A challenge to ‘proper’ gender relations?

Models of domestic life

**Working class**

Attempts to impose ‘separate spheres’ ideology on the labouring poor

- Criticism of working mothers for child neglect, poor housekeeping
- Issue of protective legislation (mines, factories) targeted as women and children
- Failure to record women’s paid work in census
- Women’s paid work was essential to family survival
- Lack of evidence that working-class adopted middle-class ideology of ‘separate spheres’ - but had own male-dominated gender politics
- Working-class movements led by skilled workers tended to promote female domesticity and male breadwinner wage
- Male concern at women under-cutting their wages tended to exclude women from unions

**Women and working class politics**

- Women had long history of active participation in popular protest - e.g. food riots
- Owenite attempts to create radically new form of society attracted some labouring women
- Large numbers of women involved in Chartist movement - but largely in supportive roles rather than leadership ones
- Early organised women’s movement was middle-class dominated

Challenging ‘separate spheres’

**Feminism and the early women’s movement**

**Womens rights in the 1790’s**

- Impact of French revolution
- Radical ideas at the ‘Rights of Man’
- Extending to women’s rights - the woman as active citizen; women’s intellectual potential; importance of education for reason not to please men; stress women’s rights to self-determination over their duty to obey to fathers and husbands
- But – reaction against the conservatives; discrediting of Mary Wollstonecraft