

= The Contest =

" The Contest " is the 51st episode of the NBC sitcom Seinfeld . The 11th episode of the fourth season , it aired on November 18 , 1992 . In the episode , George tells Jerry , Elaine , and Kramer that his mother caught him masturbating . The conversation results in George , Jerry , Elaine , and Kramer entering into a contest to determine who can go for the longest period of time without masturbating .

The episode was controversial when broadcast because NBC thought that masturbation was not a topic suitable for prime time television . As a result , the word " masturbation " is never used in the episode . Instead , the subject is described using a series of euphemisms , while the meaning of the subject is still made clear to the audience . The writer of the episode , Larry David , won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Writing in a Comedy Series for his work on the episode . One of the euphemisms used in the episode is " master of my domain , " said by a character when still in the contest . It has since become a catchphrase in popular culture , although it is not always used in reference to masturbation .

The episode was ranked # 1 on TV Guide 's list of " 100 Greatest Episodes of All @-@ Time " .

= = Background = =

The fourth season of Seinfeld has a continuous story arc , in which Jerry and George are writing a television pilot for NBC . In the previous episode , " The Virgin " , Jerry had started dating Marla (played by Jane Leeves) , a woman who is a virgin .

= = Plot = =

The episode begins with Jerry , Kramer , and Elaine dining at Monk 's Cafe . George enters and says , " My mother caught me . " When asked what he was caught doing , he says , " I was alone " , and he goes on to imply that his mother caught him masturbating in her house while reading " a Glamour magazine " , resulting in her falling over in shock and ending up in the hospital . George says he 'll never do " that " again , and when the others express skepticism , Jerry and George make a \$ 100 bet over who can go the longest without masturbating . Kramer then joins the bet , as does Elaine . However , Elaine is persuaded to bet \$ 150 , because the men claim that it is harder for men not to masturbate , as it is part of a man 's " lifestyle " .

Kramer is almost immediately out , due to the presence of a beautiful exhibitionist woman in the apartment across the street who walks around with the curtains open . The others are distracted by various temptations : George is distracted in the hospital his mother is staying at by an attractive nurse giving an even more attractive woman a daily sponge bath ; Elaine visits a fitness club which is also patronized by John F. Kennedy , Jr . ; Jerry is tempted by the naked woman across the street and frustrated because the woman he 's dating won 't have sex with him since she wants to remain a virgin . One method he uses to distract himself is by watching wholesome shows like Tiny Toons on Nickelodeon .

The contest affects their sleep , and the remaining contestants suffer insomnia . Only the eliminated Kramer can sleep peacefully . Elaine shares a cab ride with Kennedy , and she tells him that she lives Uptown near Jerry in order to extend the ride . She then learns that Kennedy wants to see her , and says he 'll drop by Jerry 's apartment . Eventually , the pressure becomes too much for her and she is the second person to be knocked out of the contest .

While making out on the couch , Marla asks Jerry if they can have sex , claiming that she is ready . However , Jerry then tells Marla about the contest , prompting Marla to leave in disgust . Jerry immediately goes to his window to watch the naked woman across the street , implying that he gives in to his temptation . Elaine believes that Kennedy has changed his mind and not bothered to see her . George then tells Elaine that Kennedy did come , but missed her and went with Marla . They then see Kramer with the naked woman across the street . That night , everyone sleeps well ? especially Kramer , who is sleeping with the naked woman ? but it is not explicitly stated who won . (

In the fifth season episode " The Puffy Shirt " , George mentions that he " won a contest " when discussing refraining from masturbation with a hand modeling agent . However , in the series finale , he confesses that he cheated .) Meanwhile , Marla is shown in bed with Kennedy , apparently having finally lost her virginity to him .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by Larry David . Kenny Kramer claimed that there actually was a " Contest " in which David and some friends of his took part , although he did not initially want to take part because he thought he could not win it . David won the contest . When David came up with using the idea for an episode of Seinfeld , he did not talk about it with Seinfeld for a considerable time , because he thought the episode was impossible for him to pitch . However , Seinfeld thought it was not offensive . The original script was not revealed until the night before the cast read @-@ through . The first version written by David was not as clean as the one later broadcast . The note from the censor claimed that David should not use the word " Masturbate " . Julia Louis @-@ Dreyfus thought that the episode would never go ahead due to the subject matter . Seinfeld decided it would be better to remove any references to what George actually did . Seinfeld claimed that what was noteworthy about " The Contest " was the " Dovetailing " of the stories . He claimed that it probably would have been possible to have used the word " masturbation " in the episode (it is notable that in " The Ticket " ? an earlier episode in the same season ? George says " you must have a good story otherwise it 's just masturbation ") although it would have probably ended up not being as funny . Part of the opening scene of the episode contains some of the script that was originally meant to be used in " The Seinfeld Chronicles " , the original pilot episode .

" The Contest " is the first episode to feature Estelle Costanza as an on @-@ screen character . Estelle Harris , who played the character , had not seen Seinfeld before she auditioned for the role . The cast and crew commented positively on the similarity in appearance between Harris and Jason Alexander , as it made it more believable that their characters could be related . Alexander 's real @-@ life mother looks similar to Harris .

Rachel Sweet has a cameo role in this episode as George 's cousin Shelly . She appears in the scene with George and his mother in the hospital .

There are two deleted scenes in " The Contest " . One features Joyce ? the teacher of Elaine 's fitness class ? in the opening scene talking to Elaine , Jerry , and Kramer . The second features George and Estelle Costanza in the hospital , where the female patient has been moved to the room next @-@ door after Estelle complained about her nakedness .

= = Reception = =

" The Contest " is considered to be one of the best Seinfeld episodes , winning several awards and positive reviews from the critics . David won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Writing in a Comedy Series for the episode . He also won a Writers Guild of America Award for his work on the episode . Director Tom Cherones won a Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Comedy Series for this episode . He was also nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Directing . TV Guide ranked the episode # 1 on its list of " TV 's Top 100 Episodes of All Time " .

" The Contest " received a Nielsen rating of 13 / 19 , meaning that the episode was watched by an average of 13 % of households and 19 % of all televisions were tuned to the episode when it was broadcast . Approximately 18 @.@ 5 million people watched the episode then . The first repeat of the episode gave Seinfeld its highest ratings up till that point , with a 20 @.@ 1 / 30 Nielsen Rating . It also received only 31 complaints from viewers , despite the subject matter . There were worries from advertisers who did not want to advertise during the episode due to the topics that were being discussed . Most regular advertisers did not broadcast adverts during the show , because the series did not have good ratings at the time .

The episode is considered by most reviewers as a success for being able to cover a controversial

subject in an inoffensive manner . Jonathan Boudreaux for tvdvdreviews.com said , " The Emmy @-@ winning script by Larry David introduced the brilliant euphemism ' master of my domain ' to our lexicon and helped the series to truly become must @-@ see TV . We know what the episode is about , but the script never explicitly says it . ' The Contest ' effortlessly takes a potentially incendiary subject and renders it utterly inoffensive yet hilarious . " He also said that " The Contest " was " one of the series ' most infamous " episodes . Donna Dorsett from audaud.com commented on the refusal to use the word " masturbation , " saying , " If the word had been used , even once , the show would not have been nearly as hilarious . The episode was totally inoffensive . "

James Plath from DVD Town said , " Estelle Harris , as George 's mother , is hilarious . " Although he himself did not appear in the episode , John F. Kennedy Jr. appeared to have had no problem with appearing as a character in the episode , with his role being played by an uncredited actor .

= = Cultural references = =

This is the second Seinfeld episode to feature Elaine 's fondness for the Kennedy family , the first being " The Baby Shower " .

Jerry Seinfeld claimed that he had never heard of the song " The Wheels on the Bus " before recording the episode .

The original script featured Jerry watching the TV series Flipper . It was changed due to concerns over music rights .

" The Contest " is referenced in other Seinfeld episodes , the first being " The Outing " , of which the plot is that Jerry and George are mistakenly outed as gay . During the episode , when George visits his mother , there is a male patient in the hospital , who receives daily sponge baths from a male nurse . Although the winner of the contest is not mentioned , it is implied in " The Puffy Shirt " that George was the winner . However , as the plane is going down in " The Finale " , it is revealed that George had actually cheated , therefore making Jerry the true winner . When Jerry asks him why he cheated , George simply replies , " Because I 'm a cheater ! "

" The Contest " is referenced in the " Shaq " episode of Curb Your Enthusiasm (S02E08) , in which Larry David and Shaquille O 'Neal watch " The Contest " together . Shaq also refers to this episode as his favorite .

" The Contest " is referenced in the Beavis and Butt @-@ head book " This Book Sucks " as an excuse to get out of finishing a homework assignment . In the book , Kramer is mis @-@ identified as " Creamer " and the act of masturbation is referred to as " spanking the monkey . "

In the Family Guy episode " Jungle Love " , Peter pays the people of a South American village to re @-@ enact " The Contest " as one of them hums the Seinfeld scene @-@ changing music . A high priestess plays Elaine , but she says " You can 't spare one square ? " , a reference to " The Stall " .