Not Learning from Others

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We provide evidence of a powerful barrier to social learning: people are much less sensitive to information others discover compared to equally-relevant information they discover themselves. In a series of incentivized lab experiments, we ask participants to guess the color composition of balls in an urn after drawing balls with replacement. Participants' guesses are substantially less sensitive to draws made by another player compared to draws made themselves. This result holds when others' signals must be learned through discussion, when they are perfectly communicated by the experimenter, and even when participants see their teammate drawing balls from the urn with their own eyes. We find a crucial role for taking some action to generate one's `own' information, and rule out distrust, confusion, errors in probabilistic thinking, up-front inattention and imperfect recall as channels.