Improbable Research

Research that makes people LAUGH and then THINK

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2016 Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony
A randomness as to which of a scientist’s publications will have the most oomph
Despite common belief (and some earlier research on the question) that success tends to come early for scientists, a scientist’s single most successful publication is likely to occur at any point in the sequence of papers that she or he publishes. That’s the gist of a new study.

The study explains that people in general tend to produce more papers and everything else early in their careers, which gives the misleading appearance that their first papers are most likely to be the most successful.

The study is “Quantifying the evolution of individual scientific impact,” by Roberta Sinatra [pictured here], Dashun Wang, Pierre Deville, Chaoming Song, and Albert-László Barabási, published in Science [04 Nov 2016: Vol. 354, Issue 6312].

The scientists also prepared a vivid set of visualizations, which they put online.

And Nature magazine prepared a video that explains it all:

(Thanks to Andrea Rapisarda, who won an Ig Nobel Prize for his own randomness research, for bringing this to our attention.)