The growing practice of public apologies has received significant attention in recent years, both in academic work and in wider public discourse. There now exist articles devoted to theorizing the pragmatics, politics, discourse, economics, performance, linguistics, materiality, and emotions of public apologies. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that normative work on public apology has uniformly failed to take seriously questions of gender. The severity of this omission is especially striking once we acknowledge the growing body of evidence concerning role gender plays in political violence and oppression – in other words, the very harms for which political apology is often invoked as remedy. Similarly, feminist work in philosophy and psychotherapy, and on restorative justice has highlighted the significant role that gender plays in practices of apologizing; indeed, it suggests that acts of apology (both private and public) are already gendered, often in problematic ways.

This raises the question: what would it mean to gender the public apology? That is, how do we begin to critically theorize and evaluate public apologies in ways that take seriously the significance of gender – that is, roles, expectations and identities – as well as gendered violence and oppression? In this presentation, I make the case for why we need a gender-attentive approach to public apology, and outline what such an account would entail.

Friday, November 9, 2012
Hagey Hall, room 373
3:30 p.m.