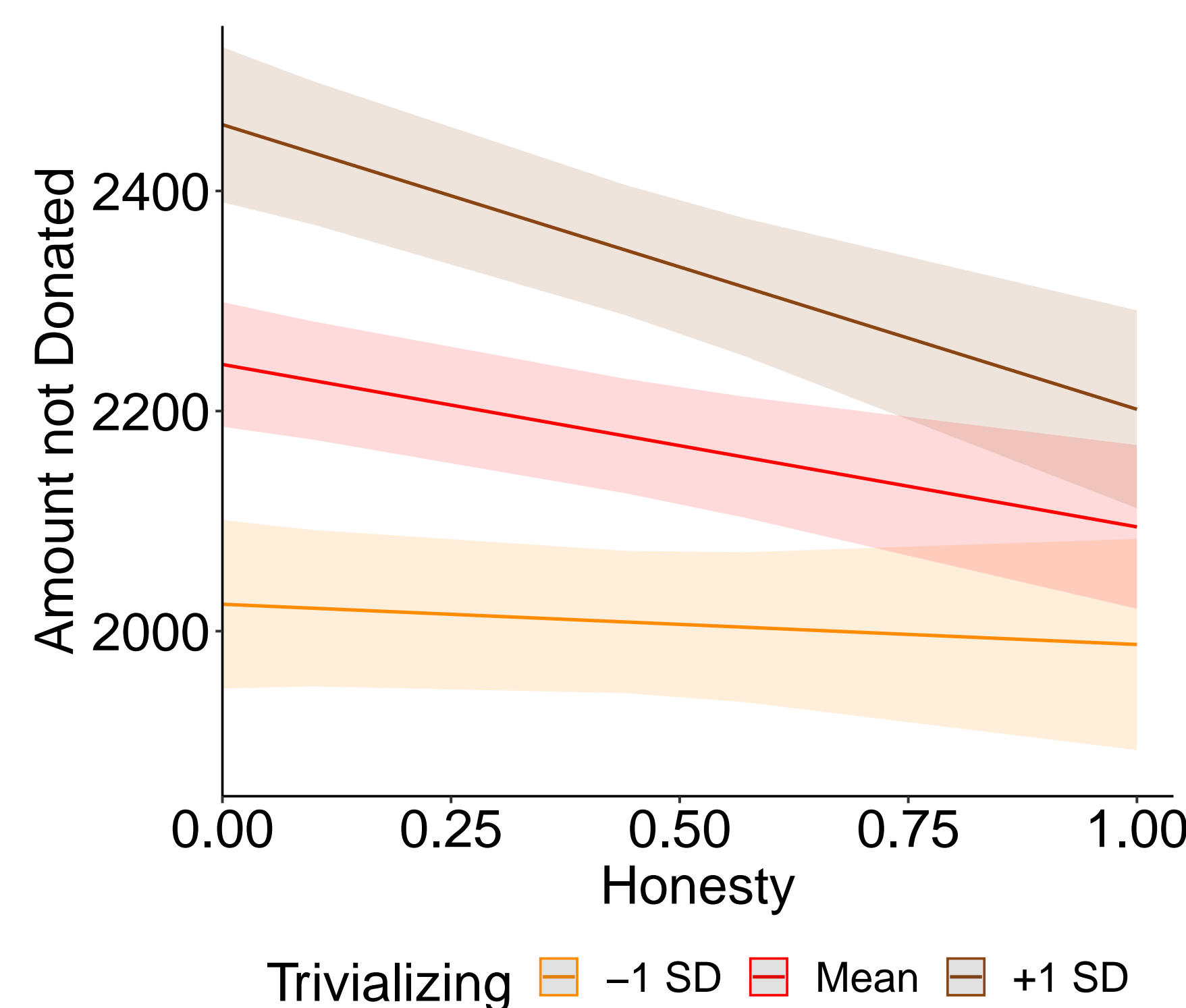


4. Linear Regression Results (DV: Amount not donated)*

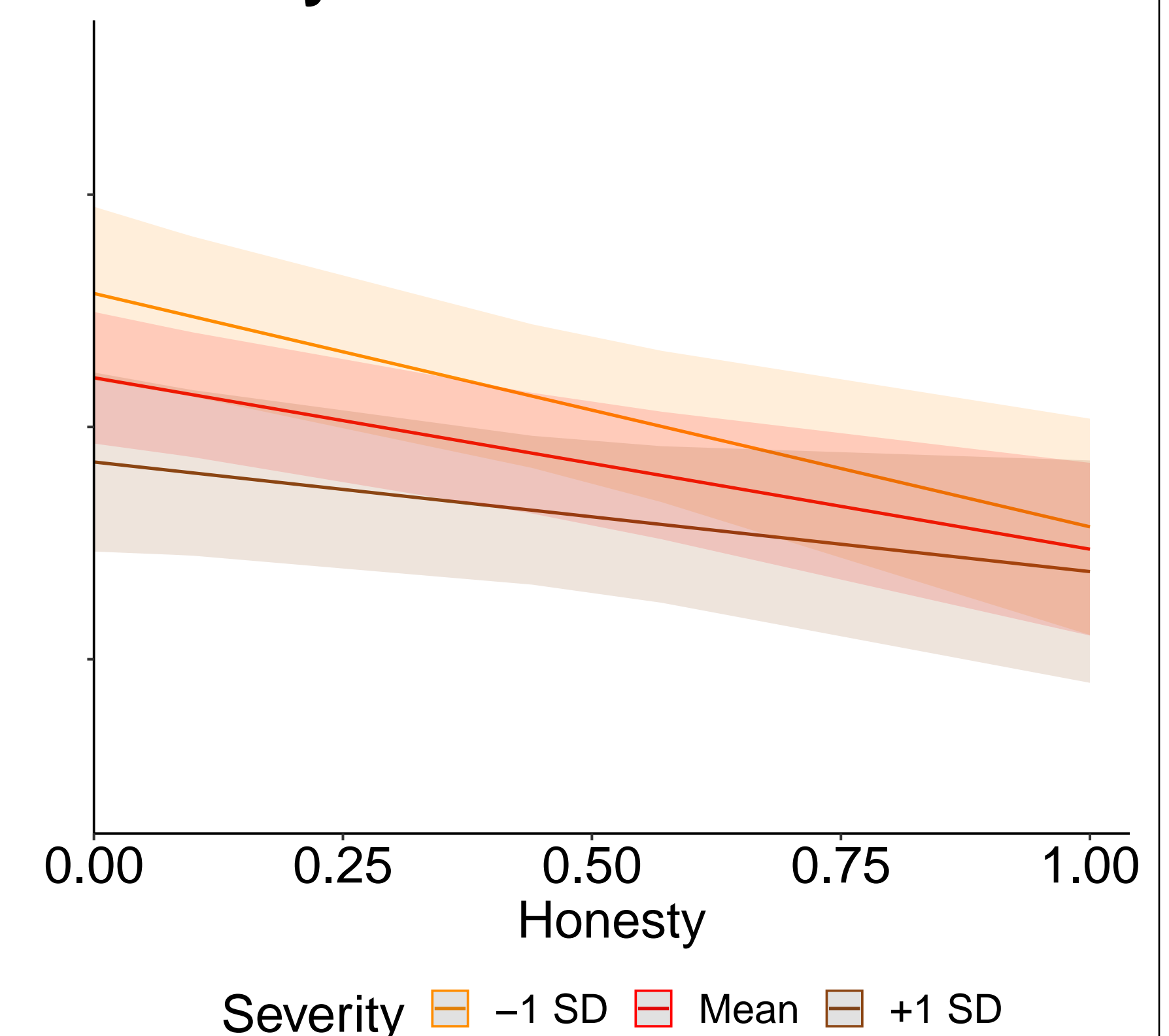
No licensing, little moderation



Trivializing makes the bad worse



Severity is irrelevant



* Results of OLS model on amount not donated. Adj R²: 0.36. Controlled for gender, age, tenure, risk-, and, time preferences.

5. Discussion

- **Behavioral Consistency:** Initial behavior predicts subsequent self serving.
- **Neutralizing future transgressions:** Inverse effect of ambiguity.
- **Hard to model:** Endogenous structure and empirical distribution of donations pose statistical challenge.
- **Implications:** Dispelling false beliefs on «trivial offenses» might help reduce repeated offenses.

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