Gary Engle’s “What makes Superman so darned American” and Jenny Lyn Bader’s “Larger than life” give a detailed analysis of why it is important to have heroes and how for many people it is something that preserves their heritage. Bader first introduces the idea that in today’s society it is easier to have a role model than a hero. This is because role models today are trained to be role models. They have screen writers and directors telling them how to be perceived in people’s lives. In today’s world one doesn’t need to have someone die in a horrific way to become a hero, it is more convenient to have role models. However, both authors come to the same agreement on the issue. They implement that through assimilation, values are forgotten and new ideas, Americanized ideas, emerge. Engle and Bader both analyze why having a hero preserves the ideals and morals that are sometimes erased by the American society during assimilation.

One difference between Engle’s article and Bader’s article is that whereas Engle focuses more on assimilation and the nature of Superman’s establishment, Bader focuses more on her observation of people pronouncing their ancestors as their heroes. Engle, through his article illustrates how Superman is the ultimate immigrant. He projects this idea through his portrayal of Superman’s American side and his immigrant side is fused together to create a consummate hero. In his thesis, Engle states, “in the pantheon of American folklore, only Superman achieves truly mythic stature, interweaving a pattern of beliefs.....and cultural traditions of American people.” This illustrates Engle’s desire
to emphasize that Superman is the fused version of an American and an immigrant. Bader on the other hand, focuses more in her article about the nature of people’s preference to name their family ancestors as heroes. She states, “An overwhelming number of those I polled named their household forebears as those they most admired.” Through this she portrays her observation and her understanding why people are more likely to replace traditional heroes with their own relatives.

Although the two essays exhibit the difference, the main point that the authors try to make in their works go in sync. The point that they try to make is that having these heroes in some way, to every individual, represents a higher standard that has to be upheld. For example, Bader brings her co-worker’s admiration of her great-grandmother, Bader’s own respect of her grandmother and other examples of how heroism impacts individuals. Engle also illustrates how Superman and his powers are a metaphor for all the immigrants that have assimilated in America and fused to become heroes of this nation.

For example, Engle’s article, stresses the concept that Superman is the ultimate immigrant. He stresses that Americans were all immigrants at some point and then all of them have assimilated. He claims, “Americans have an immediate sense of their origins elsewhere.” This shows that at one point all Americans came from somewhere else and now formed this diverse society. Moreover, Engle shows how Superman’s powers are metaphorically a representation of how immigrants contribute their traditions and ideals to the American society. Engle states, “Superman’s powers...preserve the vitality of the foster community in which he lives in the same way that immigrant ethnicity has
sustained American culture,” which illustrates how immigrants’ values blend into the
culture and add a little more diversity.

Bader’s article, much like Engle’s portrays the idea that one’s ancestors are
greatly influential in setting examples to future generations. Bader exemplifies her
colleague’s great-grandmother as a hero because she pulled her family though WWI and
provided for them when her husband died. Her colleague described her great-
grandmother by claiming, “She was a great lady.” Bader also brings the idea of her own
grandmother in order to show the audience how her ancestor was able to see the emperor,
which to Bader, is respectful.

Finally, both articles have the idea that generations today tend to assimilate and
forget the ideals and traditions of their ancestors. For example, Bader claims that today’s
youth doesn’t have heroes, but rather role models. This is because the youth today has
nothing to look up to but the media simulated characters that are like puppets. These
puppets are supposed to set forth morals for the youth. She argues that it is heroism is
decaying and previous generations didn’t have these media produced characters to show
them the values and morals. Old generation’s heroes “didn’t have the luxury of staff
writer or the opportunity to endorse designer jeans.” This is comical statement that Bader
makes in order to illustrate that heroes of previous generations weren’t influenced by the
media, but rather by cultural traditions and events. Engle reinforces this concept by
explaining the way that assimilation takes place. He stresses that children become
assimilated and “migrate psychologically if not physically from their parents.” He
explains how when this happens the roots and the ethnic traditions are left to be
rediscovered by future generations. That is the reason why Superman is the ideal hero to
Engle, because he doesn’t give up his ethnic beliefs but fuses them together with his assimilated beliefs to create a new and improved way of life.

Both authors illustrate the vital importance to preserve the concept of heroes. This is crucial in order to maintain the diverse and multi-cultural society that American people live in. Engle and Bader both agree that having heroes that reflect on ancestral actions provides standards for people of the next generation to follow. The two articles go together because Bader sets forth the idea that heroes are vital in preservation of knowledge of one’s roots and Engle emphasizes that the nature of ethnic background can be seen in heroes.