

# THE MARTIALIST: YEAR THREE MEGA ISSUE

## Non-Traditionalist Cliques and Self-Defense

By Phil Elmore

At a discussion forum online at which a large percentage of the posters should know better (but a core group of whom nonetheless spend their time telling themselves how one-percent they are compared to the infidels and unbelievers outside their inner circle), one fellow indicated that my groupings in these long-range targets were less than impressive. This criticism comes from within a clique that dominates a particularly knowledgeable discussion forum. The problem is that the existence of such a clique is counter-productive.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Granted, compared to one fellow on Glocktalk (yet another forum) who claimed to be getting all his bullets into one large hole from what was practically several football fields away, these are nothing to write home about. They are, however, sufficient to drop a man-sized target from distances much farther away than I'm likely to have to shoot a person in a realistic self-defense scenario.

Now, I could fake my results when I take pictures, I suppose; it would certainly make my life easier when those who constantly freak out over the fact that I spend my time creating productive and useful work in the field of self-defense go out of their way to over-analyze everything I do. Over-analysis of still pictures is a favorite activity among such people (who never seem to be willing to put their own work, their own training, or the own results up for public scrutiny).

Call me crazy, but I'm of the opinion that self-defense is not a popularity contest and is not a question of how tough a guy you want everyone else to believe you to be. It isn't even about to which clique you belong. Earlier I wrote about traditionalist cliques and its detrimental effects on the pursuit of success in self-defense. The flip-side to that issue is the same behavior among non-traditionalists. Such an attitude is more disappointing among non-traditionalists because, in theory, they have no group identity to substitute for realistic examination and objective analysis of a concept or method. In reality, clubs and cliques form within the ranks of such "thug-fu" adherents as readily as they do among the Easternized, elitist fops populating traditional martial arts.

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Like I said, call me crazy. Even better, call me average. I'm an average guy. I'm an average shooter. I'm an average fighter. I'm in my thirties and overweight. I've had more training than many people but less than many others. I'm not the best shot in the world, the best knife fighter on my block, or the smartest guy ever to put pen to paper. I'm also not a novice, an amateur, or a beginner. I won't talk about, boast about, brag about, or intone ominously over my self-defense experiences – which doesn't mean I don't have them. I'm not a law enforcement officer and I don't believe there's any shame in being a private citizen. I'm not a member of the military and I don't believe there's any less value to the life of a civilian.

What I am, and what I hope you are, is a *martialist*. I seek, train in, and pursue pragmatic means of realistic self-defense in real life. I don't care about the provenance of a technique or a concept if it is useful to me. I don't care about cliques. I don't care how tough you are, how many people you shot when you were a black bag specops super warrior, how many operators you know, or who you *think* you are.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Previously in this issue I wrote about traditionalist cliques and why the attitude behind them renders much of the traditional martial arts irrelevant to pragmatic, effective, self-defense. In some ways, non-traditionalist cliques are even more detrimental to the pursuit of this goal – of seeking success in self-defense. This is because such an attitude *masquerades* as something akin to martialism while completely undercutting the principles of martialism.

When the goal of being one of the “cool kids,” of being part of the in-crowd of a given online community or combative methodology, is substituted for the exchange of information relevant to self-defense, the purpose of the exercise is lost. When jeering at someone who's not part of your clique – criticizing them for things you'd not question if they came from one of your fellows – is more important than truly considering, in good faith, what they have to say, the utility of the venue is degraded. When rational, substantive conversation has been supplanted by the hoots and howls of Internet disciples, anonymous children, balding junior instructors with the arrogance and hostility of high school sophomores, the principles to which the participants supposedly adhere have been forsaken.

Just as a soldier recently returned from Iraq cannot and does not represent (nor speak for) all other soldiers, just as his experiences do not necessarily reflect the sum total of the experiences of all other soldiers in that war, the conclusions, the dictates, and the pronouncements of a handful of those who say they have “been there” and “done that”

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do not constitute the last word on all that is, all that was, and all that is possible. No matter how experienced the “expert,” you will find equally experienced “experts” with whom he or she disagrees. No matter what the person, topic, or pursuit, you will never be able to find someone who can do your thinking for you. You can never afford to suspend your own process of critical thought. If you do, you become one of the mindless followers, seeking shelter within the clique, deriding all who remain outside of it. Your membership, your identity, blinds you to what this has done to your ability to learn and to think. You have abdicated your reason. You have betrayed the goal of success in self-defense.



Photo by Phil Elmore

This attitude, this detriment to successful self-defense, expresses itself in several ways in addition to the empty derision to which I referred. It comes in the form of people telling me how effective is a martial art or system I’ve studied – when I have more direct experience of it than do they and all they can offer in criticism of it is their firm faith that I’m wrong. It can come in the form of erstwhile experts informing me of the fallibilities and liabilities of a particular gun or knife – a gun or knife that I own and with which I have trained extensively, with which they have done neither. It can come in the form of the “It will never fly, Orville” attitude of those who believe you’ll turn into a lobster-clawed, club-footed block of tofu under adrenal stress, incapable of even the simplest maneuvers, and thus

any and all techniques not part of the very simplest catalog of stompings and punchings will simply fail utterly and completely when put to the test.

At the other end of the non-traditional continuum are those who represent the opposite of the knowledgeable – if arrogant and insular – “cool kids” of Western, non-esoteric self-defense. These are the various bitter and angry children clustered at troll-sites like Bullshido. Like their more educated, skilled, and experienced counterparts, the exchange of self-defense information, the process of learning, is no longer the focus of what they discuss. For them, online discussion and the forming of cliques are done for the primary purpose of ridiculing anyone outside the group – not for being a heretic or an outsider, so much, as because the ridiculing of others makes these incredibly insecure and angry people feel better about themselves and about the skills in which they have little faith.

At both ends of that continuum, the forming of cliques is done to answer emotional and mental needs that have nothing to do with the topic of realistic and effective self-

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defense. These are very basic and very common *human* needs – the need for acceptance while feeling alienated, the need for affirmation while feeling insecure, the need for feigned courage while feeling a lack of confidence. In the forming of such cliques to answer these needs, however, the mission statement that should unify all students of self-defense is left trampled and torn on the dusty floor of the dojo, the kwoon, or the gym.



Photo by Phil Elmore

At *The Martialist's* online discussion forum, one of our participating members wrote something very insightful about the atmosphere we promote at the site – and what I think is the appropriate attitude to have as a student of self-defense:

*Sort of like Phil. A regular guy who cultivates self defense skills, is familiar with bare hand fighting, stick, knife, and licensed to carry a concealed gun... What makes us different is that we are thinking about what we are doing, instead of thinking of reasons why what we are doing is the only way.*

Even more interesting than this was an e-mail I received from a reader in the UK, who summed up in a single message what I see as both the "mission statement" of *The Martialist* and the guiding principles of every pragmatic self-defense avocate:

*I have read the introductions and discussion on Martialism on The Martialist website. In brief, your argument for Martialism, as I understood it, is:*

*Ignoring how, when, why, etc., one may be drawn into violent conflict, it is critically important to be as well equipped and prepared for it (whether by weapons, tools, tactics, training etc.) to maximise the chances of emerging from it with your objectives met. You stress the importance of pragmatism, practicality, and applicability in a real situation, of both physical and philosophical aspects of martial training, emphasising them over approaches that rely on being compelling, easy to absorb, concordant with popular views, etc.*

It is refreshing to read such opinions expressed by readers of this publication. It bolsters my faith that among the various cliques and clubs out there exist individuals who understand what the pursuit of self-defense can and should be.

As for the rest, their attitudes mirror those of traditionalist cliques. *These losers aren't in the club, but the uninitiated will think they are, and this we cannot tolerate. It is an insult to our honor and our dignity. It is a violation of the sense of elitism with which we cloak*

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*ourselves – and that masks the very shortcomings of ego and skill we are so quick to identify in others.* That is the attitude of the irrelevant non-traditionalists. That is their concern – membership in the clique above all else.

Self-defense is the right of every human being – though the right to pursue it is not a guarantee of success. Self-defense is not the purview of only those with the most worn grips on the most-fired handguns. It is not the sole territory of only those combative mindset leaves them to abhor and to jeer at civilian America. Self-defense is not the exclusive domain of only those who've bowed and groveled at the feet of the toughest angriest, loudest of black-clad RBSD instructors. Self-defense is not a privilege granted by membership to a club or a clique.



Photo by Phil Elmore

When membership in your clique becomes more important than success in delivering physical force against determined and aggressive societal predators, what you do and what you practice has become irrelevant. Your non-traditionalist cliquery has subsumed your pursuit of whatever you thought you were accomplishing. It has rendered you helpless; it has drawn you as a bitter, angry, insular caricature more concerned with who's "in" and who's "out" than with who is *safer* and who is *able*. It has left you insecure and transparent, pointing and laughing at others from the safety of a mob because this bolsters the low self-esteem and lack of self-awareness you are so quick to see in those "unworthy" travelers who fail to meet your exacting standards. It has left you impotent, your eyes fixed in an affected thousand-yard stare that would do Travis Bickle proud. ♠