

# Women at war: source work



Question 1: Source A(i), a magazine cover, is propaganda while the painting, Source A(ii) is by an official war artist. The painting therefore, is more useful than the poster as evidence of the importance of women in the First World War. Do you agree?

The cover of war worker magazine is more useful than the painting of munitions workers in a factory for a number of reasons. Firstly, although its purpose was clearly propaganda it does show clearly the thinking of the female population of Britain during the first world war by showing the roles of the female worker at home in the factories and the male soldier fighting on the western front as equally important, as is shown by the caption above the source "Men and Women united in a common cause" and by the picture featured on the source depicting the uniformed male and the working woman facing each other each holding flags symbolising the cause they were united for. Although the source is propaganda it not only shows feelings present but does also contain an element of truth in it, as women were becoming more highly regarded by trade unions and men who remained in the country, although social attitudes did need to be further reformed as pre-war chauvinistic attitudes still existed amongst those who were not ready to accept the increasing importance of women in society.

The source can therefore be seen as fairly reliable, although it is propaganda and in it truth is exaggerated to raise morale, which it would be good at doing, as the idea that the woman worker is doing something as important as the soldier fighting for his country would provoke a sense of patriotism and enthusiasm for all they have to suffer though as it was for a worthy cause. The painting, however does not show the importance of women in the

war any more than in the work they were doing in producing munitions, which suggests that this was the only area where women were working, as it was a much larger industry than it had been before the onset of the war, and had required women workers as unemployed men were not available, although this was not the case and women were employed in all areas of work. The painting also does not show the status women gained from this work, as they could be merely providing cheap unskilled labour as working class women had done before the war, the truth being that the realisation of men that women were capable of skilled labour due to dilution gained them added status, achieving the vote for women over thirty in 1918 and for all women over twenty one in 1928. The contents of the magazine, shown in the source show a lot about the purpose of the magazine.

The positive image of the just cause for the war was published to raise morale during a difficult time, "the food problem" of 1917, the effect of the German U-boat offensive was such a time which would lead to "war weariness" if the importance of the work at home could not be shown to raise morale. The poem entitled "stick it" emphasises this need to carry on for the good of the country through the challenging time. Unlike the magazine the painting was not intended as propaganda and it would not have been effective if it had, as the fine art approach to the piece would not have appealed to the working woman of the First World War, and was intended instead to merely record events pretty much as they were, and photographs and accounts of munitions factories show similar conditions to those depicted in the painting, a well lit and fairly pleasant atmosphere, although the machines were dangerous and explosions occurred

occasionally. The painting would not have brought on an urge to work in a munitions factory, as one worker is stretching her back, tired from hard work. The source is clearly not for the purpose of propaganda and shows an accurate view of a typical munitions factory, it is therefore reliable, but is not as useful as the magazine to show the importance of women in the First World War.

The magazine is therefore more useful in showing the importance of women in the first world war, as although it is not as reliable and accurate as the painting it shows the importance of women in a wider context, in labour as a whole rather than just in munitions.

#### Women at War: Source work

Question 2: Is Source C more reliable than Source E as evidence about how enthusiastic women were to support the war effort?

Neither of the sources can be seen as completely reliable or accurate in showing women's enthusiasm to the war effort, although source C is more accurate and reliable than source E. Source C is a newspaper article, which displays an exaggerated view of the Right To Serve March of 1915. The way the article is written shows that it is written by a man, and although he is excited and pleased to see such a demonstration, the article is very patronising towards women, saying this is the first time in history that they have ever made a contribution to their country, which is obviously not true as women had been working in industry for some time, these women were nearly all working class, but their contribution to industry had been present for some time. Although the source is prejudiced in this way, it must not be

dismissed as completely unreliable as the Right To Serve march was an amazing spectacle of women's loyalty to their country and to the men who had gone to fight, and would therefore have caused the journalists of the time to write in an exaggerating way as this article shows.

The source is therefore reliable to show that women were enthusiastic about the war effort, but the source exaggerates the idea and the full enthusiasm of the article is not accurate. Source E is a report from a policewoman during the war taken from a book which aims to show the importance of women in the war, it says that women did strike occasionally, however it does not say that this was in objection to the war effort, and it is known that these strikes were not for this purpose at all, and were instead in objection to bad working conditions and poor pay, which were solved to an extent due to this action and the introduction of dilution which allowed women to do skilled labour, a position they were denied before the war, this increased morale which reduced the strike action. The source therefore is not showing how enthusiastic women were towards the war effort, and is therefore not reliable in showing this.

Source C is therefore much more reliable than source E as evidence about how enthusiastic women were to support the war as source E does not show evidence, and can be dismissed because it is known that the strikes which took place were not to do with a lack of support for the war but were more to do with the bad conditions and pay that the women were suffering.

Women at War: Source work

Question 3: Sources D(i) and D(ii) give different interpretations of attitudes towards women during the war. Why do they differ?

Sources D(i) and D(ii) show different attitudes towards women in the first world war, the main reason for this is their purpose, Source D(i) is from a recently published book written to inform people about the issue, it is therefore not biased or prejudiced due to the large space of time between the war and when the book was published. Source D(ii) is from Lloyd-George's memoirs, and is written to show that he did value women's input into the war as before the war he had been accused by the suffragette movement of being prejudiced against women. Source D(i) suggests that the ability of women to replace men in their areas of work drove the conscription of men into the army, which caused resentment among men. This may have appeared to have been happening to some men at the time however it is not accurate as the process actually happened in the reverse, men were conscripted due to the death of many soldiers on the western front, and this drove the employment of women, women often taking the places of loved ones to reserve the jobs for when the men returned. The view that attitudes towards women remained negative is only true to a small extent, as during the war the value of women's work was recognised and chauvinistic attitudes receded.

The source does however show this appreciation for women workers, in a very patronising way, in a comment made by the chief inspector of factories " Women have learnt they are capable of better things, they have gained new skills and foremen have said they are doing very well indeed, much better than I ever thought they could" which shows that although men were

surprised by how well women could work, a chauvinistic attitude, they were appreciative and did not ridicule the women workers. Source D(ii) is an extract from the war memoirs of David Lloyd-George, the British Prime minister during the First World War. Lloyd George had received a lot of trouble from the suffragette movement before the war for not being supportive enough of giving women the vote and other freedoms and the purpose of this source is to show that his ideas had changed and that he was very supportive of women and regarded them highly due to their support of the war effort. The source praises the courage shown by the women working in dangerous conditions in factories, but only gives one piece of evidence to show this to be true, and although that piece may be true, in other cases women were not so courageous as to carry on working after a fatal accident in a factory. The source is also only the view of one person, Lloyd-George himself, and therefore cannot reflect the attitudes of men across the country towards women.

The two interpretations of the attitudes felt towards women during the war differ because of the purposes that they were written for, Source D(i) was written long after as information on the events, it is unbiased however is not completely accurate. Source D(ii) was written to fend off criticism of the former prime minister for his pre-war views of women.

Women at War: Source work

Question 4: Sources F(i) and F(ii) give different impressions of what war work meant to women, which view is more likely to be correct?

Source F(ii) is a more correct view of what war work meant to women, as it recognises both the problems and the benefits that women found from war work, whereas Source F(i) which is a photo aimed at persuading unemployed women to find work shows the work as an enjoyable and easy way of supporting the war effort. Source F(i) shows a woman who has taken a job as a conductress on a bus, a job previously held mainly by men, she is looking very happy, but this is not necessarily how she felt about working, as the photo was taken for a newspaper for the purpose of persuading other women to do as she had done, and start work. The woman in the photo would have been asked to smile for the photo to show this, which may have hidden her true attitude towards the job. The source is therefore not a reliable view of what war work meant to women, although they did not resent working as it was seen as “their bit” towards the war effort and the soldiers, often friends or husbands. Source F(ii) shows this view that women did not resent working, however it recognises that women had problems coping with the long hours of work, especially along with looking after children and getting food and supplies, which involved queuing for long periods of time as supplies were scarce. Women did not resent working during the war because they wanted to support the war effort, however they did find it difficult due to the time involved in being mothers for example.

Source F(ii) is therefore more reliable and shows a more correct view of what war work meant to women as it recognises the problems involved with working during the war, which meant women saw work less appealing than source F(i) suggests.

Women at War: Source work

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Question 5: How far does source G(i) or G(ii) add to our understanding of how the war affected women?

Source G(i) shows the positive aspects of separation which were seen by many women whereas source G(ii) shows the problem faced by many poorer women due to the lack of financial support from their absent husbands and the very little separation allowances provided by the government, thus the negative aspects of separation are shown in this source. Source G(i), a magazine article commenting on the situation which women were in at the time and over the previous years, especially in terms of their separation allowances, is more reliable than source G(ii) as it shows a much more general view which can be applied to many more women in the country than source G(ii) which is just one example, of the case of a woman living in a very poor area of London, the source is therefore not reliable as it is an extreme example and therefore cannot show the experience of women across the country during the war.

Source G(i) says that women were better off than they had been before the war, due to separation allowances provided by the government, women were better off, however this was due to the work they were doing as well as the separation allowances. The source does recognise that although true in general, there were cases where women were not receiving all they should be, and widows of officers were particularly poorly paid, although cases of women not receiving the money that they should were getting fewer and fewer during the war. This view was generally true, although as source G(ii) shows, there were exceptions and some women were very poor due to separation. The example given in source G(ii) is of a woman living in the east

end of London, a very poor area. The women was poorer than most women in Britain at the time and the source is therefore not accurate at telling us about women generally in Britain, although it does show us the experiences of poorer women during the war.

The sources therefore show us that women were wealthier and therefore more independent during the war, however some women were much poorer due to separation with their husbands and experienced extreme poverty during the war.

### Women at War: Source work

Question 6: “ The war brought great opportunities and advantages to women.”

Do these sources prove that this interpretation is correct?

Most of the sources suggest that the statement is correct, or that it is true to a certain extent, and it is known that women became much more independent during the war than they had been previously, an advantage brought by the war. Some sources such as source G(ii), on the negative aspects of separation however do not show the statement to be correct as the departure of their husbands to fight left some women impoverished and struggling to cope with poorly paid jobs and looking after their children. This was only in extreme examples however and so although it suggests it, the source cannot prove the statement to be incorrect.

Source A(i) suggests that because of the need for labour due to the war effort, women had many opportunities to work, as it shows the woman

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worker, and to earn money which led to their financial independence from husbands and fathers whom they had relied on previously. The source is propaganda but it does show that the statement is correct, which is true to an extent. Source A(ii) shows large numbers of women working, this had not been the case in such large numbers before the war, which shows that more women had been given the opportunity to work than before the war which again led to financial independence, so the source therefore shows the statement to be true as well. Source B also suggests that the statement is correct, saying that the pre-war of it being below the dignity of a "Lady" to work diminished quickly during the war and middle class women were given the opportunity to work. The source is not a comprehensive view however and only really shows a narrow view of working class women.

Although the source suggests that the statement is correct it cannot prove it because the source is unreliable. Source C shows the support that women had for the war effort was great, and although the source exaggerates on the feeling that was present towards this, saying that this was the first time in history that women have wanted to contribute to their country in this way, the source does show that women did want to serve and they did get the opportunity to, with a huge amount of women starting to work in 1916. The source therefore gives the view that the statement is correct and the source can be relied on for this. Source D suggests that women were treated in a hostile way by men, this not being an advantage to women. It does recognise that more women did start to work during the war than had done previously but it says that men viewed women negatively because their ability to do skilled work left more and more men vulnerable to conscription,

this view is not true, however as it was the other way round, conscription drove women to work. The source says that women had the opportunity to work, however the work had very few advantages as women who worked were viewed negatively by men. Source D(ii) praises women for the work which they did during the war, however it does not show the opportunities or advantages of this, the only advantages it suggests is that the respect gained by women for this work resulted in women getting the vote, partly in 1918 and finally in 1928. Source E suggests that women who were working did not enjoy their work and did not support the war effort, which resulted in strikes.

This is not true, as the strikes which happened were due to bad pay rather than a lack of support for the war effort. The source does not show what opportunities women had, and any advantages of any opportunities, so it cannot say whether the statement is correct or not. Source F(i) suggests that women enjoyed work and the opportunity to work for the first time, suggesting that the statement is correct, although the source is not reliable as it is an example of propaganda. Source F(ii) says that women who worked did not gain anything from working, there were no advantages for them, as a job provided an extra burden for them on top of looking after children and getting hold of scarce supplies. The source is reliable and suggests that the statement is incorrect. Source G(i) says that women had ample amounts of money and were respected because they could do work in factories, the money they were receiving from work was clearly an advantage, so the source suggests that the statement is correct, whereas source G(ii) shows a very different view, that women were impoverished and desperate due to

the departure of their husbands, although this is an extreme example and its view that the statement is incorrect cannot be reliable because of this.

In general the sources prove that the statement, " The war brought great opportunities and advantages to women." Is correct to a certain extent, and the sources which suggest that this is not true are unreliable because they are extreme examples which do not represent the country as a whole, or because they are unreliable.