## IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES IN THE MATTER OF:

## HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

- v -

## BLAKE NESSEL

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Transcript of the Decision held before The
Honourable Justice S.H. Smallwood, sitting in Yellowknife,
in the Northwest Territories, on the 16th day of February,
2018.

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## APPEARANCES:

Ms. M. Zimmer: Counsel for the Crown

Ms. K. Oja, agent for Counsel for the Accused

R. Clements:

(Charges under s. 271 the Criminal Code)

No information shall be published in any document or broadcast or transmitted in any way which could identify the victim or a witness in these proceedings pursuant to s. 486. 4 of the Criminal Code This decision has been edited to comply with s. 486. 4 of the Criminal Code

THE COURT: So dealing with the decision on Mr. Nessel's application. The accused Blake Nessel is charged with having sexually assaulted TN on August 26, 2016 in Hay River, Northwest Territories. This matter is set for trial by judge and jury on April 9th, 2018.

The accused has brought an application pursuant to section 276 of the *Criminal Code* seeking permission to adduce evidence of prior sexual activity between himself and TN.

Pursuant to section 276, evidence that the complainant has engaged in sexual activity, whether with the accused or with any other person, is not admissible to support an inference that the complainant because of the sexual nature of that activity either is more likely to have consented to the sexual activity that forms the basis of the charge or is less worthy of belief. These are referred to as the twin myths, and the section is intended to ensure that any evidence of sexual activity that is adduced is relevant to the allegations before the Court and does not contribute to stereotypical representations of sexual assault victims.

The procedure for determining the admissibility of this evidence is set out in section 276, 276.1 and 276.2 of the *Criminal* 

1 Code.

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The application process requires a two-stage process. The accused first applies for a hearing to determine the admissibility of the evidence pursuant to section 276.1. If the preconditions are satisfied, then the judge may order a hearing.

The preconditions in section 276.1(4) require a judge to be satisfied that first, the application is made in accordance with subsection (2) so it is in writing and sets out the detailed particulars of the evidence that the accused wishes to adduce and the relevance of that evidence to an issue at trial; second, a copy of the application was filed with the clerk and provided to the Crown at least seven days in advance or such shorter interval as the judge may allow where the interest of justice require; and third, the evidence sought to be adduced is capable of being admissible under section 276(2).

Crown counsel conceded that the evidence was capable of being admitted and that the defence had met the preconditions set out in section 276.1.

The application was made by the accused in writing seeking to adduce two prior occasions of sexual intercourse with TN that the accused

1 alleged occurred in the summer of 2016.

The application, as filed, did not make reference to the defence of honest but mistaken belief in consent.

At the outset of the hearing, defence counsel advised that this was also an issue and that he wished to address it during the application. Despite the lack of notice, the Crown indicated that they were prepared to address this issue as well. We adjourned so that the accused could provide a supplemental affidavit addressing that issue.

I was satisfied that the preconditions had been met and ordered a hearing into the admissibility of the evidence.

The evidence that was adduced at the hearing consisted of the affidavit of Blake Nessel, the supplementary affidavit of Blake Nessel, the transcript of the preliminary inquiry, the statement of TN, statement of JL, the statement of JD, the statement of JLL, and a screen shot of a note on TN's ipod. In addition, the accused testified at the hearing and was cross-examined.

With respect to the evidence at the hearing, the statement of TN was provided to the RCMP on August 27, 2016. In her statement, TN told the police that she had been babysitting at the

apartment of the accused and his girlfriend
Rebecca Brown. She was in the apartment with her
cousin and little sister and the baby that
evening. At around 10 or 11 the accused came to
the apartment, and she let him in. She thought
he was intoxicated and possibly high.

The complainant said that the accused repeatedly asked her to have sex with him, and she kept saying no. She went outside to have a smoke, and the accused came outside on the balcony with her. When they were outside, he kept asking her if he could have sex with her, and she said no. He tried to grab her and kiss her, and she pushed him away. They went back inside the apartment, and she sat down beside her cousin and sister. The accused went down the hall and then she heard him calling her name. She ignored him, and a couple of minutes later he called her name again. She went down the hall and into the spare room, and he closed the door.

She said he started to come on to her again and that he pulled down his pants and pulled down her pants. He put her on the bed, and he was behind her in a spooning position. He put his penis inside her. She said she kept telling him to stop and saying no.

About two minutes later she heard a knock on

the door, and the accused stopped. She said the accused pretended to sleep, and she opened the door and saw her aunts JL and JD.

When asked in the statement how long she had known the accused for, TN said that she had just met him recently since she moved back here.

There were no questions asked in the statement about any prior sexual interactions between herself and the accused.

The complainant also testified at a preliminary inquiry into this matter on March 21st, 2017. The Crown tendered the complainant's statement pursuant to section 540(7) of the Criminal Code, and she testified briefly before being cross-examined by counsel for the accused.

During the cross-examination, TN testified that she had moved to Hay River in May 2016 and had babysat for Rebecca Brown during the summer of 2016.

TN was asked if she went to Kalinda

Cardinal's house, the mother of the accused, to

see the accused, and she testified that she

didn't think so. She also testified that she had

drunk a lot that summer and that she might have

gone there when she was drunk. TN denied

spending time with the accused outside of when

she babysat for Ms. Brown, and she testified that

she only saw the accused around Rebecca Brown that summer and never saw him alone.

When asked if she had exchanged Facebook messages with the accused to meet at the Rooster, TN said she did not remember. She was asked if she met up with the accused at the Rooster, and she answered that she did not know. She was asked about walking with the accused on a trail, and she testified that she did not know.

JL provided a statement to the police on August 27th, 2016. She stated in her statement that she and JD went to Rebecca Brown's apartment. When they entered the apartment JD knocked on a door and yelled to open the door. TN came out of the room clothed and looking upset. A male was on the bed face down.

JD provided a statement to the police on September 8th, 2016, and she said that she had gone to the accused's apartment and knocked on the bedroom door and told TN to open the door. She heard something zip up and the door opened. The accused was on the bed half naked laying face down. TN came out of the room and was shaking.

JLL provided a statement to the police on August 27th, 2016. She said that she went with TN to babysit. At around 10:30 a guy came to the door and was let in by TN. He seemed to her to

be drunk and high. This man and TN went out on the balcony to smoke and came in a few minutes later. He went down the hall, and TN showed her a note on her ipod that said something like "WTF, he's trying to bang me", and TN shook her head no.

A few minutes later he called TN, and she did not answer. He called her name again sounding angrier. TN went down the hall, and after a few minutes when she did not come back, Ms. JLL went down the hall and heard TN say no. Then someone knocked on the door, and she opened the door and it was her mother and JD, her mother being JL.

A photocopy of the note that TN made on the ipod was entered into evidence. It is dated August 26 and shows a time of 11 p.m., and the note says "WTF, he's trying to bang me... No thank you".

Mr. Nessel provided two affidavits and testified on the hearing. His evidence was that he met TN during the summer of 2016. TN had been babysitting for his children and that he and TN had consensual sexual contact on two occasions. Because he was in a relationship with Rebecca Brown, he attempted to conceal this sexual activity from Ms. Brown and others. He believed

that TN also attempted to conceal the sexual activity.

On the first occasion, the accused said that he had consensual sexual intercourse with TN in his bedroom at his mother's home in Hay River. This was the first time he had met TN, and she was babysitting at the time for he and Ms. Brown. He had come home, and TN was in the living room with his daughter, who was asleep. He said they talked for a bit and then he asked her to have sex with him. She followed him down the hall to his bedroom. They were in his bed and had sex in a spooning position. He believed that no one was home except for himself, TN and his daughter.

On the second occasion, the accused said that TN and he arranged to meet at the Rooster in Hay River. They walked together to a secluded area off of a trail and had consensual sexual intercourse.

The accused's evidence was that this occurred around the beginning of August 2016 and a couple of weeks after the first time they had sexual intercourse. Afterwards, the accused testified that he told TN that "if you want to keep doing this, keep it secret, keep it to ourselves".

On the night of August 26, 2016 the accused

testified that he returned to his apartment that he shared with Rebecca Brown and their daughter. He had been drinking beer earlier with Rebecca Brown and others. He says that he went on the balcony with TN and they shared a cigarette. He asked her about having sex that evening, but he didn't recall her saying yes or no. TN went back inside and he followed her inside. He went down the hallway of the apartment and into a spare bedroom. He called TN, and she came into the bedroom and closed the door behind her. He was on the bed and said let's have sex.

His evidence was that TN came over to the bed, got on the bed and pulled her pants down. He pulled his pants down, and they engaged in sexual activity in a spooning position. This lasted for about 30 seconds before there was a knock on the door. TN got up off the bed and stood by the door. He said that she hesitated before opening the door.

According to the accused's supplementary affidavit, TN never said any words such as "no" or "don't" or "stop" or "I don't want to", and did not make any gestures such as pulling away or pushing or struggling or resisting that would indicate to him that she was not consenting to what occurred.

That is the evidence that was before me on this application relative to the sexual history that the accused alleges he had with the complainant and that he wishes to have tendered into evidence at the trial.

Section 276(1) of the Criminal Code states that evidence that the complainant has engaged in sexual activity, whether with the accused or with any other person, is not admissible to support an inference that by reason of the sexual nature of the activity the complainant is more likely to have consented to the sexual activity that is the subject matter of the charge or is less worthy of belief.

An accused person is not allowed to adduce evidence of the sexual history of the complainant unless the Court is satisfied that the evidence pursuant to section 276(2) is of specific instances of sexual activity, is relevant to an issue at trial, and has significant probative value that is not substantially outweighed by the danger of prejudice to the proper administration of justice.

Section 276(3) sets out a number of factors that I must take into account in determining whether the evidence is admissible. They are: the interests of justice, including the right of

the accused to make full answer and defence; society's interest in encouraging the reporting of sexual assault offences; whether there is a reasonable prospect that the evidence will assist in arriving at a just determination in the case; the need to remove from the fact-finding process any discriminatory belief or bias; the risk that the evidence may unduly arouse sentiments of prejudice, sympathy or hostility in the jury; the potential prejudice to the complainant's personal dignity and right of privacy; the right of the complainant and of every individual to personal security and to the full protection and benefit of the law; and any other factor that the judge considers relevant.

There is no dispute that the evidence that the accused proposes to adduce is of specific instances of sexual activity as contemplated by section 276(2)(a) of the *Criminal Code*. The issue is whether it is relevant to an issue at trial and whether it has significant probative value that is not substantially outweighed by the danger of prejudice.

In order to determine whether the evidence is relevant to an issue in trial, it is necessary to identify the issue to which the evidence is relevant as stated in the *R. v. L.S.*, 2017 ONCA

1 685 at paragraph 86: "Relevance is
2 fact-specific. It depends on the material facts
3 in issue, the evidence adduced, and the positions
4 of the parties."

In order to be relevant, the evidence does not have to establish or refute the fact in issue. It does not have to be determinative. The evidence only has to have some tendency to make the existence or non existence of the material fact more or less likely. L.S., Supra at paragraph 89

In this case the defence is claiming that the defence will be one of consent or of honest but mistaken belief in consent. The defence argues that it is necessary for the trier of fact to know about the prior sexual activity between the accused and TN as it is relevant to contextual narrative and credibility, consent, and honest but mistaken belief in consent.

The defence argues that it will be impossible for the trier of fact to properly assess the accused's claim that the sexual activity that forms the subject matter of the charge was consensual if the jury is left with the impression that the accused requested sex with his babysitter, a virtual stranger, without knowing about the accused's claim that they had a

1 prior sexual relationship.

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The defence argues that the accused's evidence of the prior sexual activity between the accused and TN is necessary and relevant to the contextual narrative and credibility as well as consent.

The anticipated evidence of the complainant, based upon her statement and the preliminary inquiry transcript, will be that the accused returned to the apartment that evening intoxicated. The accused repeatedly asked her to have sex with him and she kept saying no, both inside the apartment and out on the balcony when she went for a smoke and the accused accompanied her.

Back inside the apartment, the complainant sat down beside her cousin and sister and typed a message on her ipod, which she showed to her cousin, that said "WTF, he's trying to bang me. No thank you."

The accused went down the hall and then she heard him calling her name. She went down the hall and into the bedroom, and he closed the door. He started to come on to her again. The complainant said that he pulled his pants down and pulled down her pants. He put her on the bed and was behind her in a spooning position. The

complainant says that she kept telling him to stop and saying no. About two minutes later she heard a knock on the door, and the accused stopped.

It is not clear what the complainant will say about prior sexual activity with the accused. She was asked some general questions about meeting with the accused at his home at the preliminary inquiry, and she denied being alone with him at any time. She was also asked at the preliminary inquiry about meeting him at the Rooster, and she answered that she didn't know when she was asked about meeting the accused at the Rooster.

The accused's evidence is that he had consensual sexual intercourse with the complainant on two occasions in the weeks leading up to the alleged incident. His evidence is that the encounter on August 26, 2016 was also consensual, and he argues that it bore some similarity to what occurred the first time he and the complainant had sexual intercourse.

Evidence of other sexual activity can be important to an accused's ability to make full answer and defence. The defence position is that the complainant consented to the sexual activity and only complained about the incident when they

were caught by her aunts, who accused her of being irresponsible.

One of the issues the jury will be considering will be the relationship between the parties when determining whether the complainant consented to having sexual intercourse with the accused. Without evidence of prior consensual sexual activity between the complainant and the accused, the jury will likely have questions and wonder why the complainant would agree to have sex with a virtual stranger, would wonder what the relationship was between the parties prior to this night, would wonder why the accused expected that the complainant would consent to his request to have sex on that occasion.

Credibility will be a central issue at trial in assessing the conduct of the complainant and the accused during the incident and the believability of their positions. The jury may be influenced by their perception of the nature and extent of the relationship between them.

Among other things, the jury will have to consider why the complainant walked down the hallway and went into the room with the accused, why she wrote the note on the ipod that she showed to her cousin, why the complainant was hesitant to open the door when her aunts knocked

on it, whether the timing of her complaint to her aunts about what occurred was part of her effort to conceal the consensual nature of her sexual activity with the accused.

If the accused is unable to testify about the prior sexual activity between himself and the complainant, the jury could assume that there was no prior relationship between the parties, and that the accused and complainant were practically strangers. This has the potential to make the evidence of the accused improbable or preposterous.

As stated in *R. v. Strickland* 2007 CanLII 3679 at paragraph 35: "The probative value of this contextual evidence is not to support the inference of an increased likelihood of consent. Rather, it is to dispel the inference of the unlikelihood of consent, which would result if the jury were left with the misapprehension that the sexual relations in question must have occurred on the sudden, with no pre-existing relationship between the parties."

The evidence of the complainant will likely refer to the note she wrote on the ipod to her cousin. One conclusion that could be drawn from this note is that the complainant was not interested in having sexual intercourse with the

accused. Her evidence will likely be that she had little contact with the accused before this incident, although, as I said, it is not clear what she will say if asked about being in the accused's bedroom alone at his mother's house and about meeting him at the Rooster.

The evidence of the complainant will place the nature of her relationship with the accused in issue.

The accused's assertion of the prior sexual activity between himself and the complainant is relevant to the contextual narrative and to credibility. In order to make full answer and defence, the accused is entitled to lead evidence of the alleged prior sexual activity between himself and the complainant.

With respect to honest but mistaken belief in consent, this issue frequently arises in section 276 applications. It arises in situations where the accused alleges that he honestly believed that the complainant was consenting to the sexual activity when the evidence of the complainant is that she did not consent.

It often occurs in situations where there may be some ambiguity regarding the issue of consent. It does not arise when there is clear

evidence of non consent, for example, where the complainant is vigorously resisting or yelling

There is an evidentiary burden on the accused to establish that he believed there was consent by the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question. This requires evidence by the accused and specific evidence regarding conduct or words that led him to believe the complainant was consenting. The Ontario Court of Appeal in the R. v. Harris, (1997) 118 C.C.C.(3d)498, provides a number of factors to consider in this situation.

The Court of Appeal stated at page 508:

"Where evidence of prior consensual sexual activity between the parties is being proffered to support the defence of honest but mistaken belief in consent, it must be tested on a case-by-case basis having regard to all of the circumstances, including, but not limited to: The viability of the defence itself; the nature and extent of the prior sexual activity as compared to the sexual activity forming the subject matter of the charge; the time frame separating the incident; and the nature of the relationship between the parties."

The evidence of the accused is that the

complainant voluntarily entered the bedroom and closed and locked the door. She got on the bed herself and removed her pants, that they began to have sex in a spooning position before they were quickly interrupted by the knock on the door.

The accused's evidence was that she did not say "no" or "stop" or do anything to suggest that she was not consenting to what was occurring.

The evidence of the complainant, based upon the statement to the police, was that she said "no" and "stop" in the bedroom.

The statement of JLL indicates that she heard the complainant say no from inside the bedroom shortly before her mother knocked on the apartment door. The evidence of the Crown seems to establish that the complainant indicated her non consent to the actions of the accused. She said "no", and said it loud enough that her cousin heard it from outside the door of the room.

At this point I am not satisfied that there is evidence which gives an air of reality to the defence of honest but mistaken belief in consent. Certainly, evidence during the trial may unfold differently, and the issue can be revisited, but I am not satisfied that there is a basis to the section 276 application pursuant to the honest

but mistaken belief in consent defence.

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The third condition is that the evidence must have significant probative value that is not substantially outweighed by the danger of prejudice to the proper administration of justice.

Significant probative value means that the evidence must have more than a trifling relevance and is capable in the context of all of the evidence of leaving the jury with a reasonable doubt. *L.S.*, Supra at paragraph 90.

engaged in consensual sexual activity before the alleged sexual assault has a probative value that is more than trifling. Evidence about the nature of the relationship in the weeks before the alleged incident could be of assistance to the jury in assessing the evidence of the complainant and the accused in making determinations regarding their credibility. It also provides contextual narrative to the accused's evidence.

Considering the accused's evidence without hearing about the prior sexual activities that he alleged occurred between he and the complainant could cause the jury to dismiss the accused's account and prevent the trier of fact from considering the prior relationship, if it

existed, in assessing the conduct of the parties on the night in question.

In considering potential prejudice, the Crown argued that this stigmatizes the complainant, perpetuates a trope of her as the "drunken, crazy, home wrecker". No one has referred to the complainant in that way or made any suggestion of the sort.

The evidence of the complainant from the preliminary inquiry referred to her use of alcohol and her mental health struggles. She testified that she was consuming a lot of alcohol in the summer of 2016, and she also testified that she had taken medication on occasion for depression.

It is a fact that the complainant has had some issues, whether they are big or small is not for me to say, which have had an impact on her. She acknowledged in her testimony that her consumption of alcohol may have had an affect on her memory. That is a relevant issue to be explored at trial, so is any prior relationship she may have had with the accused.

I am cognizant that there may be some prejudice which will result from the trier of fact hearing about prior sexual activity between the complainant and the accused. Any potential

prejudice can be limited and addressed in two ways; first, the potential misuse of the evidence by the jurors can be limited by a clear warning to the jury about the use they can make of this evidence in the charge to the jury in accordance with section 276.4 of the *Criminal Code*.

The second way that this prejudice can be limited is through a limitation on what evidence can be adduced at the trial and limiting the extent of the cross-examination of the complainant on this issue. This will assist in limiting the prejudice as well as maintaining, as much as possible, the complainant's personal dignity and right of privacy.

This is not a situation where the intimate details of the sexual activity are relevant. The relevance arises from the assertion that the sexual relationship existed at all, that there may have been a sexual relationship which consisted of two sexual encounters that occurred in the weeks before the allegations and that the accused wished to conceal this relationship from others.

I have also considered society's interest in encouraging the reporting of sexual assault offences. While delving into the prior sexual activity between the accused and the complainant

could operate to discourage reporting of sexual assault offences, requiring the complainant to answer some questions about any prior relationship with the accused would not have that result.

The complainant will have to testify at the trial about intimate details of the alleged sexual assault and requiring her to answer additional questions of a more general nature about prior encounters with the accused will not add significantly to that burden.

In conclusion, the application is granted, and the accused has permission to adduce evidence at trial concerning his prior sexual activities with the complainant.

The evidence that may be adduced will be general in nature and only refer to the sexual nature of the activity, the number of times that it is alleged to have occurred, the time and place in which the activities are alleged to have occurred, that the parties were alone at the relevant time, and that the accused wished to conceal the activities from others.

Counsel will not be permitted to elicit the specific details of the alleged sexual encounters, and this ruling is subject to being revisited depending on the evidence adduced at

1	trial in the event that it is materially
2	different than the evidence which was adduced at
3	the hearing.
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6	PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED TO MARCH 5, 2018 A.M.
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8	CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPT
9	
10	I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the
11	foregoing pages are a complete and accurate
12	transcript of the proceedings taken down by me in
13	shorthand and transcribed from my shorthand notes
14	to the best of my skill and ability.
15	Dated at the City of edmonton, Province of
16	Alberta, this 26th day of February, 2018.
17	Certified Pursuant to Rule 723.
18	of the Rules of Court
19	C Rea
20	
21	Colleen Rea
22	Court Reporter
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