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GENTILE V. STATE BAR OF NEVADA: ABA MODEL RULE 3.6 AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL STANDARD FOR REVIEWING DEFENSE ATTORNEYS' TRIAL PUBLICITY

John Fletcher

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1988, Dominic Gentile, a criminal defense attorney, held a press conference on the day of his client’s indictment on theft charges. Gentile hoped to rebut adverse press coverage that his client, Gary Sanders, had received over the preceding months. Gentile delivered a prepared statement that he believed conformed with ethical rules. In the statement, he maintained Sanders’s innocence, claimed that a police detective was the likely culprit, and attacked the character and motives of three potential witnesses. Six months later, a jury acquitted Gentile’s client.

The State Bar of Nevada then charged Gentile with violating the Nevada Supreme Court rule on trial publicity. The Southern Nevada Disciplinary

2. Id. at 2723. The Las Vegas police department accused Gentile’s client, Gary Sanders, of stealing money from safety deposit boxes at Sanders’s facility that he had rented to undercover police agents. Id. at 2727-28.
3. Id. at 2730-31.

RULE 177. Trial publicity.
1. [A] lawyer shall not make an extrajudicial statement that a reasonable person would expect to be disseminated by means of public communication if the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that it will have a substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding. (emphasis added).
2. A statement referred to in subsection 1 ordinarily is likely to have such an effect when it refers to a civil matter triable to a jury, a criminal matter, or any other proceeding that could result in incarceration, and the statement relates to:
   (a) The character, credibility, reputation or criminal record of a party, suspect in a criminal investigation or witness, or the identity of a witness, or the expected testimony of a party or witness;
   (b) In a criminal case or proceeding that could result in incarceration, the possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense or the existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement given by a defendant or suspect or that person’s refusal or failure to make a statement;
   (c) The performance or results of any examination or test or the refusal or
subsequently conducted a hearing and recommended a private reprimand.6 On appeal, the Nevada Supreme Court affirmed the decision.7 The court stressed Gentile’s remarks about the police detective and potential witnesses to find that his comments posed a “substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing” the trial.8 Furthermore, the court summarily rejected Gentile’s arguments that his statements fell within the rule’s safe harbor9 and that the rule was unconstitutional under state or federal law.10

Gentile appealed to the United States Supreme Court.11 The Court reversed and held that Nevada’s application of Rule 177 was unconstitutional because it was “void for vagueness.”12 Furthermore, a state can balance its interest in an impartial trial against an attorney’s First Amendment rights when reviewing discipline for an attorney’s extrajudicial statement on a
pending trial. Thus, a state can use the “substantial likelihood of material prejudice” standard instead of the more restrictive “clear and present danger of actual prejudice” without violating an attorney’s right to free speech.

II. LEGAL BACKGROUND TO CASE

A. Identification of the Problem

Attempts to regulate the extrajudicial comment of attorneys on pending judicial proceedings invoke three fundamental interests: the attorney’s right to free speech, the criminal defendant’s right to a fair trial, and the public’s interest in the judiciary. Like other citizens, attorneys are protected by the First Amendment prohibition against restrictions on free speech. The Sixth Amendment provides a right to a fair trial to defendants in prosecutions of serious crimes. In order to ensure an impartial forum for the public, the courts have assumed a state interest in the preservation of the integrity and impartial functioning of the judiciary. The question is whether courts, when attempting to ensure the proper functioning of the judiciary, deny a defendant’s right to a fair trial or an attorney’s right to free speech when they prevent counsel from speaking publicly about pending criminal proceedings.

Importantly, the Court imposes a strict standard for reviewing criminal convictions for possible prejudice. A showing of actual prejudice is generally

13. Id. at 2744-45.
14. Id.
15. U.S. CONST. amend. I (providing in part that “[c]ongress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press”). The Court has applied the first amendment to the state as a fundamental liberty protected under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. E.g., Gitlow v. New York, 268 U.S. 652, 666 (1925)(rejecting challenge to the constitutionality of a New York statute that prohibited expression advocating the overthrow of organized government).
16. See, e.g., Konigsberg v. State Bar of California, 353 U.S. 252, 273 (1957)(recognizing that a state bar could not select its members in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner that impinged on the candidate’s freedom of association or political expression when California Bar denied admission to an attorney partly due to his editorial that criticized the Korean War, big business, and other aspects of American society); Bates v. State Bar of Arizona, 433 U.S. 350, 384 (1977)(applying commercial speech doctrine to protect attorney’s right of expression in the advertising context). For a discussion of Bates see infra notes 86-95 accompanying text.
17. U.S. CONST. amend. VI (providing in part that “[i]n all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed . . . .”).
18. E.g., Duncan v. Louisiana, 391 U.S. 145, 148-49, 159-62 (1968) (applying the Sixth Amendment to the states as a fundamental liberty and holding that a Louisiana battery statute with punishment up to two years in prison was a serious crime that entitled defendant to a jury trial).
19. See, e.g., Chicago Council of Lawyers v. Bauer, 522 F.2d 242, 250 (7th Cir. 1975), cert. denied, 427 U.S. 912 (1976) (stating that “[w]e must not forget that public justice is no less important than an accused’s right to fair trial”); United States v. Tijerina, 412 F.2d 661, 666 (10th Cir. 1969) (rejecting defense counsel’s argument that their extrajudicial comments could not threaten a fair criminal trial because the state interest limits both sides to a case). Some commentators criticize arguments that give equal priority to an individual’s right to a fair trial and the public’s interest in the fair administration of justice. E.g., Monroe H. Freedman and Janet Starwood, Prior Restraints on Freedom of Expression by Defendants and Defense Attorneys: Ratio Decidendi v. Obiter Dictum, 29 STAN. L. REV. 607, 607-08 (1977).
required for reversal. On occasion, however, the Court has found inherent prejudice without requiring a showing of actual prejudice via the veniremen. Nevertheless, numerous cases show the difficulty of overcoming the burden of proving prejudice.

B. Restrictions on Trial Publicity: A Historical Overview of American Bar Association Regulation

In 1908, the American Bar Association (ABA) adopted the Canons of Professional Ethics. Canon 20 contained the relevant provision on trial publicity. These original provisions remained in effect for nearly sixty years. During the 1960s aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, the legal community debated, and commissions studied the potential for interference with the defendants' right to a fair trial by modern era mass communications. In 1970, the ABA adopted an extensive trial publicity rule, Discipli-
nary Rule (DR) 7-107, as part of the Model Code of Professional Responsibility. The rule covered all phases and types of judicial proceedings, and one section prohibited lawyers associated with pending criminal trials from making statements to the press that were "reasonably likely to interfere with a fair trial."

Finally, the ABA adopted the Model Rules of Professional Conduct in 1983, and Rule 3.6 contains the current formulation of the trial publicity standard: "substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding." The majority of states have officially adopted this standard.

course of criminal trial to minimize effects of publicity); Committee on the Operation of the Jury System, Judicial Conference of the U.S., Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Jury System on the "Free Press-Fair Trial" Issue, 45 F.R.D. 391, 400-15 (1968)(recommending that each United States District Court adopt local rules with the following provisions: (1) restrict release of prejudicial information by attorneys; (2) control similar disclosures by courthouse personnel; and (3) regulate conduct of trial with precautionary devices); Special Committee on Radio, Television, and the Administration of Justice of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Freedom of the Press and Fair Trial 14-57 (Final Report 1967)(doubling constitutionality of imposing limits on the press through contempt powers, committee recommended the following changes within the judicial system: (1) revise Canon 20; (2) regulate law enforcement bodies; and (3) devise standards for preventive measures in court.

27. MODEL CODE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY DR 7-107 (amended 1987) [hereinafter MODEL CODE].

28. HAZARD & HOIDES supra note 23, at xxxiv. Bar associations and courts officially adopted the code in a large majority of states, and "it has remained the basic law of the legal profession since then." Id.

29. See, e.g., MODEL CODE supra note 27 at DR 7-107(A) (criminal investigation period); DR 7-107(B) (pretrial phase of criminal trial); DR 7-107(E) (post trial and/or sentencing period); DR 7-107(G) (civil cases).

30. Id. at DR 7-107(D)(the ABA derived the reasonable likelihood standard in part from Supreme Court dicta in Sheppard v. Maxwell, 384 U.S. 333, 362-63 (1966), and the lower courts were divided as to whether the standard was constitutional). See discussion infra notes 61-66.


31. HAZARD & HOIDES, supra note 23, at xxxv (stating that dissatisfaction with the MODEL CODE's confusing format, its failure to address certain topics, and the unconstitutionality of some of its provisions led to the adoption of the new rules).

32. MODEL RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT Rule 3.6(a) (amended 1989) [hereinafter MODEL RULES]. The drafters intended the "substantial likelihood" test to approximate the "clear and present danger" test. HAZARD & HOIDES, supra note 23, at 395. See infra notes 75-77 and accompanying text for a discussion of the "clear and present danger" test.

33. Thirty-two states have adopted the "substantial likelihood" standard: 23 A. LA. CODE, Sup. Ct. R. 3.6(a) (1990); 17 A. ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN., Sup. Ct. R. 42, ER 3.6(a) (1991); ARK. CODE ANN., Ct. R. Prof. Conduct 3.6(a) (Michie 1991); CONN. RULES OF CT., R. Prof. Resp. 3.6 (West 1991); 16 DEL. CODE ANN., R. Prof. Conduct 3.6 (1987); 35 FLA. STAT. ANN., Bar R. 4-3.6 (West Supp. 1991); IDAHO RULES OF CT., R. Prof. Conduct 3.6 (West 1991); IND. CODE ANN., Ct. R. Prof. Conduct 3.6(a) (Burns 1991); KAN. SUP. CT. R. 226, R. Prof. Conduct 3.6(a) (West 1991); K.Y. REV. STAT. ANN., Sup. Ct. R. 3.130, R. Prof. Conduct 3.6(a) (Michie/Bobs-Merrill 1991); 21A LA. REV. STAT. ANN. app. # 37, State Bar...
The first section of rule 3.6 is a general prohibition against statements by an attorney that are reasonably likely to be disseminated by the press and that pose a "substantial likelihood" of "materially prejudicing" a proceeding. The second section lists types of statements that would ordinarily violate the general prohibition. The final section, or safe harbor provision, states that notwithstanding the first two sections, an attorney can safely make certain statements if he does not elaborate on them.

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Eleven states have retained the "reasonable likelihood" standard. See supra note 30.

Six states have adopted the "clear and present danger" or an equivalent test. The following five states have adopted this standard by statute or court rule: 110A ILL. ANN. STAT. app. ch. 77/4, Rule Prof. Conduct 3.6 (Smith-Hurd 1978) ("serious and imminent threat to the fairness of an adjudicative proceeding"); ME. RULES OF CT., State & Fed., Bar R. 3, Code of Prof. Resp. 3.7(j) (West 1991) ("substantial danger of interference with the administration of justice"); N.D. CENT. CODE, Ct. R. Prof. Conduct 3.6 (1990) ("serious and imminent threat of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding"); OR. RULES OF CT., Code Prof. Resp. DR 7-107 (West 1991) ("serious and imminent threat to the fact-finding process"); 11 VA. CODE ANN., Sup. Ct. R. part 6, § 2, Code Prof. Resp. DR 7-106(A) (Michie 1991) ("clear and present danger of interfering with the fairness of the trial by a jury").


California does not have a trial publicity rule in its Code of Professional Conduct. See CAL. RULES OF CT., State, R. Prof. Conduct §§ 1-100 to 1-600, 5-100 to 5-320 (West 1991).

For a catalogue of the state rules on trial publicity, consider the discussion in Justice Rehnquist's opinion. See Gentile v. State Bar of Nevada, 111 S.Ct. 2720, 2741 n.1-3 (omitting Alabama and including New York in the majority of states).

34. MODEL RULES, supra note 32, Rule 3.6(a); NEVADA RULES supra note 4, Rule 177(1).

35. MODEL RULES, supra note 32, Rule 3.6(b); NEVADA RULES supra note 4, Rule 177(2).

36. E.g., MODEL RULES supra note 32, Rule 3.6(a)(1) (statements about the character or credibility of an expected witness, among others). The Nevada Supreme Court found that Gentile's statements about the potential witnesses violated this section of the Nevada rule. Gentile 787 P.2d at 387.

37. MODEL RULES supra note 32, Rule 3.6(c); NEVADA RULES supra note 4, Rule 177(3).

38. E.g., MODEL RULES, supra note 32, Rule 3.6(c)(1) (the general nature of the defense). The Nevada Supreme Court rejected without comment Gentile's arguments that his statements fulfilled this provision. Gentile, 787 P.2d at 387.
literal terms, these safe harbor statements are automatically immune. As one commentator has noted, this "unfortunate draftsmanship" creates a potential conflict if a statement violates the general prohibition, but also falls within the safe harbor provision.

C. Supreme Court Treatment of Restrictions on Attorney Speech

I. In Re Sawyer

Before Gentile, the Supreme Court had not addressed the constitutionality of limits on extrajudicial comments placed on attorneys associated with pending trials. In In re Sawyer, the Court had the opportunity to address the issue, but decided the case on factual grounds. Sawyer, who was associated with a highly publicized prosecution under the Smith Act, gave a speech six weeks into the trial that criticized the presiding judge. After the trial, an ethics committee determined that Sawyer had violated two canons. On appeal, the Ninth Circuit affirmed the committee's findings and the order of the Supreme Court of Hawaii suspending Sawyer from the Bar for one year.

Reversing the sanction, Justice Brennan's plurality opinion found that Sawyer's comments were a general attack on Smith Act prosecutions and were not directed at the trial judge. After noting that lawyers were free to criticize law enforcement bodies and the state of the law, Brennan observed that the pendency of litigation would not make an attorney's extrajudicial statements "more censurable, other than that they might tend to obstruct the administration of justice.

Justice Stewart refused to join Brennan's opinion because of its "intimations" that the First Amendment would shield attorneys from discipline for clear ethical violations, and he indicated that ethical rules could require attorneys to refrain from otherwise "constitutionally protected speech."

39. Hazard & Hodes, supra note 23, at 401 (commenting that a statement can violate the general prohibition yet be per se admissible under the safe harbor provisions).

40. Id.


42. The Court refused to hear at least one lower court case directly addressing the issue. See Chicago Council of Lawyers v. Bauer, 522 F.2d 242 (7th Cir. 1975), cert. denied, 427 U.S. 912 (1976) (holding parts of Model Code DR 7-107 unconstitutional). For a discussion of Bauer, see infra notes 60-66 and accompanying text.

43. 360 U.S. 622 (1959).

44. Id. at 626.

45. Id. at 625-26. Sawyer was charged with violating canon 1 (Duty of Lawyers to Courts) and 22 (Candor and Fairness) of the Canons of Professional Ethics, but not Canon 20 relating to public comment on pending litigation. Id. at 625-26 n.3.

46. Id. at 623.

47. Id. at 630-36.

48. Id. at 631-32.

49. Id. at 636 (emphasis added). Since the ethics committee had not charged Sawyer with obstructing justice, this issue was not before the Court. Id.

50. Id. at 646 (Stewart, J., concurring in judgment).

51. Id. at 646-47.
In dissent, Justice Frankfurter strongly denied constitutional protection to attorneys for comment on pending litigation in which they are associated.

2. Sheppard v. Maxwell

The Supreme Court's most notable statement on the constitutional protection of attorney speech came in its reversal of Sam Sheppard's murder conviction. After finding grounds for reversing the conviction, the Court in dicta addressed the methods that the trial judge should have used to avoid the prejudice. The Court stated that the trial judge should have acted to prevent prejudice when "there was a reasonable likelihood that prejudicial news prior to trial would prevent a fair trial." The record indicated that the prosecution and defense counsel were the source of some of the prejudicial information, and the Court strongly criticized their actions.

3. Lower Court Treatment

After the numerous states adopted DR 7-107, several lower courts addressed the constitutionality of the rule, producing three general standards. This section reviews the leading cases for each of these alternate standards.

a. Chicago Council of Lawyers v. Bauer

In Chicago Council, the Seventh Circuit reviewed the constitutionality of Model Code DR 7-107(D) and held that the reasonable "likelihood standard" was unconstitutional. The court held that the provision for comment on pending criminal trials was constitutional if the "serious and...
imminent threat’ of interference with the fair administration of justice” was applied. The court placed equal priority on the defendant’s right to fair trial and the public’s interest in the judiciary. Furthermore, it stated that the public is likely to believe attorneys since they are privy to reliable information and due to their role as officers of the court. The court also relied on Sheppard to conclude that courts can take preventive measures to preserve a fair trial and to subordinate the free speech rights of attorneys to the public’s interest in impartial trials.

b. Hirschkop v. Snead

The Fourth Circuit also reviewed DR 7-107(D), but found that it was constitutional. The court disagreed with Bauer in holding that the “reasonable likelihood” standard was not overbroad. The court emphasized that the Court in Sheppard had utilized similar language when admonishing the trial court to take remedial actions, and it extrapolated that the same standard should apply for preventive measures. The New Jersey Supreme Court supported the Hirschkop holding in In re Hinds, and listed objective factors to assess the risk of prejudice under the “reasonable likelihood” standard. Other courts have also approved this standard.

c. Markfield v. Association of the Bar of the City of New York

A New York state court concluded that the “clear and present” danger test was required when applying DR 7-107(D). The court noted that the Sheppard Court had indicated that the “reasonable likelihood” standard was

“must be no greater than is necessary or essential to the protection of the particular governmental interest involved.”) (quoting Procunier v. Martinez, 416 U.S. 396, 413 (1974)).

63. Id. at 249 (quoting Chase v. Robson, 435 F.2d 1059, 1061-62 (7th Cir. 1970)).

64. Id. at 250-51. Contra Freedman & Starwood, supra note 19 at 607-08 (arguing that defense generated publicity could not deny the accused’s constitutional rights since they are designed to protect the individual from state action, not the reverse).

65. Bauer, 522 F.2d at 250.

66. Id. at 248-50.

67. 594 F.2d 356 (4th Cir. 1979).

68. Id. at 370.

69. Id. at 362.

70. Id. at 369-70.


72. Id. (The court listed seven factors: (1) nature of the statement; (2) timing of the statement; (3) extent to which the information has already been published; (4) nature of the proceeding and its vulnerability to prejudice; (5) attorney’s status in the case; (6) attorney’s unique status as an informed and accurate source of information in the case; and (7) effect of unrestricted comment on the interests of the litigants and the integrity of the proceeding).

73. See, e.g., United States v. Tijerina, 412 F.2d 661, 667-68 (10th Cir. 1969), cert. denied, 396 U.S. 990 (1969) (relying in part on statements in Sheppard to uphold order limiting statements by attorneys involved in case that would pose a “reasonable likelihood” of prejudicial news which would make the impanelling of an impartial jury difficult); Younger v. Smith, 106 Cal. Rptr. 225, 240-43 (1973) (determining that “clear and present danger” test was not appropriate for assessing the validity of protective order designed to curb prejudicial publicity in a criminal case, and adopting “reasonable likelihood” standard as realistic approach that allows trial court to assess factors that would otherwise never satisfy the stricter test).


75. Id. at 85.
appropriate but nevertheless determined that only when a statement poses a "clear and present" danger will it be likely to interfere with a fair trial.\(^7\)

In summary, the lower courts all relied on Sheppard to support court action in protection of the public's interest in an impartial judiciary. The courts could not agree on a uniform standard. The majority view, however, was that attorneys associated with pending criminal trials could be subject to greater scrutiny than the press.\(^7\)

E. Ability of States to Regulate the Press

In contrast to the standards imposed on attorneys, the Supreme Court has addressed the proper standard for limiting the freedom of the press in many cases. This section summarizes the Court's treatment of the press in the context of contempt cases and the modern treatment of gag orders.

1. Contempt for Out-Of Court Statements

Unlike the dicta concerning regulation of attorneys, the Supreme Court has placed strict limits on attempts to regulate the press through contempt measures.\(^7\) Bridges v. California\(^7\) is the landmark case for contempt orders for out-of-court statements. The Court cited the "clear and present danger" test as the proper standard for reviewing contempt orders and stated that expression should have the broadest protection allowable in a democratic society.\(^8\) In other contempt cases, courts continued to apply the clear and present danger standard with some slight linguistic variations.\(^8\)

2. Modern Treatment

Nebraska Press Association v. Stuart\(^8\) represents the modern Supreme Court's statement of the presumption against the constitutionality of prior

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76. Id. (stating that this standard did not unreasonably restrict expression while it fully protected the judicial process).
77. Markfield represented a minority position with the strict "clear and present" danger test. See generally, John W. Hall, Jr., Professional Responsibility of Criminal Lawyers § 18.5, at 529-30 (1987 & Supp. 1991)(summarizing lower courts' views of constitutional considerations such that at least two things were known: (1) ethical rules could not place an absolute prohibition on attorney comments on pending criminal matters; and (2) statements must actually threaten the impartiality of a trial before they could be limited).
78. E.g., Wood v. Georgia, 370 U.S. 375 (1962) (denying contempt power in political free speech context when media had accused judge of discrimination in grand jury proceeding).
79. 314 U.S. 252 (1941) (reversing conviction of contempt imposed on union representative who had threatened to release telegram that threatened a major strike if judge ruled against his interests). Bridges' companion case, Times-Mirror Co. v. Superior Court of California, 98 P.2d 1029 (Cal.), cert. granted, 310 U.S. 623 (1940), had the same result. Id. (reversing contempt convictions of newspaper officials who had printed editorials criticizing a judge's probation sentence in an assault case involving union-related violence).
80. Bridges, 314 U.S. at 262-63.
81. E.g., Craig v. Harney, 331 U.S. 367, 373 (1947) (reversing contempt finding for media criticism of judge's handling of a pending case and stating "serious and imminent threat" as standard); Pennekamp v. Florida, 328 U.S. 331, 347 (1946) (in reversing contempt conviction, Court balanced interest in freedom of discussion against danger of coercion and intimidation by the courts; for borderline cases, "[f]reedom of discussion should be given the widest range compatible with the essential requirement of the fair and orderly administration of justice").
82. 427 U.S. 539 (1976).
restraints when placed on the press. The case involved a trial court's gag order on the press that both sides in a highly publicized criminal case had requested. The Court found the order unconstitutional, and it formulated a standard for imposing prior restraints that will rarely, if ever, be satisfied.

F. Balancing of Interests in the Commercial Speech Area

When reviewing restrictions on First Amendment rights in a relevant context, the Court has imposed a lower level of scrutiny than it has for the press. In the context of attorney advertising and solicitation, the Court has balanced the attorney's right to free speech and the state's interest in the legal profession. The Court has applied the commercial speech doctrine to invalidate numerous state bar restrictions on advertising. These cases, however, have recognized that the state can restrict the attorney's freedom of speech since commercial speech merits less protection than core First Amendment political expression. Thus, the state can prevent false, misleading, or deceptive advertising, statements that promote an illegal transaction and in person solicitation by attorneys for the purpose of pecuniary gain. If these elements are not present, the Court imposes a test on the validity of restrictions that favors the disclosure of truthful information.

Throughout the Court's treatment of this area, Justice Rehnquist, and

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83. Id. at 570.
84. Id. (stating that order was not justified because it was not "clear that further publicity, unchecked, would so distort the views of potential jurors that 12 could not be found who would, under proper instructions, fulfill their sworn duty to render a just verdict exclusively on the evidence presented in open court"); see also Landmark Communications, Inc. v. Virginia, 435 U.S. 829, 842-45 (1978) (reversing conviction of newspaper that had violated a Virginia criminal statute prohibiting disclosing the identity of a judge who is subject to a pending investigation and rejecting state legislature's finding that such disclosures posed a "clear and present" danger to the administration of justice).
85. See In re R.M.J., 455 U.S. 191, 203 (1982) (adopting four part test for validity of restraints on advertising: (1) Is the advertisement truthful?; (2) Is the government's interest in opposing the expression substantial?; (3) Does the regulation directly advance the state's interest?; and (4) Is the state's regulation broader than necessary?).
87. See, e.g., Shapero v. Kentucky Bar Ass'n, 486 U.S. 466, 472-78 (1988)(categorical ban of sending truthful, non-deceptive letters to solicit business to persons with known legal problems); Zauderer v. Office of Disciplinary Counsel of Supreme Court of Ohio, 471 U.S. 626, 647-49 (1985) (ban of printed advertisement containing truthful, non-deceptive legal advice and an accurate, non-misleading illustration); Bates, 433 U.S. at 384 (complete ban of newspaper publication containing truthful advertising of routine legal services and their costs).
88. E.g., Ohralik v. Ohio State Bar Ass'n, 436 U.S. 447, 455-56 (1978) (state may discipline a lawyer for soliciting clients in person for pecuniary gain).
89. Zauderer, 471 U.S. at 638.
90. Ohralik, 436 U.S. at 449.
91. Id. (stating test that allows restrictions only if state proves a substantial governmental interest and only in a manner that directly advances that end).
92. E.g., Bates v. State Bar of Arizona, 433 U.S. 350, 404 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting) (reit-
later Justice O'Connor\textsuperscript{93}, have opposed the decisions. Their opinions, especially Justice O'Connor's, have stressed that the Court should show greater deference to the states' attempts to exercise their inherent regulatory power over attorneys.\textsuperscript{94} With the addition of Justice Scalia,\textsuperscript{95} this Rehnquist-O'Connor faction represents an emerging trend toward a return to a lower level of scrutiny in the context of state regulation of the legal profession.

III. \textit{Gentile v. State Bar of Nevada}\textsuperscript{96}

A. Overview of Supreme Court Opinion

The \textit{Gentile} case created two opinions with different majorities on the Court. In Justice Kennedy's majority opinion,\textsuperscript{97} the Court performed an independent review of Nevada's application of Rule 177 and found that given the grammatical conflict between the general prohibition and the safe harbor provision, the rule was void for vagueness.\textsuperscript{98} More importantly, Justice Rehnquist's majority opinion\textsuperscript{99} held that a state can balance its interest in an impartial trial against an attorney's First Amendment rights when re-
viewing discipline for extrajudicial comments on a pending criminal trial. Thus, a state can use the "substantial likelihood of material prejudic[e]" standard in Model Rule 3.6 instead of the more restrictive "clear and present danger" test that is applied when states limit the press' ability to comment on trials.

B. The Not So Safe Harbor Provision of Rule 177

Kennedy emphasized throughout his opinion that the case involves "classic" political speech. Therefore, Kennedy felt the attendant risk that states will enforce vague statutes in a discriminatory fashion was particularly relevant in this context. In applying the prohibition against vague regulations of speech, Kennedy analyzed the grammatical conflict between Rule 177's general prohibition and its safe harbor, as well as the relative terms employed within the safe harbor provision. Because of the rule's grammatical ambiguity and the safe harbor's failure to provide a meaningful principle to guide an attorney's determination of permissible extrajudicial statements, the Court concluded that Nevada's interpretation of the rule was void for vagueness. Gentile's efforts to comply with the rule and his refusal to answer questions from the press illustrated to the Court that the rule failed to provide fair notice.

Justice O'Connor's concurrence with Kennedy's analysis of the rule provided a majority to reverse the Nevada Supreme Court judgment. She added that the ability of the disciplinary board and Gentile to make cogent arguments regarding whether Gentile remained within the scope of the safe harbor provision illustrates the rule's failure to provide sufficient guidance.

In dissent, Rehnquist denied that the rule is overly vague. He stated

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100. Id. at 2738-48.
101. Id.
102. Id. at 2724-26, 2731-36 (highlighting Gentile's charge that the criminal authorities had framed his client and stressing that the criminal defense bar has the important mission of challenging the government).
103. Id. at 2731-32, (Kennedy, J., majority opinion). The court assumed Nevada had not enforced the rule in a discriminatory manner. Id.
104. Id. at 2732 (pointing out that the grammatical structure of the rule indicates that an attorney can violate the first two sections of the rule but avoid discipline by complying with the safe harbor provision).
105. Id. (the section's allowance for "general" comments "without 'elaboration' " fails to provide an attorney with sufficient guidance).
106. Id. Kennedy also stressed that Rule 177, and therefore Model Rules Rule 3.6, was not void on its face and that states can correct the flaw with a clarifying interpretation. Id. at 2725-26.
107. Id. at 2731 (Gentile stated that he and two colleagues had reviewed the rules for several hours in order to prepare a statement in compliance with the rule).
108. Id. at 2731-32 n.2. Gentile refused to respond to several questions during the press conference. For example, he refused to elaborate on the existence of proof concerning police involvement in the theft or the legitimacy of polygraph results. Id.
109. Id. at 2731-32.
110. Id. at 2748-49 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
111. Id.
112. Id. at 2745-48 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).
that the grammatical conflict results from a literal reading of the rule, and he argued that the ABA intended the safe harbor provision to be read in light of the general prohibition.\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, Rehnquist argued that the safe harbor’s terms convey a precise standard for determining allowable comments.\textsuperscript{114} Rehnquist concluded that the rule provides sufficient notice to attorneys,\textsuperscript{115} and he stressed that the Court should defer to Nevada’s determination that Gentile had violated the rule.\textsuperscript{116}

Due to the Court’s focus on Nevada’s interpretation of the rule and its fact specific holding, Kennedy’s majority opinion is of less significance. Despite Rehnquist’s failure to sway the Court to adopt his view of the judgment, he obtained a majority for the proper standard for states to apply when reviewing attorney comment.

\section*{C. Adoption of Deferential Balancing Test}

\subsection*{1. Rehnquist Majority}

Rehnquist’s majority opinion addresses the proper standard for reviewing a state’s discipline of an attorney for making extrajudicial comments while associated with a pending trial.\textsuperscript{117} Gentile argued that the strict standard for reviewing regulations of press comments on trials should apply when attorneys made the comments as well.\textsuperscript{118} Nevada asserted that an attorney’s presence distinguished the cases involving regulations of the press and pointed to the dicta from Sawyer and Sheppard to justify stricter regulations of attorney speech.\textsuperscript{119}

Rehnquist began his analysis with a historical survey of state regulation of the legal profession.\textsuperscript{120} He then reviewed authority supporting stricter regulations of attorney speech. First, the dicta in Sawyer stated that courts could place greater restrictions on attorneys than ordinary persons.\textsuperscript{121} Second, Sheppard asserted that courts must take precautionary actions that are arguably within their powers to restrict attorney speech.\textsuperscript{122} Third, the Shep-
pard Court imposed limits on participants in trials preventing them from disclosing information obtained solely by their court access. Finally, the Court had allowed states to balance interests in the regulation of attorney advertising.

In light of this authority and the historical regulation of the profession, the Court adopted a more deferential standard for reviewing restrictions on attorney speech regarding pending litigation. Specifically, the Court held that the "substantial likelihood of material prejudice" standard reflects a proper balance between the state's interest in fair trials and the attorney's right of free speech.

2. Kennedy's Attack on the Adoption of a Deferential Standard

In contrast to the Rehnquist majority's focus on the heritage of attorney regulation, the critical factor to Justice Kennedy was that the case involves classic political speech. Kennedy made a strong attack on the majority's reliance on obiter dicta from Sheppard and Sawyer. Furthermore, he argued that the proposition that parties cannot disclose information obtained solely by their access to the courts is inapplicable here because all of Gentile's statements related to previously disclosed material. Finally, he readily distinguished the commercial speech cases due to the political nature of Gentile's statements.

IV. CONCLUSION

The grammatical conflict in Rule 177 split the Court on the issue of whether Rule 177 was unconstitutional under the prohibition against statutes that are overly vague. The lower courts should either interpret the safe harbor provision of Model Rule 3.6 as providing full immunity, or reexamine the rule and provide notice to attorneys that the safe harbor is simply a presumption that the general prohibition can override.

The Rehnquist Majority's adoption of a lower standard for reviewing ex-

123. Id. at 2743-44. The Court cited Seattle Times Co. v. Rhinehart, 467 U.S. 20, 32 (1984), in which it had upheld the constitutionality of a protective order that prevented disclosure by a defendant newspaper of information obtained solely by virtue of discovery during the pre-trial phases of a civil defamation suit. Id.
124. Gentile, 111 S. Ct. at 2344. Rehnquist stresses the Bates line of cases as authority for regulation of attorney speech outside the context of pending litigation. Id.
126. Id. at 2744-45 (Rehnquist, J., majority opinion).
127. Id. (stating that few goals can be more legitimate than the state's interest in fair trials and that the 'substantial likelihood' standard imposes sufficiently narrow limitations on attorneys, thus striking a satisfactory balance).
128. Id. at 2732-34 (Kennedy, J., minority opinion) (stressing that attorney Gentile was criticizing the actions of state authorities). Id.
129. Id. at 2733-34 (stating that even if those cases stand for greater restrictions on attorney speech, none of the cases addressed the proper scope of those limits).
130. Id. (distinguishing Seattle Times v. Rhinehart, 467 U.S. 20 (1984), the case relied on by the majority).
131. Id. at 2732-33.
trajudicial attorney comments regarding pending trials makes manifest the Rehnquist-O'Connor agenda to provide greater deference to state regulation of the legal profession. Great deference was shown to Nevada in its balance of the countervailing considerations of the defendant's right to a fair trial and the attorney's right to free speech. With the retirement of Justice Marshall, the current Court will likely continue this retreat from close scrutiny of state regulation of attorneys that was evident in the *Bates* line of cases.