

'Weak, pathetic people are the most beautiful' – Sylwia Zajac

It is undeniable that over the past decade, the vast majority of society have conformed to viewing each other through the filtered, restricted lens of social media. This phenomenon has prompted the rise of a new breed of celebrities – social media influencers.

Set in modern day, the 2020 film *Sweat* provides a raw, dark, and surprisingly heartfelt insight into what it means to have every aspect of your daily life illuminated by a ring light and scrutinised by faceless identities all around the world.

The film stars Magdalena Koleśnik as Sylwia Zajac, a celebrity fitness influencer with an adoring fan base of 600,000 followers. She is the ideal depiction of the influencer stereotype, where her life's joys are validated by the selfies taken, and her livelihood is dependent on securing brand sponsorships from corporations who see her as a pretty face with a perfect life. However, despite that, Koleśnik's portrayal of Sylwia gives the audience a peek beyond the phone screen, with an uncensored look at the emotional and physical difficulties faced by those who walk down the path of youth success and internet fame.

The opening of the film is filled with enough energy and enthusiasm to raise my heart rate just by watching it. Sylwia, dressed head to toe in bright pink, uses her bubbly personality to motivate a large crowd of fans through a dynamic sequence of squats and burpees in the middle of a shopping mall. Cinematographer Michał Dymek captured this scene with what feels like a dizzying handheld camera, dashing around the space at a speed on par with the pace of the workout. This burst of positivity and liveliness is sharply contrasted by an eerie silence as Sylwia retreats to her dressing room, and whilst in a moment of solitude, films a heartfelt appreciation to her fans for their support. Although not immediately obvious at the time, this moment is key in establishing the theme of isolation in Sylwia's life, as although she has the unwavering affection of thousands of people online, none of those connections amount to genuine emotional intimacy.

As the audience is taken through a deep dive of Sylwia's life, writer-director Magnus von Horn strikes the perfect balance between immersive and expository portraits. In many emotionally tense scenes throughout the film, such as a television interview where Sylwia is explicitly criticised for her decision to open up about her loneliness to her fans, the camera focuses in on her teary crystal-blue eyes, allowing the vulnerability and fragility that Koleśnik pours into the character to shine. The closeness also serves as a reflection of the intense scrutiny that people like Sylwia undergo from the media, her management, her family, and her fans, who observe her every move and believe they reserve the right to tell her how to live her life. On the other hand, one unknowingly revealing scene simply depicts Sylwia walking up the stairs of her building to her apartment, but the fact that it is framed to look like it is secretly filmed from an adjacent building links to the issue of stalking that influencers in general are at high risk of facing, as well as the sense that the world is watching even when she is innocently living her daily life.