The Evolution of the Final Girl in Slasher Films

Jimmy Schindewolf
Who is the Final Girl?

Wickham Clayton describes this character as “the primarily female character who survives until the end and dispatches or escapes the killer” (Clayton 6).

Often takes on the archetype of the Virgin, while also showing signs of the hero.

Over time, there has been an increase of Final Girls who have also taken on the role of the Amazon, while often still holding certain traits of the Virgin.
The Virgin

Usually describes a female character who displays traits of purity and wholesomeness.

A light in the darkness.

Very strong in mind.

In Horror, she has been described as the “girl scout” by her less innocent friends.

Doesn’t take part in the drugs/alcohol/sex or at least is not as interested in them.
The Amazon

strong female character

Strong and Independent in nature

Has the ability and courage to face whatever comes her way

In Horror, Final Girls who take on this role are able to hold their own and face their threat head-on.
Earlier Final Girls
(The Virgins)
Nancy Thompson - A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)

As the story progresses, she is the character with the sense that there’s more than what meets the eye.

Along with her friends she is haunted in her dreams by Freddy Krueger.

Uses her wits and skills to seemingly defeat Freddy Krueger, but in the end her and her friends are ultimately captured in Freddy’s dream world.
Laurie Strode - Halloween (1978) and Halloween II (1981)

Intelligent, kind friend and babysitter

Chooses to babysit Halloween night while her friends choose to go out and have sex.

Unwittingly the sister of serial killer Michael Myers.

Able to fight Michael off when he goes on a killing spree but in both films she is ultimately saved by Dr. Loomis, an older male figure.
Halloween Ending - Dr. Loomis Saves Laurie
Modern Final Girls
(The Amazons)
Sidney Prescott - Scream Franchise (1996-2011)

Loses her mother a year before the story begins.

Outwits multiple killers throughout the franchise from the very first time she is attacked.

Even taunts the killers with their own phone tricks in the climax of the original.

More often than not, she is the one to kill at least one of the characters who have taken on the Ghostface persona.
Scream - First Attack on Sidney
Erin Harson - You’re Next (2013)

Accompanies her boyfriend to a family gathering

Shows purely kind traits

When the house is attacked, she remains calm and collected, having been raised on a survivalist compound

Manages to turn the tide and take down the attackers, including the members of the family who hired them
Laurie Strode - Halloween H20: 20 Years Later (1998)

Has changed her name to Keri Tate and now has a son

Still struggles to deal with her past, always fearing Michael’s return

Acts as a protector to her son John and his girlfriend, Molly when Michael does indeed return.

In this film, she finally faces Michael head-on and, like the hero, “slays her dragon.”
What does the idea of the “Final Girl”, what it represents, and how it’s changed say about us and our society?
Thank You!


*Halloween II*. Directed by Rick Rosenthal, performances by Jamie Lee Curtis and Donald Pleasance, Universal Pictures, 1981.

