I've never admitted to anyone before, but I’ve continually found it impossible to pop every single kernel in a bag of popcorn without burning it. Try as I might over the years, the perfect method has evaded me. At times, it has left me depressed, discouraged, perplexed, frustrated, and even skeptical about the prowess of my hand-eye coordination. I imagine, to an individual who is even the slightest bit unstable emotionally, the trauma of constant failure when trying to microwave a bag of popcorn properly might have devastating psychological ramifications. It may even leave one permanently unable to withstand the sight, or even smell, of freshly popped popcorn without intense emotional distress.

It seems quite simple to do if you follow the prewritten instructions on the packaging; remove the plastic, insert the bag face-up in the microwave, and close the door. Only, that’s when the tricky part arrives -- how long do you cook the popcorn? I’ve been constantly forced to guess the length of time that yields the highest quantity of popped kernels in the bag. Of course, I’m never successful, primarily because the manufacturers are intent on providing a variable array of timing instructions, which only serves to further my confusion. What’s more, is that the labels on these commercially packaged microwave popcorn bags explicitly tell us to NOT use the popcorn button on the microwave. I suppose the microwave designers were cleverly seeking to throw me off on my quest to properly cook such problematic comfort food.

Shame on them.

Watching the boxes of popcorn march innocently off the assembly unit, you would never come to realize the ways in which they torment many unsuspecting grocery shoppers, like me, day after day, movie night after movie night. Up until this point, I was ashamed of my shortcomings and refused to reveal this secret to anyone. I thought I was alone in my struggle against contemporary consumer convenience technology, but I realize now that I wasn’t really alone after all.

Microwave popcorn was invented in 1981 by an innovative company named General Mills. The bag was designed to inflate from pressurized steam emitting from heated kernels. Burning is minimized by the use of a susceptor -- metallic film layered inside the bag that distributes heat evenly across all kernels before they are popped. This technology, though, isn’t perfect. Take for example how if you were to try and heat...
three or four kernels separately, your microwave would seemingly refuse to pop them. Experts in the small kitchen appliances industry call this perplexity a “low load,” which simply means that there isn’t enough mass inside the microwave for it to heat up. When some perceptive individual figured out that you could heap together a bunch of kernels in a concoction of solid oil and “natural” flavoring, something special was born. The issue with microwave popcorn is simple: As more and more popcorn pops, there are fewer and fewer kernels for the microwave to heat up -- which seems to mean that some kernels just won’t pop.

Normally, a scientific explanation such as that is enough to satisfy the average person. Call me crazy, but despite such logic and rationality, I still believe there is a way to perfect the popcorn popping process. I refuse to sit back in dejection as more and more delectable kernels slip through our collective buttery fingers, being promptly denied their true snacktime potentials. Through all adversity, I will persist. Through all denigration, I will tirelessly work until I produce the perfect popcorn popping procedure. I refuse to settle for the abomination that is stovetop popcorn, unlike many like-minded consumers in the past. With determination as my superpower, I will find a way to pop every last kernel in a bag of microwave popcorn -- and I won’t stop until my superpower becomes my kryptonite.