Presentation Abstracts and Presenter Bios
For the Top Girls Frame/Works Event

“Then We’ll Start All Over Again”: Examining Motherwork through Women’s Descriptions of their Daily Practices  
Dr. Tracy R. Nichols, UNCG

Abstract: While the media fuels a false debate between “working” mothers and “stay-at-home” mothers, most women struggle with daily work that encompasses multiple domains. However the dominant narrative of how women combine carework with other responsibilities and how women both internalize and challenge societal expectations of motherhood is still largely writ by white middle-class women. This presentation presents findings from a larger study on mothers’ health and daily care practices. Thirteen mothers, with at least one minor child living in their home, provided descriptions of a typical weekday and their weekends. Participants were primarily low-income mothers of color. Using a poetic form of narrative analysis the women’s descriptions were examined to identify a common story of “motherwork.” Motherwork is the lived experience of how mothers’ carework is structured into women’s daily lives. Examining mothers’ descriptions of their daily practices provides a window into how women perceive expectations of motherhood and the strategies they devise to meet these expectations across a variety of living situations. Poetic representations of women’s daily life stories reveal both a common narrative of women struggling to meet unrealistic expectations with few structural supports as well as unique stories of identity and connection. The importance of considering alternative narratives and the ethics of representing the stories of marginalized mothers will be discussed.

Bio: Dr. Tracy R. Nichols is an Associate Professor of Public Health Education and Women and Gender Studies at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. She holds a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from Columbia University. Her expertise is in adolescent girls’ development; mother-daughter relationships; developing and evaluating women’s health promotion programs; and marginalized motherhoods.

“Nurturing the Impossible: Motherhood and its Absences in the Plays of Caryl Churchill”  
Ms. Christy Gaydon Jones, UNCG

Abstract: The 1970's and early 1980's, commonly referred to as the "second wave" of feminism, brought advances for women's right in the United States and Great Britain but left many feminist goals unrealized. Many of the personal and political struggles that have been faced by women seeking access to jobs, equal pay, reproductive rights and childcare have been represented in the work of British playwright Caryl Churchill. This study looks closely at four Churchill plays that were written during the "second wave" and asks questions about what it means to be a mother (versus a person who mothers or cares for children) and who may have access to such roles and the resources necessary to fulfill them in capitalist societies. Top Girls explores different styles of feminism that were practiced during this era and asks whether it is possible to nurture oneself as well as one's children when women's work is undervalued as well as underpaid and so many
mothers are left fighting for survival rather than personhood. *Cloud 9, Fen* and *Owners* also explore themes surrounding common understandings of motherhood and the effects capitalism has had on motherhood as an institution. Churchill employs theatrical devices and Brecht's alienation techniques in ways that focus the viewer's gaze on the children who are often rendered invisible or otherwise absent in her work. It is not just these children but also their mothers (both the women who bear them as well as their caregivers) who disappear or are left behind.

**Bio:** Christy Gaydon Jones is currently an M.A. student within the UNCG Women's and Gender Studies Program. She holds a B.A. in Women's and Gender Studies and Psychology from UNCG. Her research interests include feminist theatre and performance art, performance as a tool for social change, and critical theories of neurodiversity. She is currently serving as Dramaturg for the UNCG Theatre production of *Top Girls*.

**“Teaching Social Responsibility: Brecht, Postmodernity, & *Top Girls*”**

Dr. Scott Proudfit, Elon University

**Abstract:** Few plays have acts as differentiated as those of Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls*. The style, structure, and scope of these two acts so contrast, it sometimes seems as if Churchill merely yoked together two one-acts through the tenuous thread of Marlene, the upwardly mobile women’s employment agency executive who bridges the onstage worlds. However, one way to map continuities across the play’s seemingly discontinuous acts is to consider the inherent tension in most of Churchill’s work between her Brechtian dialectics (pitting two forces against each other) and her “postmodern” rejection of binaries in favor of recognizing diversity. Never in her plays is this tension more manifest or literal than in the aesthetic and philosophical division between the acts of *Top Girls*.

**Bio:** Scott Proudfit is Assistant Professor of drama in the English department at Elon University. Before receiving his PhD at Northwestern University, he worked with the Actors’ Gang and the Factory Theater in Los Angeles and with Irondale Ensemble Project in New York. In addition, for seven years he covered the New York and Los Angeles theatre scenes as an editor for the publications *Back Stage* and *Back Stage West*. He recently served as associate editor on two books, *A History of Collective Creation* and *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, both of which will be published by Palgrave Macmillan this fall.