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JUN 22 2015

CLERK OF THE SUPREME COURT
STATE OF WASHINGTON CRF

No. 91824-4
COA No. 45971-0-II

IN THE SUPREME COURT
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Petitioner,

v.

BRIAN GLEN COX.,

Respondent.

PETITION FOR REVIEW

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I. IDENTITY OF THE PETITIONER.

The State of Washington, appellant, petitions the Court for review of a decision of the Court of Appeals in State v. Brian Glenn Cox, Court of Appeals No. 45971-0-II, filed on May 27, 2015.

II. COURT OF APPEALS OPINION.

The State seeks review of the Court of Appeals opinion filed on May 27, 2015, reversing Cox's convictions for two counts of solicitation to commit first degree murder and one count of violation of a protection order. The decision was unpublished. State v. Cox, COA No. 45971-0-II, (May 27, 2015). A copy of the decision is attached to this petition as Appendix A.

III. ISSUES

1. Whether the public trial right applies to challenges for cause to members of the jury venire.
2. If the public trial right applies to challenges for cause to the jury venire, whether a sidebar, at which challenges for cause to the jury venire are taken, is a courtroom closure to which the Bone-Club¹ factors must be applied.

¹ State v. Bone-Club, 128 Wn.2d 254, 906 P.2d 325 (1995).

IV. STATEMENT OF THE CASE.

Cox was convicted by a jury on two counts of criminal solicitation of first degree murder and one count of violating a protection order. State v. Cox, COA 45971-0-II, *slip op.* at 2 (May 27, 2015). The convictions were based upon evidence that Cox had contact with his estranged wife and that he had offered money to a co-worker to kill his wife, and to a cellmate in the jail to kill the co-worker. *Id.* at 1-2.

After the jury had been selected, the court made a record of a sidebar during which the court excused three jurors for cause. The State requested that two of the three jurors be excused and the defense did not object. The defense challenged the third juror and the State objected, and although the court believed, correctly, that this juror's number was so high he or she would not be reached before the jury was selected, it excused the juror anyway. 1 RP 126-27. The reasons for the challenges and excusals were not made part of the record of this sidebar. If a written document was filed, the record is silent.

Division II of the Court of Appeals reversed the convictions on the grounds that the sidebar during jury selection violated Cox's right to a public trial under the Sixth Amendment to the United

States Constitution and Art. I, § 22 of the Washington Constitution. The Court of Appeals relied entirely on its earlier decision in State v. Calvert R. Anderson, COA 45497-1-II (May 19, 2015), without additional discussion or analysis. The opinion in Cox was not published; the opinion in Anderson was.

The State did not bring a motion for reconsideration in the Court of Appeals.

V. ARGUMENT WHY REVIEW SHOULD BE ACCEPTED.

A. The decision of the Court of Appeals conflicts with a decision from another division of the Court of Appeal and to some extent with another of its own decisions. The Division II opinion also presents a significant question of law under both the federal and state constitutions.

Because the court in Cox relied entirely on its decision in Anderson to reverse the convictions in this case, this argument addresses the Anderson decision. A copy of that opinion is attached to this petition as Appendix B.

This Court will accept review when the decision of the Court of Appeals conflicts with a decision of the Supreme Court, RAP 13.4(b)(1), conflicts with another decision of the Court of Appeals, RAP 13.4(b)(2), or raises a significant question of law under the Washington or the United States Constitutions. RAP 13.4(b)(3).

The decision at issue does conflict with the decision of the Court of Appeals, Division III, in State v. Love, 176 Wn. App. 911, 309 P.3d 1209 (2013), *review granted in part*, 181 Wn.2d 1029, 340 P.3d 228 (2015).² It also conflicts to some degree with another decision of Division II. In State v. Dunn, the court held that “the public trial right does not attach to the exercise of challenges during jury selection.” 180 Wn. App. 570, 575 321 P.3d 1283 (2014), *review denied*, 181 Wn.2d 1030, 340 P.3d 228 (2015) (citing to Love, 176 Wn. App. at 920).

In addition, this case presents a significant question of constitutional law. Conducting trials in a manner that preserves the right of both the defendant and the public to an open administration of justice, while making wise use of judicial resources and respecting the privacy of jurors, is of the utmost importance to the citizens of the State of Washington.

1. Challenges for cause at sidebar do not implicate the public trial right.

Whether a defendant's constitutional right to a public trial has been violated is a question of law that is subject to de novo

² The Supreme Court heard oral argument in State v. Love on March 10, 2015. S. Ct. No. 89619-4. Because the issue there is identical to the issue in this case, the State suggests that a ruling regarding review of this case be stayed pending the decision in Love.

review on direct appeal. State v. Easterling, 157 Wn.2d 167, 173-74, 137 P.3d 825 (2006) The right to a public trial is guaranteed by both the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution and article 1, section 10 of the Washington Constitution. Id., at 174. The remedy for a violation of the right to a public trial is reversal and remand for a new trial. State v. Wise, 148 Wn. App. 425, 433, 200 P.3d 266 (2009), *affirmed*, 176 Wn.2d 1, 288 P.3d 1113 (2012).

The right to a public trial is not absolute, but the courtroom may be closed only for the most unusual of circumstances. State v. Heath, 150 Wn. App. 121, 715, 206 P.3d 712 (2009). The right to open proceedings extends to jury selection and some pretrial motions, and a trial court must, before closing the courtroom, conduct the analysis required by State v. Bone-Club, 128 Wn.2d 254, 906 P.2d 325 (1995). That analysis is not required unless the public is "fully excluded from the proceedings within a courtroom," State v. Lormor, 172 Wn.2d 85, 92, 257 P.3d 624 (2011) (citing to Bone-Club, 128 Wn.2d at 257), or when jurors are questioned in chambers. Lormor, 172 Wn.2d at 92, citing to State v. Momah, 167 Wn.2d 140, 146, 217 P.3d 321 (2009) and State v. Strode, 167 Wn.2d 222, 224, 217 P.3d 310 (2009).

The initial question is whether the challenged proceeding even implicates the public trial right. State v. Sublett, 176 Wn.2d 58, 71, 292 P.3d 715 (2012). As noted above, both Divisions II and III of the Court of Appeals have held that the public trial right does not attach to challenges during jury selection. Love, 176 Wn. App. at 920; Dunn, 180 Wn. App. at 575. Anderson holds otherwise.

The challenges for cause at issue in Anderson were conducted at a sidebar in the courtroom. In State v. Smith, 181 Wn.2d 508, 334 P.3d 1049 (2014), the Supreme Court said:

Sidebars have traditionally been held outside the hearing of both the jury and the public. Because allowing the public to “intrude upon the huddle” would add nothing positive to sidebars in our courts, we hold that a sidebar conference, even if it is held outside the courtroom, does not implicate Washington’s public trial right.

Id. at 519. The Anderson court distinguishes this case, *slip op.* at 8, because the sidebar at issue in Smith dealt with evidentiary rulings, but the holding quoted above is not limited to any particular subject matter. No other case holds that a closure occurs where the proceeding takes place in the courtroom and the public is present in that courtroom, regardless of whether members of the public can hear what is being said or not.

While the public trial right applies to the questioning of potential jurors, it has not been applied to the process of challenging individual members of the venire. In State v. Slerf, 181 Wn.2d 598, 334 P.3d 1088 (2014), the defendant challenged the dismissal of four prospective jurors in chambers, based upon answers to a jury questionnaire, before the actual questioning of the jury panel began. Id. at 600. Slerf argued that that the public trial right applied to jury selection, but the court said that “the mere label of a proceeding is not determinative.” Id. at 604. The Slerf opinion quoted with approval language from State v. Wilson, 174 Wn. App. 328, 338, 298 P.3d 148 (2013):

Existing case law does not hold that a defendant’s public trial right applies to every component of the broad “jury selection” process (which process includes the initial summons and administrative culling of prospective jurors from the general adult public and other preliminary administrative processes). Rather, existing case law addresses application of the public right related *only* to a specific component of jury selection—i.e., the “voir dire” of prospective jurors who form the venire (comprising those who respond to the court’s initial jury summons and who are *not* subsequently excused administratively).

Slerf, 181 Wn.2d at 605 (emphasis in original). Voir dire is that component of the jury selection process in which prospective jurors

are questioned for the purpose of exposing biases and partiality. Wilson, 174 Wn. App. 340, n. 12.

Concluding that the question of whether or not challenges for cause implicate the public trial right has not been previously decided, the Anderson opinion then moved on to an analysis of the experience and logic test of Sublett. Anderson, *slip op.* at 7. The United States Supreme Court originally developed the experience and logic test to determine whether the public's right to access trials attaches under the First Amendment. See Press-Enter. Co. v. Superior Court, 478 U.S. 1, 7, 106 S. Ct. 2735, 92 L. Ed. 2d 1 (1986) (Press II). The experience prong of the test "asks 'whether the place and process have historically been open to the press and general public.'" Sublett, 176 Wn.2d at 73. The court engages in an inquiry to determine whether a type of procedure is one that has traditionally been open to the public. The logic prong addressed "whether the public access plays a significant positive role in the functioning of the particular process in question." Id. at 73, (quoting Press II, 478 U.S. at 8). Relevant to the logic inquiry are the overarching policy objectives of having an open trial, such as ensuring fairness to the accused by permitting public scrutiny of the proceedings. See Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Virginia, 448 U.S.

555, 572, 100 S. Ct. 2814, 65 L. Ed. 2d 973 (1980); State v. Brightman, 155 Wn.2d 506, 514, 122 P.3d 150 (2005). If both prongs of the experience and logic test are implicated, the public trial right attaches and the Bone-Club factors must be considered before the proceeding may be closed to the public. Sublett, 176 Wn.2d at 73.

a. Logic prong.

The Supreme Court has reasoned that the public has little, if any, role where the parties and the court all agree that a potential juror is disqualified from a case. Slerf, 181 Wn. 2d at 607. CrR 6.4(2)(d) provides that when there is an exception to a challenge for cause, the court shall conduct a mini-trial on the issue, determine the facts and the law, and make a ruling. In that event, there is a more compelling argument that the inquiry should be held in the hearing of the public, but that did not occur in Anderson's case. There was no dispute about the challenges for cause. Trial RP 12-13.

Even if members of the public cannot hear what is being said at sidebar, they can observe the individuals involved. They can make inquiries later. Where, for example, the challenges for cause are conducted in a way that the spectators can hear what is being

said, those spectators cannot do anything at the moment. A spectator who tries to interject himself into jury selection is likely to find himself being summarily escorted out of the courtroom by security. The court in Anderson does not explain why the public right or ability to know what takes place in the courtroom is hindered where a record is made later of the challenges for cause, whether in open court or in a written record filed with the clerk. As with the question from a deliberating jury, and the answer to that question, as discussed in Sublett, the public's right to know is protected. And it is the public's ability to see what the courts are doing that provides the protection for the defendant—nothing is done in secret even if it is not contemporaneously available to the public. There is no "significant positive role," Sublett, 176 at 73, for the public to play at the moment the challenges to the jury venire are made.

b. Experience prong.

The Anderson court acknowledged that challenges for cause have been made and ruled upon at sidebar, "particularly in recent years." Anderson, *slip op.* at 9. It found significant, however, that in "earlier times" challenges at sidebar were rare. Id. The court listed a number of cases to support this assertion, Id., although in

several of those cases it is unclear that the challenge for cause was made in public. See State v. Davis, 141 Wn.2d 798, 836, 10 P.3d 977 (2000); State v. Murphy, 9 Wash. 204, 206-08, 37 P. 420 (1894); State v. Parnell, 77 Wn.2d 503, 504, 463 P.2d 134 (1969); Wash. v. City of Seattle, 170 Wash. 371, 373, 16 P.2d 597 (1932). In one of the cases cited by the Anderson court, challenges for cause occurred in both open court and in chambers. State v. Wilson, 16 Wn. App. 348, 352, 555 P.2d 1375 (1976).

It is not apparent why more recent cases are excluded from the historical analysis. Methods and procedures evolve, and if the practice many years ago was to take challenges for cause in open court, but that practice changed to taking challenges at sidebar, the more recent practice is still "historical." The experience prong of the experience and logic test is an elastic concept. A practice that extends back a quarter of a century is sufficient to satisfy the history portion of the experience prong. See State v. Sykes, 182 Wn.2d 168, 175, 339 P.3d 972 (2014) (closure of drug court staffings supported by a history extending back to 1989).

The Anderson court acknowledged that evidence is slim regarding how juror challenges have historically been exercised, *slip op.* at 9, which indicates that defendants have not historically

found the procedures constitutionally objectionable. The court in Love interpreted that paucity of evidence to mean that the logic prong of the test had not been established. Love, 176 Wn. App. at 918. The Anderson court concluded the opposite, based upon cases which, as mentioned above, are not, in most cases, crystal clear that the challenges were conducted in the hearing of spectators. The State maintains that if the evidence is weak, the experience prong of the experience and logic test has not been met.

The court in Anderson distinguished between “traditional” practices and “historically required practices.” *Slip op.* at 10. The court’s rationale seems to imply that if a practice is required, traditionally ignoring it nullifies the requirement. The State argues that this is a distinction without a significant difference. The court in Anderson was incorrect in finding that the experience prong of the Sublett test was met.

2. Sidebars do not constitute a closure of the courtroom.

The Court of Appeals in Anderson cited to State v. Gomez, 183 Wn.2d 29, 347 P.3d 876 (2015), for the proposition that a closure can occur “when the public is excluded from particular

proceedings within a courtroom.” Anderson, *slip op.* at 4. In Gomez, however, the Supreme Court, which was primarily addressing the lack of a record regarding the alleged closure, said, “[T]he appellant must supply a record that reveals that the court took actions amounting to a closure, such as explicitly issuing an order completely closing the proceedings or moving the proceedings to chambers.” Gomez, 183 Wn.2d at 35. “The record must establish that the courtroom and proceedings were closed by express direction of the judge.” *Id.* The Anderson court equates holding a sidebar with an order closing the proceeding or moving the proceeding to chambers. While acknowledging that the trial court did neither of these things, the Court of Appeals concludes that the sidebar presented such an obstacle to public oversight of the challenges for cause that it constituted a courtroom closure. Anderson, 45497-1-II, *slip op.* at 5-6. There are no Supreme Court or Court of Appeals decisions holding that sidebars for any purpose constitute a courtroom closure.

In State v. Sadler, 147 Wn. App. 97, 193 P.3d 1108 (2008), *review denied*, 176 Wn.2d 1032, 299 P.3d 19 (2013), the trial court

had heard a Batson³ challenge in chambers. Division II held that moving the proceedings out of the courtroom was equivalent to closing the courtroom, but it disagreed with the State's argument that the chambers hearing was the equivalent of a bench conference. *Id.* at 113-14. In Anderson, the same court found that the sidebar, or bench conference, is the equivalent of moving the proceeding into chambers.

The court in Anderson cited to Sadler for the principle that "public scrutiny is essential where challenges to prospective jurors may be abused." *Slip op.* at 12. However, the Batson challenges in Sadler occurred in chambers, not in an open courtroom where spectators could observe the parties even if they could not hear them. 147 Wn. App. at 107. The State does not dispute that addressing challenges in chambers is the equivalent of closing the courtroom. That did not happen in Anderson. The court was incorrect that the logic prong of the Sublett test was met.

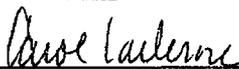
VI. CONCLUSION.

Review of the instant case is appropriate; the decision of the Court of Appeals conflicts with another decision of the Court of Appeals and raises a significant question of law under the

³ Batson v. Kentucky, 476 U.S. 79, 106 S. Ct. 1712, 90 L. Ed. 2d 69 (1986).

Constitutions of both Washington and the United States. The State respectfully requests that this court stay consideration of this petition pending a decision in State v. Love, and grant review as appropriate.

Respectfully submitted this 15th day of June, 2015.



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APPENDIX A

FILED
COURT OF APPEALS
DIVISION II

2015 MAY 27 AM 9:34

STATE OF WASHINGTON

BY ls
DEPUTY

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

DIVISION II

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Respondent,

v.

BRIAN GLENN COX,

Appellant.

No. 45971-0-II

UNPUBLISHED OPINION

JOHANSON, C.J. — Brian Glenn Cox appeals his jury trial convictions and his sentence for two counts of criminal solicitation of first degree murder and one count of violating a protection order. He successfully argues that the trial court violated his public trial rights when it excused jurors for cause during a sidebar conference. We follow our recent precedent in *State v. Anderson*, No. 45497-1-II (Wash. Ct. App. May 19, 2015), and hold that the trial court violated his public trial rights. Because we vacate Cox's convictions and remand to the trial court, we do not reach his other arguments or his statement of additional grounds (SAG) except we address, and reject, his challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence.

FACTS

In 2013, despite a recent protection order that restrained Cox from harassing, following, or having any contact whatsoever with his estranged wife, Cox drove up behind his wife's car, close

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enough so that if she had applied the brakes, their cars would have collided; honked his horn repeatedly at her; “[e]xtend[ed] his middle finger towards” her; and yelled at her from his car. 1 Report of Proceedings (RP) at 153. Cox also offered half of a \$250,000 life insurance policy, and later agreed to pay \$10,000, to a co-worker to “make his wife permanently disappear.” 2 RP at 281. After he was arrested, Cox asked his cellmate, “[H]ow much it would cost to have [his co-worker] disappear,” and Cox agreed to pay the cellmate \$20,000 so that the co-worker could not testify against him. 3 RP at 485.

The State charged Cox with two counts of criminal solicitation of first degree murder and one count of violating a protection order.¹ A jury convicted Cox on all three counts.

Prior to voir dire, the trial court excused three jurors for cause during a sidebar, stating,

THE COURT: . . . I’d like to make a record of sidebar we had before we selected the jury. At that time, there were requests to excuse for cause No. 6, 40 and 43. The state did not object to 6 or 40. The state did object to 43. They indicated in my thinking we were not going to reach 43 anyway and we did not, but I granted the challenges for cause for each of those three, 6, 40 and 43.

Does anybody need to put anything else on the record in that regard?

[THE STATE]: Your Honor, just to be specific, I think with 6 and 40, it was actually the state that made the request.

.....
[THE COURT:] Is there anything else I need to memorialize about any sidebars or actions outside the record?

1 RP at 126-27. The record does not establish what the parties said during the sidebar or the specific reasons that the court excused the three jurors. The trial court also did not analyze the

¹ RCW 9A.28.030; RCW 9A.32.030(1)(a); RCW 26.50.110(1)(a).

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*Bone-Club*² factors either before or after the sidebar conference. The full voir dire appears in the record only as “(The jury was selected and sworn.)” 1 RP at 100.

ANALYSIS

I. FOR CAUSE SIDEBAR CHALLENGE VIOLATED COX’S PUBLIC TRIAL RIGHTS

Cox argues that the trial court violated his public trial rights when it conducted for cause challenges at a sidebar without considering the *Bone-Club* factors. We follow our recent precedent in *Anderson*, agree with Cox, and hold that the trial court violated Cox’s public trial rights when it conducted for cause challenges at a sidebar. Because the violation of a defendant’s public trial right is structural error, we remand for a new trial.³

II. STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL GROUNDS

In his SAG, Cox argues that his convictions for two counts of criminal solicitation of first degree murder and one count of violating a protection order are not supported by sufficient evidence. We disagree.

“Evidence is sufficient to support a finding of guilt if, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the State, a rational trier of fact could find the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt.” *State v. Rose*, 175 Wn.2d 10, 14, 282 P.3d 1087 (2012). “A claim of insufficient evidence admits the truth of the State’s evidence and all inferences that reasonably can be drawn from that evidence.” *State v. Caton*, 174 Wn.2d 239, 241, 273 P.3d 980 (2012). We consider circumstantial and direct evidence to be equally reliable. *State v. Delmarter*,

² *State v. Bone-Club*, 128 Wn.2d 254, 906 P.2d 325 (1995).

³ Accordingly, we decline to address his remaining arguments other than his challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence to sustain his convictions.

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94 Wn.2d 634, 638, 618 P.2d 99 (1980). We also defer to the trier of fact where there are questions of conflicting testimony, witness credibility, and the persuasiveness of evidence. *State v. Thomas*, 150 Wn.2d 821, 874-75, 83 P.3d 970 (2004).

A defendant is guilty of criminal solicitation when,

with intent to promote or facilitate the commission of a crime, he or she offers to give or gives money or other thing of value to another to engage in specific conduct which would constitute such crime or which would establish complicity of such other person in its commission or attempted commission had such crime been attempted or committed.

RCW 9A.28.030. A defendant is guilty of first degree murder if, “[w]ith a premeditated intent to cause the death of another person, he or she causes the death of such person or of a third person.”

RCW 9A.32.030(1)(a).

Here, there was both video and testimonial evidence that Cox offered to give his co-worker money to kill his wife and testimonial evidence that he later offered his cellmate money to kill his co-worker. From their testimony, a rational trier of fact could find that Cox offered his co-worker and his cellmate money with the intent to promote or facilitate his wife’s murder and his co-worker’s murder. This evidence is sufficient to support Cox’s conviction on two counts of criminal solicitation of first degree murder.

To prove the violation of a protection order, the State must submit sufficient evidence to persuade a rational trier of fact that a protection order is granted, the person restrained knows of the order, and violates its provisions. RCW 26.50.110(1)(a). Here, there was evidence that Cox was served with and signed a protection order that restrained him from following, harassing, or having any contact with his estranged wife. Yet, despite knowing about the protection order, Cox

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followed his wife's vehicle very closely, made obscene gestures, and yelled at her. Again, this evidence is sufficient to support his conviction for violation of a protection order.

Because Cox's convictions were each supported by sufficient evidence, he is not entitled to dismissal with prejudice. However, because of the public trial rights violation, we vacate his convictions and remand for a new trial.

A majority of the panel having determined that this opinion will not be printed in the Washington Appellate Reports, but will be filed for public record in accordance with RCW 2.06.040, it is so ordered.


JOHANSON, C.J.

We concur:


WORSWICK, J.

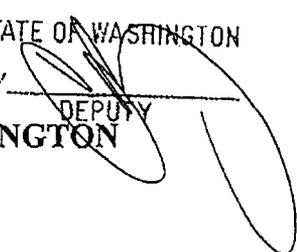

MELNICK, J.

APPENDIX B

FILED
COURT OF APPEALS
DIVISION II

2015 MAY 19 AM 9:05

STATE OF WASHINGTON

BY  DEPUTY

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

DIVISION II

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Respondent,

v.

CALVERT R. ANDERSON, JR.,

Appellant.

No. 45497-1-II

PUBLISHED OPINION

MAXA, P.J. — Calvert Anderson appeals his convictions for third degree assault and obstructing a law enforcement officer. During voir dire, Anderson successfully challenged four prospective jurors for cause at a sidebar conference. We hold that the trial court violated Anderson's constitutional right to a public trial by allowing counsel to make juror challenges for cause at a sidebar conference without first conducting a *Bone-Club*¹ analysis. Therefore, we reverse Anderson's convictions and remand for a new trial.

FACTS

The State charged Anderson with third degree assault and obstructing a law enforcement officer after he scuffled with police officers. A jury convicted Anderson of both crimes.

¹ *State v. Bone-Club*, 128 Wn.2d 254, 258-59, 906 P.2d 325 (1995).

During voir dire, Anderson challenged four prospective jurors for cause at a sidebar conference. The trial court dismissed all four challenged prospective jurors.² No transcription of the sidebar conference appears in the record, but the trial court later noted the challenges and resulting dismissals for the record. The trial court did not conduct a *Bone-Club* analysis before the sidebar conference.

Anderson appeals his convictions.

ANALYSIS

Anderson argues that the trial court violated his public trial right by allowing him to challenge prospective jurors for cause at a sidebar conference, when spectators in the courtroom presumably could not hear what was occurring.³ We agree and hold that (1) the sidebar conference addressing juror challenges for cause constituted a closure of courtroom proceedings because the public could not hear what occurred, (2) under the experience and logic test, challenging jurors for cause implicates the public trial right, and (3) the trial court did not establish any justification for closing the for cause juror challenge proceedings.

A. PUBLIC TRIAL RIGHT – GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution and article I, section 22 of the Washington Constitution guarantee a defendant the right to a public trial. *State v. Wise*, 176

² The court later dismissed a fifth prospective juror for cause at a second sidebar conference, apparently *sua sponte*.

³ Anderson's own successful challenges for cause form the basis for this appeal, and he did not object to the process below. However, a defendant does not waive a public trial right claim on appeal by failing to object to a court closure below. *State v. Wise*, 176 Wn.2d 1, 15, 288 P.3d 1113 (2012).

Wn.2d 1, 9, 288 P.3d 1113 (2012). In general, this right requires that certain proceedings be held in open court unless the trial court first applies on the record the five-factor test set forth in *State v. Bone-Club*, 128 Wn.2d 254, 258-59, 906 P.2d 325 (1995), and finds that a closure of the courtroom is justified. A public trial right violation is structural error, and we presume prejudice where a trial court closes trial proceedings without conducting a *Bone-Club* analysis. *Wise*, 176 Wn.2d at 13-14.

In analyzing whether the trial court has violated a defendant's public trial right, we must determine whether (1) the trial court closed the proceedings to the public, (2) the proceedings implicate the public trial right, and (3) the closure was justified. *State v. Smith*, 181 Wn.2d 508, 513-14, 334 P.3d 1049 (2014).⁴ Whether the trial court has violated a defendant's right to a public trial is a question of law that we review de novo. *Id.* at 513.

B. CLOSURE OF PROCEEDINGS

Anderson argues that the trial court effectively closed the proceedings by allowing him to challenge jurors for cause at a sidebar conference, even though the courtroom remained open to the public. We agree.

⁴ Our Supreme Court in *Smith*, 181 Wn.2d at 513, and *State v. Gomez*, No. 90329-8, 2015 WL 1590302, at *2 (Wash. Apr. 9, 2015), stated that the first step in the analysis of a public trial right claim is determining whether the proceedings implicate the public trial right, and the second step in that analysis is assessing whether the trial court closed the proceedings. However, where a genuine question exists as to whether a closure occurred, that issue may be addressed first. For instance, in both *State v. Andy*, 182 Wn.2d 294, 301, 340 P.3d 840 (2014) and *State v. Njonge*, 181 Wn.2d 546, 556-58, 334 P.3d 1068, *cert. denied*, 135 S. Ct. 880 (2014), the court addressed whether a closure had occurred before determining whether the proceedings implicated the defendant's public trial right.

A defendant's public trial right can be violated only if there has been a closure of court proceedings. *State v. Njonge*, 181 Wn.2d 546, 556, 334 P.3d 1068, *cert. denied*, 135 S. Ct. 880 (2014) (stating that "[a] defendant asserting violation of his public trial rights must show that a closure occurred.").

It is clear that "[a] closure occurs 'when the courtroom is completely and purposefully closed to spectators so that no one may enter and no one may leave.'" *Smith*, 181 Wn.2d at 520 (quoting *State v. Lormor*, 172 Wn.2d 85, 93, 257 P.3d 624 (2011)). But such a closure of the entire courtroom is not the only action that constitutes a closure. A closure also occurs when the public is excluded from particular proceedings within a courtroom. *State v. Gomez*, No. 90329-8, 2015 WL 1590302, at *2 (Wash. Apr. 9, 2015); *Lormor*, 172 Wn.2d at 92. As a result, holding proceedings in areas inaccessible to the public, such as the judge's chambers, also qualifies as a closure.⁵ *Id.*; *State v. Strode*, 167 Wn.2d 222, 226, 217 P.3d 310 (2009); *see also State v. Leyerle*, 158 Wn. App. 474, 483, 242 P.3d 921 (2010) (holding that proceedings conducted in a hallway adjacent to the courtroom were closed to the public).

The record here shows that the trial court neither barred the public from the courtroom during the sidebar conference nor held the conference in a physically inaccessible location. However, the entire purpose of a sidebar conference is to prevent anyone other than those present at the sidebar – an audience typically limited to the judge, counsel, and perhaps court staff –

⁵ Although our Supreme Court held in *Smith* that sidebar conferences on evidentiary matters do not implicate the public trial right, it declined to review whether such conferences constituted a closure. 181 Wn.2d at 520-21.

from hearing what is being said. The question we must decide is whether preventing the public from hearing a proceeding rises to the level of a closure.⁶

To determine whether the trial court closed the proceedings, we examine whether the trial court's action actually impeded public scrutiny. *See, e.g., In re Pers. Restraint of Orange*, 152 Wn.2d 795, 808-09, 100 P.3d 291 (2004). In *State v. Andy*, our Supreme Court addressed closure in this manner, focusing on the question of whether public access actually was thwarted. 182 Wn.2d 294, 301-02, 340 P.3d 840 (2014). The court examined the impact of a sign placed outside the courtroom stating that the courtroom would be closed at times it was in fact still in session. *Id.* at 300-301. To determine whether this misleading placement of the sign was a closure, the court analyzed whether the public actually was excluded from the proceedings. The court noted that the trial judge made express findings that "the public was able to access the courtroom at all times during Andy's trial and that no member of the public was deterred" from entry. *Id.* at 301. The court concluded that where the trial court's action "presented no obstacle to members of the public who wished to attend the trial," there was no closure. *Id.* at 302.

Unlike the sign in *Andy*, the sidebar conference here presented a clear obstacle to public scrutiny of Anderson's challenges. While the trial court did not physically restrict access to the courtroom, it did prevent meaningful access to the proceedings by conducting the challenges for cause in a manner such that the public could not hear what was occurring. Taking juror challenges at sidebar in this way thwarts public scrutiny just as if they were done in chambers or

⁶ Our Supreme Court in *Smith* suggested in dicta that the experience and logic test (discussed below) bears on the closure question. 181 Wn.2d at 520. However, the court in *Gomez* clarified that this test applies only to whether the public trial right attaches to a particular proceeding. 2015 WL 1590302, at *4 n.3.

outside the courtroom. We hold that the sidebar conference constituted a closure of the juror selection proceedings because the public could not hear what was occurring.

C. IMPLICATION OF PUBLIC TRIAL RIGHT

1. General Principles

If a proceeding has been closed to the public, we next must determine whether that proceeding implicates the public trial right. *State v. Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d 58, 71, 292 P.3d 715 (2012): “[N]ot every interaction between the court, counsel, and defendants will implicate the right to a public trial or constitute a closure if closed to the public.” *Id.*

To address whether there was a court closure implicating the public trial right, we employ a two-step process. *State v. Wilson*, 174 Wn. App. 328, 335-37, 298 P.3d 148 (2013). First, we consider whether the particular proceeding at issue “falls within a category of proceedings that our Supreme Court has already acknowledged implicates a defendant’s public trial right.” *Id.* at 337; *see also Wise*, 176 Wn.2d at 11-12. Second, if the proceeding at issue does not fall within an acknowledged category implicating the public trial right, we determine whether the proceeding implicates the public trial right using the “experience and logic” test our Supreme Court adopted in *Sublett*. *Wilson*, 174 Wn. App. at 335.

2. Juror Challenges Distinguished from Voir Dire

Anderson argues that challenges for cause fall within a category of proceedings to which the public trial right attaches under existing case law. Anderson bases his argument on Supreme Court cases establishing that voir dire implicates a defendant’s public trial right. *See, e.g., Wise*, 176 Wn.2d at 11; *Strode*, 167 Wn.2d at 227. He argues that challenges for cause are part of the

voir dire process and that the public trial right therefore attaches to such challenges as well. We disagree.

Contrary to Anderson's position, challenges for cause are not part of voir dire. In *Wilson*, we held that only the voir dire aspect of jury selection automatically implicates the public trial right. 174 Wn. App. at 338-40. We used the term "voir dire" as synonymous with the actual questioning of jurors, referring to the "'voir dire' of prospective jurors who form the venire." *Wilson*, 174 Wn. App. at 338; see also *State v. Slert*, 181 Wn.2d 598, 605, 334 P.3d 1088 (2014) (plurality opinion quoting this language with approval). In *State v. Marks*, we relied in part on this language from *Wilson* in holding that peremptory challenges are not part of voir dire. 184 Wn. App. 782, 787-88, 339 P.3d 196, *petition for review filed*, No. 91148-7 (Wash. Dec. 29, 2014). Like the peremptory challenges at issue in *Marks*, challenges for cause constitute a distinct proceeding that does not involve the questioning of jurors. See CrR 6.4 (distinguishing voir dire from both peremptory challenges and challenges for cause).

Here, the record neither shows nor suggests that the sidebar conference involved any questioning of jurors. Because Anderson's challenges were not part of the actual questioning of jurors, they were not part of voir dire. Therefore, our Supreme Court has not yet addressed whether juror challenges for cause implicate the public trial right.

3. Experience and Logic Test

Because our Supreme Court has not addressed the issue, we must apply the *Sublett* experience and logic test to determine whether the exercise of juror challenges for cause

implicates a defendant's public trial right.⁷ This test requires us to consider (1) whether the process and place of a proceeding historically have been open to the press and general public (experience prong), and (2) whether access to the public plays a significant positive role in the functioning of the proceeding (logic prong). *Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d at 73. If the answer to both prongs is yes, then the defendant's public trial right "attaches" and a trial court must consider the *Bone-Club* factors before closing the proceeding to the public. *Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d at 73.

a. Application of Test to Sidebar Conferences

In *Smith*, our Supreme Court concluded after applying the experience and logic test that the sidebar conference in that case did not implicate the public trial right. 181 Wn.2d at 511. The court broadly stated that "sidebars do not implicate the public trial right." *Id.* However, *Smith* involved legal argument on evidentiary issues at a sidebar conference. *Id.* at 512. The court framed the issue as addressing whether "sidebar conferences *on evidentiary matters*" implicate the right. *Id.* at 513 (emphasis added). We view the Supreme Court's holding in *Smith* as limited to that issue, and rule that *Smith* is not controlling here. Therefore, we must apply the experience and logic test.

b. Experience Prong

The experience prong of the *Sublett* test asks us to examine whether a particular practice or proceeding historically has been accessible to the public in the courts of this state. See *Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d at 73. Because most of the opinions referencing juror challenges for cause

⁷ In *Marks* we applied the experience prong and held that the exercise of peremptory juror challenges does not implicate the public trial right. 184 Wn. App. at 788-89. However, whether the exercise of juror challenges *for cause* implicates the public trial right involves a different issue.

show that historically such challenges were made in open court, we conclude that the experience prong supports a holding that such challenges do implicate the public trial right.

It is difficult to apply the experience prong to juror challenges for cause because the evidence regarding how trial courts historically have handled such challenges is slim. We are not aware of any cases or secondary authorities that discuss whether the traditional practice over the years has been to address for cause juror challenges in public or in private, or even whether there was a traditional practice.

However, what evidence we do have indicates that juror challenges for cause historically have been addressed in public. The published opinions of Washington courts show that challenges for cause have been exercised and ruled on in open court throughout the history of our state. *See, e.g., State v. Beskurt*, 176 Wn.2d 441, 447, 293 P.3d 1159 (2013); *State v. Davis*, 141 Wn.2d 798, 836, 10 P.3d 977 (2000); *State v. Moser*, 37 Wn.2d 911, 917, 226 P.2d 867 (1951); *State v. Stentz*, 30 Wash. 134, 135-37, 70 P. 241 (1902); *State v. Murphy*, 9 Wash. 204, 206-08, 37 P. 420 (1894); *State v. Biles*, 6 Wash. 186, 188, 33 P. 347 (1893); *see also State v. Parnell*, 77 Wn.2d 503, 504, 463 P.2d 134 (1969); *Wash. v. City of Seattle*, 170 Wash. 371, 373, 16 P.2d 597 (1932); *State v. Cronney*, 31 Wash. 122, 128, 71 P. 783 (1903); *State v. Rutten*, 13 Wash. 203, 204-07, 43 P. 30 (1895); *State v. Wilson*, 16 Wn. App. 348, 352, 555 P.2d 1375 (1976).

Challenges for cause also sometimes have been made and ruled on at sidebar, particularly in recent years. *See, e.g., State v. Love*, 176 Wn. App. 911, 915, 309 P.3d 1209 (2013), *review granted in part*, 181 Wn.2d 1029 (2015). But it appears that at least in earlier times, challenges for cause at sidebar were quite rare. Only one older civil case provides a possible example of a challenge for cause exercised at sidebar, and in that case there was a compelling reason to depart

from the usual procedure – the argument for dismissing the juror would have improperly exposed prospective jurors to information about the defendants’ liability insurance. *Popoff v. Mott*, 14 Wn.2d 1, 9, 126 P.2d 597 (1942). Overall, the weight of historical practice favors exercising of challenges for cause in open court.

Division Three of our court in *Love* held that challenges for cause do not satisfy the experience prong, stating that “there is no evidence suggesting that historical practices *required* [for cause] challenges to be made in public.” 176 Wn. App. at 918 (emphasis added). The court’s analysis in *Love* seems to redefine the *Sublett* experience prong as an inquiry into whether challenges for cause historically were *required* to be made in open court. But the court in *Love* cited no authority for this interpretation of the experience prong analysis. 176 Wn. App. at 918.

Our reading of the relevant cases indicates that the experience prong actually involves asking whether the practice *traditionally* has been open to the public, whether required or not. *E.g., Smith*, 181 Wn.2d at 516 (stating that “[w]ithout any evidence the public has *traditionally participated* in sidebars, the experience prong cannot be met” (emphasis added)). This reading is consistent with the United States Supreme Court’s analysis in *Press-Enterprise Co. v. Superior Court (Press II)*, 478 U.S. 1, 8, 10, 106 S. Ct. 2735, 92 L. Ed. 2d 1 (1986), which guided our Supreme Court in *Sublett*. 176 Wn.2d at 73-74. The Court in *Press II* analyzed whether there was a “tradition of accessibility” surrounding the proceeding at issue, 478 U.S. at 8, 10, and this is the proper question to ask here as well. Accordingly, we reject the experience prong analysis in *Love* and look to traditional practice, rather than historical requirements.

In light of what appears to be the historical practice in Washington courts, the experience prong favors a holding that challenges for cause implicate the public trial right.

b. Logic Prong

The logic prong of the *Sublett* test asks us to examine whether public access plays a “‘significant positive role’” in the functioning of the practice or procedure at issue. *Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d at 73 (quoting *Press II*, 478 U.S. at 8). Because public access provides a check against both actual and apparent abuse of challenges for cause, we hold that the logic prong supports extension of the public trial right to the exercise of challenges for cause.

Under the logic prong, we look to the “values served by open courts” and “must consider whether openness will ‘enhance[] both the basic fairness of the criminal trial and the appearance of fairness so essential to public confidence in the system.’” *Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d at 74-75 (quoting *Press-Enterprise Co. v. Superior Court (Press I)*, 464 U.S. 501, 508, 104 S. Ct. 819, 78 L. Ed. 2d 629 (1984)). We have held that this basic fairness is enhanced where “the public’s mere presence passively contributes to the fairness of the proceedings, such as deterring deviations from established procedures, reminding the officers of the court of the importance of their functions, and subjecting judges to the check of public scrutiny.” *State v. Bennett*, 168 Wn. App. 197, 204, 275 P.3d 1224 (2012) (emphasis omitted); see also *State v. Sadler*, 147 Wn. App. 97, 116, 193 P.3d 1108 (2008) (“[T]he purposes underlying a *public* trial include ensuring that the public can see that the accused is dealt with fairly and reminding officers of the court of their responsibilities to assure that the defendant receives a fair trial” (citation omitted)).⁸

⁸ In *Sublett*, our Supreme Court expressly rejected our analytical framework in *Sadler*, pointing to that opinion as an example of the categorical distinction approach we previously employed.

We previously have found that public scrutiny is essential where challenges to prospective jurors may be abused. *See Sadler*, 147 Wn. App. at 116 (holding that *Batson*⁹ proceedings implicate the public trial right because “the public has a vital interest” in the issue of “whether the prosecutor has excused jurors because of their race”). Challenges for cause may be less prone to arbitrary or improper exercise than peremptory challenges because a party must offer, and the trial court must find, a legal reason for dismissing a juror for cause. However, the public still has a vital interest in determining whether parties are making, and the trial court is ruling on, challenges for cause for legitimate reasons.

Further, challenges for cause exist specifically to ensure fairness in jury selection and, ultimately, a fair trial before an impartial jury. *See State v. Fire*, 145 Wn.2d 152, 164, 34 P.3d 1218 (2001). Addressing such challenges in public enhances the appearance of fairness in this process, and may well enhance actual fairness by reminding counsel of the importance of the juror challenge process, and subjecting the trial court’s rulings to public scrutiny.

In *Love*, Division Three of our court held that challenges for cause did not satisfy the logic prong. 176 Wn. App. at 919-20. The court seemed to indicate that because challenges for cause involve legal questions, public oversight is of limited importance. *See id.* at 920 n.7. But we have noted that “even in proceedings involving purely legal matters, the public’s presence

176 Wn.2d at 72; *see also State v. Halverson*, 176 Wn. App. 972, 977 n.2, 309 P.3d 795 (2013), *review denied*, 179 Wn.2d 1016 (2014). However, the Court in *Sublett* noted no deficiencies in our discussion of the values served by public scrutiny or on the value of publicity in deterring the abuse of challenges during jury selection. Further, the court denied review of *Sadler* after deciding *Sublett*. 176 Wn.2d at 1032.

⁹ *Batson v. Kentucky*, 476 U.S. 79, 106 S. Ct. 1712, 90 L. Ed. 2d 69 (1986) (holding that a party cannot exercise peremptory juror challenges on the basis of race).

may ensure the fairness of such proceedings.” *Bennett*, 168 Wn. App. at 204. While the court in *Love* reasoned that making a record of the challenges “satisfies the public’s interest in the case and assures that all activities were conducted aboveboard,” it seemed to discount the idea that public oversight of the challenges and associated argument would enhance the appearance of fairness or deter deviation from established procedures. 176 Wn. App. at 920.

Because our Supreme Court has indicated that the appearance of fairness and deterrence of deviation from established procedures are important functions of the public trial right, we disagree with Division Three and conclude that public access plays a significant positive role in the functioning of juror challenges for cause. Therefore, the logic prong of the *Sublett* test indicates that challenges for cause implicate the public trial right.

Both the experience and logic prongs of the *Sublett* test support a holding that the exercise of juror challenges for cause should occur in open court. Accordingly, we hold that juror challenges for cause implicate a criminal defendant’s public trial right.

D. JUSTIFICATION FOR CLOSURE.

If the trial court has closed a proceeding to the public and that proceeding implicates the public trial right, we must determine whether the trial court was justified in closing the proceeding. In most cases, the trial court must expressly consider the five *Bone-Club* factors on the record. *Smith*, 181 Wn.2d at 520 (stating that “[a] closure unaccompanied by a *Bone-Club* analysis on the record will almost never be considered justified”).

Our Supreme Court has recognized that in extremely rare circumstances, a closure could be justified without a *Bone-Club* analysis if an examination of the record shows that the trial court “effectively weighed the defendant’s public trial right against other compelling interests.”

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Smith, 181 Wn.2d at 520. The court found no public trial right violation under such circumstances in *State v. Momah*, 167 Wn.2d. 140, 156, 217 P.3d 321 (2009). But the court has acknowledged that it is unlikely to ever again see a case like *Momah*. *Smith*, 181 Wn.2d at 520.

Here, the trial court did not expressly consider the *Bone-Club* factors before holding the sidebar conference. Further, there is no basis in the record for concluding that these factors effectively have been satisfied through a balancing process. Therefore, we hold that the trial court was not justified in hearing juror challenges for cause at a sidebar conference.

CONCLUSION

A sidebar conference addressing juror challenges for cause constitutes a closure of the juror selection proceedings, and implicates a defendant's public trial right. Here, the trial court did not conduct a *Bone-Club* analysis or otherwise provide justification for not addressing for cause juror challenges in open court. Accordingly, we hold that the trial court erred in addressing juror challenges for cause at a sidebar conference.

We reverse Anderson's convictions and remand for a new trial.



MAXA, P.J.

I concur:



ZEE, J.

MELNICK, J. (conurrence) — I concur with the result the majority reaches. However, I write separately to supplement the majority's analysis under the "experience and logic" test. See Majority at 7-8 (analyzing *State v. Sublett*, 176 Wn.2d 58, 73-74, 292 P.3d 715 (2012)).

I believe there is additional authority in CrR 6.4 to support the majority's position. This rule delineates procedures for selecting a jury. Specifically, after examination, when challenging a juror for cause, a judge may excuse for cause that juror if grounds for the challenge exist. CrR 6.4(c).¹⁰ If, however, the challenge for cause is denied by the opposing party, "the court shall try the issue and determine the law and the facts." CrR 6.4(d)(1). If the challenge is tried, the rules of evidence apply and the challenged juror may be called as a witness, subject to cross-examination. CrR 6.4 (d)(2). If the court finds the challenge is sufficient or true, the juror shall be excluded. CrR 6.4(d)(2). Conversely, "if not so determined or found otherwise," the challenge shall be disallowed. CrR 6.4(d)(2).

Because both the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution and article 1, section 22 of the Washington Constitution guarantee a defendant the right to a public trial and because

¹⁰ CrR 6.4(c)(2) references RCW 4.44.150 through 4.44.200 as governing challenges for cause. RCW 4.44.190 states,

[a] challenge for actual bias may be taken for the cause mentioned in RCW 4.44.170(2). But on the trial of such challenge, although it should appear that the juror challenged has formed or expressed an opinion upon what he or she may have heard or read, such opinion shall not of itself be sufficient to sustain the challenge, but the court must be satisfied, from all the circumstances, that the juror cannot disregard such opinion and try the issue impartially.

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challenges for cause involve trials, a trial court must either hold the trials in open court or utilize the five part *Bone-Club*¹¹ test.


Melnick, J.

¹¹ *State v. Bone-Club*, 128 Wn.2d 254, 906 P.2d 325 (1995).

THURSTON COUNTY PROSECUTOR

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