



Emily Sweeney, 32
Staff Reporter

"Sorry I'm late," Emily Sweeney says, grabbing a stool at dbar, the trendy restaurant and nightclub/lounge that has emerged as a flagship hotspot in the growing gay scene in Dorchester. She tugs a floppy newsboy hat from her head. Her hair is combed flat today, but she later produces a photo of her usual look: a pincushion of punky, ultra-blonde hair spikes.

"People usually notice my hair first," she laughs with amiable energy, before pointing out some of her other distinctive fashion flourishes. There's the vintage Boy Scout uniform that she wears, badges intact, that fits her petite frame like a comfortable, gender-subversive second skin. "I was always a tomboy," she explains. "I was one of the girls at Catholic School who wanted to play football. I wasn't playing double-dutch with the girls."

Sweeney also sports several tattoos, including one particular favorite on her forearm: a grimacing skull—gripping a sword in its teeth and wearing an eye patch and

Boston Bruins cap—inked atop a pair of crossed hockey sticks. It's a tribute both to Sweeney's love of hockey and the beloved band Dropkick Murphys, who have always enjoyed particular popularity among lifelong Boston locals.

"I'm a Dot-Rat," smiles Sweeney, quickly flashing a "rock-on" gesture with her hand. "I have Boston roots."

Those roots go deep. After attending Boston Latin School (where she skated on the boys varsity hockey team), Sweeney went on to college at Northeastern University. She landed her first newspaper job at the *Bedford Minuteman*, followed by *Brookline Tab* and then the *Waltham Daily News Tribune*. She joined the *Boston Globe* in 2001. She's also done work for New England Cable News, is chapter president of the New England Society for Professional Journalists where she helped to develop an annual October fundraiser for journalism scholarships (Bloodfeast), and one of her favorite pieces—an examination of Boston's storied local mob scene—even earned her a

gig as a consultant for Hub-based flick *The Departed*, leading the film crew around the city for an overview that wound up among the DVD's special features.

And as much as her sexuality has been a mostly non-issue among her family ("No one was really that shocked," she says about coming out), Sweeney says that LGBT issues generally don't come up in her beat. When they do come up, she says maintaining objectivity comes naturally. "I think of myself as a microphone," she says. "I try to present every person in their own light."

For example, she says, "I've talked to people on both sides of the aisle, people in support of and people totally anti-gay marriage. ... It's funny, whenever I interview anybody, I always empathize [with them]. Even when I was talking to people petitioning to put a gay-marriage amendment on the ballot, I found myself totally empathizing with this older woman, with her religion, and how she really felt fearful. ... I think you have to really hear what they say to be a good reporter."



Johnny Diaz, 35
Living/Arts writer
Author,
Boston Boys Club

"Then I walk out, and I'm like, 'Well that was weird!'" she laughs. "If anything, I'm probably too emotional. I'm like, 'Oh yeah, those gays! I hear ya!'"

Sweeney's *Globe* colleague Johnny Diaz is also a Dorchester resident, but for the most part the comparisons end there. When we meet, Diaz is waiting patiently at a South End Starbucks with his hands clasped atop a textbook he's using as a part-time journalism professor at Emerson College. His face smiles a greeting, and his features are dark where Sweeney's are light: thick brunette hair, deep set brown eyes, and a smooth olive skin tone that reflects his Cuban-American heritage.

Unlike Sweeney, Diaz is not a lifelong local. He's still a relatively new transplant, hailing from Miami where he began his journalism career at just 16 years old with a weekly column in the *Miami Herald*. He

eventually grew into a reporter's role there, before finally moving to *Boston Globe* in 2002.

"I found it very embracing," says Diaz. "I think it's a more urbanized scene [than in Miami]. You have more publications than down there ... and I think from the moment I got here I felt like other gay media representatives and journalists reached out and said, 'Hey! Welcome.'"

Miami is Diaz's hometown, but he says things aren't as open down there as they are up here. "Miami has a lot of the Hispanic, Latin culture, where there's traditionally some homophobia and things are closed off," he says. Although he's been out since high school without incident, and says that the *Miami Herald* newsroom was one that valued diversity, he does believe that growing up as a Cuban-American influenced his experiences as a gay man.

"It's taboo in the Latino family," says Diaz. "As a guy, they don't want you feminized. It's conservative in that aspect, and ingrained culturally. I have a very macho father. Some of my cousins are machinists—they'll talk to me about cars and sports, but don't want to know about [being gay]. They applaud my books, though. They haven't read them, but they applaud them."

The books Diaz refers to are his first novels of gay fiction: *Boston Boys Club*, *Miami Manhunt*, and the forthcoming *Beantown Cuban*. In fact, while Diaz has used his newspaper work to investigate the intersection of culture and sexuality—as with one favorite piece about the immigration struggles of same-sex couples—his main outlet for expressing the uniquely gay Hispanic experience has been through his own books.

Boston Boys Club (inspired, says Diaz, as a gay male take on Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez' *The*

Dirty Girls Social Club) set a trio of fictitious characters loose in real local gay hotspots like Club Café. But its main character, Tommy Perez, a homesick Cuban-American reporter from Miami (sound familiar?), also garnered attention for Diaz's representation of Latino culture in the gay community—something he says is all too rare.

"It's fear," he says of the lack of representation. He adds that he's received loads of grateful reader letters from all segments of the Latin Diaspora, and he is proud that the novel gives voice to a normally silent gay Hispanic media: "That's why I wrote the book, and the second [*Miami Manhunt*]. Being gay in Miami, you don't really hear about the gay Latino media. You're either one or the other. I know that we have members, but they're not totally out. They want just to be a Hispanic reporter, or just a reporter."

In fact, while his novels have received plenty of coverage in gay media, Diaz says he finds it interesting that Hispanic media have not been so attentive. "I had a great article in *El Nuevo Herald*, the Spanish

sister of the *Miami Herald*," says Diaz.

"Other than that, no other Hispanic media have picked up on my books, and I think a part of it is the gay thing. I think it's a cultural taboo, and that's why the gay media have been great but not the Hispanic media."

If there is one similarity that links Doherty and Diaz together, it is the common passion they share that fuels their journalism: telling other people's stories, whether enlightening or offensive, quirky or queer.

"It was about unsung heroes and colorful characters around Miami," says Diaz, recalling that teenage column that set his career in motion. "I loved writing about every day people doing different things—interviews that made you want to get to know them more."

"Being a journalist, you're always expanding your knowledge and learning to play devil's advocate," says Sweeney. "It's interesting to be able to meet people, see something different every day, and learn about someone else's life. That's why I'm in it. ♦"

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"But the reverse of that is, it becomes a charade. It becomes this game. We're an open society—people talk about everything. We're all out in the open with our issues, and I don't know what the hang-up would be about being honest about who you are," he says. "But I don't make these decisions for others. I made them for myself."

Even in a world far more accepting than the one he found in his early career, Price believes that his public representation remains a vital contribution to the gay community and the media industry.

"When they were recently rewriting the bio [on the WHDH Website], there was a question of: Is there any relevance to that anymore?" he recalls, referring to the biography's disclosure of his sexuality. "And actually, I really appreciated the question, because that means that people think it has no relevance."

"At some point, it shouldn't be. It's just a personal thing. After I've said who I am, I appreciate that it's no longer relevant," he says. "But until then, it's very relevant." ♦

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