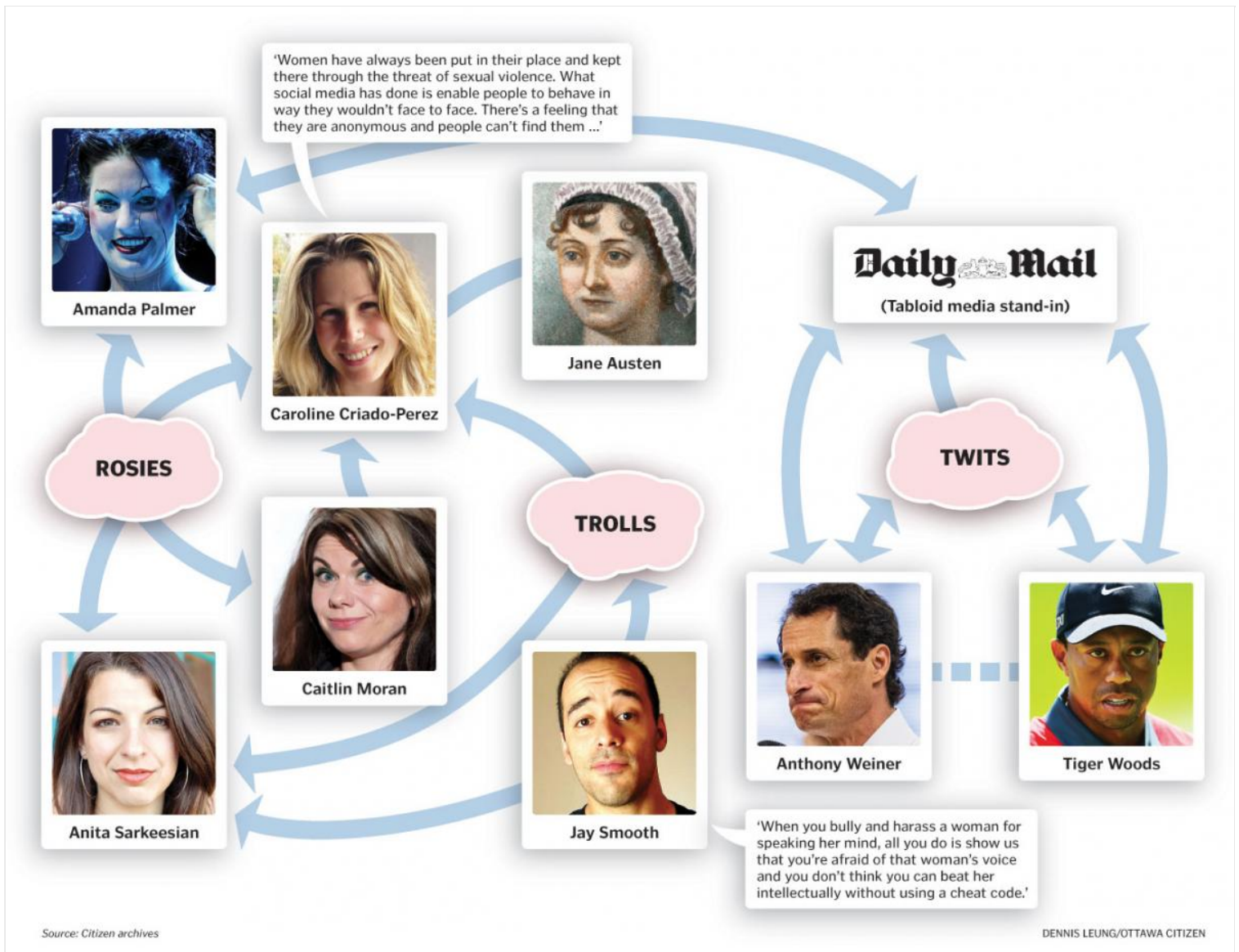


# Op ed: Entitled of empowered in cyberspace

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Do you feel empowered by cyberspace? How you answer the question may reveal all sorts of things about you: how you view the opportunities afforded by social media; how savvy you are about online privacy settings; and how inclined you are to use the internet's cloak of anonymity to transmit malicious messages or post pictures of your penis. OK, there's a danger of gender stereotyping here, but recent news stories do suggest a possible chromosomal gap in terms of who is most likely to fall into which categories. In a cursory review, the behaviour breakdown appears to reflect traditional (albeit shifting) power dynamics: Some men seem to use cyberspace as a way to assert their misguided machismo or misogyny, while more than a few women are learning to mobilize shared networks to strike back or gain notoriety.



Consider: Anita Sarkeesian: This Canadian-American media critic and feminist blogger launched a modest Kickstarter campaign in 2012 to raise \$6,000 online for a series of educational videos about the sexism in video games. Misogynist male trolls in the gamer community (apparently unfamiliar with the concepts of irony or self-incrimination) responded by creating, emailing and posting online images of Sarkeesian being raped by video game characters and looking as if she'd been beaten and brutalized.

Rosies: In the great roll-up-the-sleeves tradition of Rosie the Riveter, many in the online world — both female and male — have stepped forward in cyberspace to offer active support of those targeted by trolls. The backlash against Sarkeesian sparked its own

backlash, and those outraged by the attacks ended up donating more than \$150,000 to her Kickstarter campaign. Her speaking invitations have soared.

**Caroline Criado-Perez:** The British graduate student attracted 35,000 signatures and \$20,000 in support of her campaign to ensure that at least one inspirational woman would be featured on the newly redesigned UK bank notes. In response to her success, a group of British trolls — one since arrested — used Twitter to pepper Criado-Perez with thousands of unprintable rape and death threats — even after the arrest. Clearly some people feel enormously violated in cyberspace, while others retain an astonishing sense of invulnerability.

Jane Austen, an 18th century British writer whose romantic novels — rich in pointed social commentary — have made her among the most widely read authors in the English language, was chosen for the bank note. Her impressive credentials, however, failed to allay the fury of those outraged by the uppity woman who championed her. (see Troll)

**Caitlin Moran:** Hilarious broadcaster, TV critic and columnist with the Times, Moran is also the author of the internationally-best-selling feminist memoir *How To Be A Woman*. Outspoken in her support of Criado-Perez, she drew attention to the abominable rape threats on her blog and mobilized half a million twitter followers to express their own outrage to help force Twitter and the UK government to respond.

**Amanda Palmer:** An American singer/songwriter, she responded to the Daily Mail's regrettable pseudo-news coverage of her concert by performing a satirical send-up of the paper to an enormously appreciative London audience. Halfway through the delightful waltz, entitled "Dear Daily Mail", she stepped out of her kimono to complete the tune stark naked in a display that is more feminist empowerment than sexual titillation. Video of the one-time-only performance has since gone viral, and Palmer now has almost a million followers on Twitter.

**Troll:** A person (often, if not usually, male) who sows discord on the Internet by posting inflammatory and/or threatening messages with the deliberate intent of provoking

readers into responding emotionally. Comes in American, British and Canadian varieties. Revels in the ability to sling mud and spew hate on blogs, newspaper feedback forums, and social media sites, without revealing his identity.

**Daily Mail:** A British tabloid that chose to devote editorial space to Amanda Palmer's wardrobe malfunction, featuring a large format photograph of her breast "escaping" her bra ("Making a boob of herself!" was the headline), rather than her musical performance. (Standing in here for all celebrity-scandal tabloid media.)

**Jay Smooth:** AKA John Randolph, a New York City hip hop DJ and vlogger who posted an articulate and convincing critique of the trolls who trashed Sarkeesian, condemning their cowardice. Salon labelled him one of the "sexiest men living" even before his compelling demonstration of feminist advocacy.

**Anthony Weiner:** American politician who resigned from Congress in 2011 after it was revealed that he'd been sexting images of his penis to female Twitter followers. Undaunted by such sensational baggage, he launched a bid to become mayor of New York City this spring. In July, his reputation for chutzpah went into overdrive when it came to light that he has continued to send explicit photos to women other than his wife as recently as April of this year under the porn-worthy pseudonym, Carlos Danger.

**Tiger Woods:** The most successful golfer of all time, and one of the highest paid athletes in the world, Woods' self-confessed sense of "entitlement" gave birth to a string of sexual affairs with more than a dozen women, at least some of which were documented in text messages. The revelation of his infidelities cost him his marriage and, temporarily, his career.

**Twits:** Usually, if not exclusively, female followers of famous (heterosexual male) Tweeters who are open to engaging in surreptitious and sexually explicit banter which may or may not lead to in-the-flesh liaisons, about which Twits cannot be counted upon to remain discreet.

*Shari Graydon is the Founder of Informed Opinions and the editor of the collection of essays, I Feel Great About My Hands.*