Ex-TMZ Employees Allege 'Toxic Environment' Rife With Bullying

Nearly two dozen former employees of celebrity news site TMZ have alleged that the newsroom is rife with bullying, harassment, and gender discrimination in what one current employee described as an "unchecked abuse of power" by top executives, BuzzFeed News reports. "It's just a toxic environment of extreme measures of blaming, scapegoating, bullying, harassing people to get what they want, and being biased against women," a former employee of Warner Bros., TMZ's parent company, told BuzzFeed. Several former employees singled out the news site's founder, Harvey Levin, who they say routinely berated employees and called them "retarded" and "morons." "I got screamed at so often I felt like a scared dog. Nothing was rational. The things that [Levin] would decide that he liked were based on his feelings that day. It wasn't based on a formulaic structure, so there's no way that you could anticipate what he was going to like and what he doesn't like. It was insane," a former employee was quoted saying.

TMZ is also accused of running a "boys club" where sexual harassment allegedly went unchecked and gender discrimination was common. According to one former employee, it was an open secret in the industry that TMZ has "a long-running history of having problems with women." "What we had to say was never valued and the men were always leading the conversation, even if it was about women's reproductive rights," Veronica Barriga, a former contributor on TMZ on TV, told BuzzFeed. "Being in that room, I've never felt so small. I've never felt like my voice didn't matter. I just felt like if you wanted to have success as a woman at that company, you had to work three times as hard as your male colleagues."

Levin has not commented on the allegations laid out by BuzzFeed, but TMZ called the accusations a "blatant attempt to use negative publicity and inaccurate claims to force" a pay out.