The song ‘Subdivisions’ by the Canadian rock band Rush introduces us to the youth of the late twentieth century and speaks about their feeling of alienation and the loss of identity during their teenage by using imagery, metaphors, and motifs. This loss of identity and the feeling of alienation stems from the use of literary devices as the band charts the pre-decided life of the teenagers. A deeper analysis of the literary devices reveals that the song also talks about what these teenagers feel when they become adult. ‘Subdivisions’ talks about the isolations of growing up in the mundane, uniformity environment of suburbia and also speaks about the longing to get to the suburban home when they grow up.

The first two stanza sets up the idea that uniformity is the way of life of suburban areas. The speaker upholds that meaning by the lines “Sprawling on the fringes of the city, in geometric order.” (1.1-1.2). It shows that the buildings and houses in suburban areas are very life-like to each-other which is completely different from the houses of the cities. Such uniformity also brings about the same lifestyle, same beliefs of the people living in these areas which is described by the lines “Opinions all provided, the future pre-decided.” (2.2-2.3). The song continues with the motif that in this uniformity lifestyle, people with different perspective, different dreams are called/tagged as misfits and that they should conform or will be cast out. This is understood from the 3rd and 4th stanza lines - “Nowhere is the dreamer or the misfit…..In the shopping malls, Conform or be cast out.” (3.1-4.4). Thus, the peer pressure from the society to make the youths do what they do introduces a want to leave the suburban areas. The uniformity lifestyle and environment also have no charm to soothe the creative dreams of these youths which can be understood from these lines “Any escape might help to smooth…..The restless dreams of youth” (4.9-4.12).

The 5th stanza allows us to see the forever attraction towards the city for these youths. The life of people living in the city is very different and diversified which is completely opposite of the way of life in suburban areas. Which is why these youths are so attracted to the city life and the speakers describe this through the lines “Drawn like moths we drift into the city, the timeless old attraction” (5.1-5.2). The speaker also describes the difference of the life in suburban areas and cities as the people in suburban areas sleep early, so nights in those areas are silent whereas the nights in cities are more living. The storefronts, street signals are also lit up like Firefly during the night in cities whereas it's not in the suburban areas. These can be understood from these lines “Cruising for the action......Just to feel the living night” (5.3-5.5). So, a unique and diversified environment should reduce the feeling of alienated of these youths as they will be able to uphold their dreams more freely.

By the end of the song, we can see that the speaker tells us about what happens when these misfit youths become adults and try to accomplish their dreams and new desires which arises by becoming adults. They become committed with jobs to earn money to accomplish these desires, but committing to a job means that they sacrifice their lifelong dreams for which they came into the city. A job commitment also means a commitment of time because of which they miss out on valuable experiences in life. These can be understood by the lines “Some will sell their dreams…..caught in ticking traps” (6.1-6.3). So, by sacrificing their lifelong dreams and the tedium of the daily commute leaves them longing for their relaxing suburban, subdivided home. Moreover, the longing to get to the suburban home is not just their present thought but also deeply ingrained in their memory, as they were raised in those type of subdivision. The speaker brings this up through the lines “And start to dream…….streets on quiet nights” (6.4-7.1).

Through its use of motifs and imagery, ‘Subdivisions’ explains the pressure the youths of late twentieth century felt for being a misfit and losing their identity and how their desire arises to move to a city and longing for their relaxing suburban life after sacrificing their dreams and becoming busy with the city of tedium. This pre-deciding nature of the people in suburban areas compelled those youth to move into the city life and sacrifice their dreams to accomplish their small little desires which however is not mentioned in the song.

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SONG RESPONSE ESSAY – ‘SUBDIVISIONS’

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