by JANE CORNWELL

like to think that I've grown up with extraordinary respect for women.
Which was kind of inevitable, really.
My mum [Gillian] had five sisters.
There were women all around me as a kid, and I'm still surrounded by women now. I live with my wife and six-year-old daughter and our two miniature schnauzers, which are both female. My mum lives close by and so does my wife's mother. I could very happily live in a matriarchy. I prefer the energy of it.

My parents divorced when I was seven. Dad [John] was a jazz drummer, which makes him sound more artistic.

seven. Dad [John] was a jazz drummer, which makes him sound more artistic than my mother, who worked in the tax office in Gloucester, but she had the biggest influence on me. She was involved in the local drama group, which is what got me into acting; I'd spend hours watching her in shows and getting the taste for the buzz of performance.

I was 14 or 15 when I told her I wanted to do acting and films and she was completely supportive. There was never any of the usual "You should be a doctor" stuff; I can't remember ever her saying anything other than, "Okay, you can do that." Mum made a lot of sacrifices so that I could go to drama college – and for my younger sister Katy [Pegg] as well. Katy's a very talented creative person who could quite easily have done what I've done.

Sometimes I feel like I strive to do well in this business for my mum as much as anything. I know she enjoys it vicariously.

My first crush was Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia in *Star Wars*. That was the first time I got that sense of longing, that deep 'why do I love you so much?' feeling. But I've always loved girls.

From a young age I had as many girls as boys among my friends. There was a girl who was the daughter of friends of Mum and Dad's, and we hung out from toddlers until teenagers. There's a photo of us in a paddling pool at their place and I'm wearing a dress; I think I'd got my clothes muddy and that's all they had. Not that you should suppress that kind of thing. If my own child [Matilda]



SIMON PEGG, ACTOR, 45, MARRIED

has an impulse to do something I always try and foster it, or it will come out somewhere else in a different way.

My sex education was pretty formal. I never got "the talk" but I was given materials to discover it for myself. I was about 12 when Mum bought me a book called *The Facts of Love*, which was by the same guy who wrote *The Joy of Sex* [Alex Comfort]. There was a bearded man in there but there were no intercourse depictions; it was all about the reproductive system. I read it with a

friend. We were like, "Hold on a minute, WHAT? The penis does WHAT?"

Any pornography I saw as a kid I found, like the discarded magazine we hid under a caravan. We'd take it into the woods and pore over it, going "Oh my God." It was erotica more than anything, but it was still objectification. I don't have a problem with the impulse to look at sexual imagery; it's in our wiring, particularly men's. What really concerns me is this culture of hatred of women on the internet, almost a

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celebration of violence, which our children are seeing. What I really don't want is for my daughter to go online one day and find images of women with eyeliner streaming down their faces being subjugated – and that's her first indication of sex? That's terrifying!

I have my own theories about why misogyny exists. It's like the male ego can't accept its place in the universe, which is to contribute to something, just like women do. Men are so ego-driven they either resent women because they can't do some of the things women do, or they fear women because of their power over heterosexual men. At the root of it all is jealousy, I think. We're supposed to be enlightened as a species but the old prejudices are still rampant.

I think a lot of men fear their feminine side, see it as a sign of weakness, which is why they often fear male friendship. But embracing your femininity is the key to your masculinity, to understanding yourself better. You need to know the other to know yourself. I think the clearest opposition in society is the opposition between men and women, between two types of human being. Embracing the other side of you makes you a lot less uptight. Some guys will freak out over pink socks. It's like, what are you frightened of really?

Not that affection between male friends is feminine. When I write with Nick [Frost, with whom he wrote Shaun of the Dead, Hot Fuzz and Paul], we always play up this idea of a bromance. When women are like that with each other, it's not commented on. Okay, women may be naturally more nurturing than men, but affection shouldn't be something that is gender specific, and men shouldn't feel that expressing that kind of thing in any way reduces them.

It's an insult when they do, since this presupposes that femininity is less than them. Which, for your average misogynist, is mistake number one.

Simon Pegg stars in Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation, in cinemas August 6.