



## Jesy Nelson of Little Mix on surviving the trolls: 'People were saying awful things'

**Nelson tells how she dealt with the stress of being persistently abused on social media eight years after she rose to fame on The X Factor.**

Jesy Nelson, then 19, was working behind the bar at a pub in Dagenham, Essex, when she saw The X Factor on TV and thought: "I know I could win that." In 2011, she did just that, as part of the girl group Little Mix – and thought: "This is the worst day of my life."

Competing in Simon Cowell's singing competition drew endless criticism for her appearance and weight (but rarely her voice). "All I cared about was what other people were saying about me," she admits today.

Winning provided no relief. The first Facebook message she read after Little Mix was crowned was from a stranger. "You are the ugliest thing I have ever seen in my life," it said. You do not deserve to be a member of this female group; you deserve to die." "I should have been floating on cloud nine," she adds. "I had Leigh-Anne [Pinnock, another member of Little Mix] in my room saying, 'This is the best!' and I was like, 'No, this isn't'."

Little Mix went on to become the most popular British female group since the Spice Girls, but Nelson was devoured by social media bullying and harassment. She experienced despair, an eating disorder, and attempted suicide within two years after the finale.

Jesy Nelson: Odd One Out, an incredibly intimate BBC Three documentary, focuses on her downward fall and ultimate, difficult rehabilitation. She claims she had never talked openly about her troubles in the spotlight before filming.

Within minutes of sitting down, she says she would not have done it if she had realised the implications of being on The X Factor: "I don't think anything is worth your happiness, and it was a lot of my life that I won't get back."

Social media was not as closely interwoven with reality TV back then as it is now. In reality, the ninth season was the first to allow contestants to send audition films to YouTube; Nelson had no idea what YouTube was. She recalls being impressed when all of the finalists were given new Samsung phones and urged to start using Twitter to create their fans.

Little Mix played Nicki Minaj's Super Bass on the first live broadcast 12 weeks in, earning rapturous applause from the judges. Nelson described it as "the best feeling in the world" as she sobbed on stage. However, later that evening, someone mentioned the comment section. "I was very naive," Nelson admits. "I assumed it would be people expressing their thoughts on our performance." But practically every criticism was on my appearance: "She's a fat ugly rat," "How did she get in this girl group?" "How is the fat one in this?" The air was thick with anxiety, she recalls, "because no one knew what to do or how to react."

Nelson, however, was the only member even remotely close to the average UK woman at size 16. Although the four bandmates have always been friends – "that's why we're still together" – she felt singled out. "I was with three other girls to be compared to. I don't think it would have been as bad if I'd been on my own." My mental health was on the floor.

She felt less alone after speaking with other young people who had suffered internet harassment. "A lot of people think 'stop moaning,' but it's difficult to understand until you've experienced it - and it doesn't just happen to celebrities." Many individuals are battling with social media and online trolling. People must be aware of the consequences."

Nelson thinks that the transformation in five years has been remarkable: while Little Mix works on their sixth album, she is less aware of her weight, looks, what she eats, and even what is said about her. She returned to Twitter to film the documentary and uncovered some fresh insults. "I didn't even know some people said that about me, but it's because I don't look for it - and also, I. Don't. Care," she adds, pushing forward in her chair.

"I'm mentally a lot happier now, but I think people will always have an opinion." But I'm just concerned with mine." She smiles from behind all her hair, delighted yet rebellious - and for a little minute, she resembles the girl in the music videos.



*Jesy picking up a Brit Award*



### HELP AND SUPPORT



If you are the victim of cyberbullying and you need emotional or practical help or advice, the following organisations are specialists in this field:



■ [The National Bullying Helpline](#) - Providing information and support for victims of bullying and cyberbullying of any age. This organisation has vast experience in supporting those who are bullied at school, work and in social settings.



■ [NSPCC](#) - Providing emotional support for children who are victims of bullying and practical advice for parents on how to prevent and address concerns.



■ [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#) - A hub of advice, support and training links for children and adults. With up to date government information and interactive tools to support those seeking emotional support and further information.