**IMAGE CAPTION: Apparently wombs define the womb-men**

**No Non-Binary People Allowed in OUSA Women’s Room**

‘Can’t use the room if you don’t got a womb’ - OUSA

By Esme Hall

OUSA has rejected a request to allow non-biological women to use the OUSA Women’s Room.

OUSA’s policy says the Women’s Room in the Union Building is a safe space for women to feel “welcome and free from harassment of any kind”.

After a suggestion from Otago Women’s+ Club, OUSA looked into opening the doors of the Women’s Room to non-binary people. However, after consultation with religious groups they decided against changing any policies.

The Women’s Room is well-used by Islamic students as some Muslim women can only take off their headscarves in women-only spaces.

In an OUSA exec meeting, OUSA CEO Debbie Downs said the room was “not necessarily the right space” for non-binary people. Welfare Officer Abigail Clark said the Women’s Room is for “specifically women,” but defended the decision because “we do a lot for the queer community”.

OUSA President Caitlin Barlow-Groome told *Critic* that “the idea has been put on pause”. She says, “just because the Women’s Room may not be the best solution for non-binary students, doesn’t mean OUSA isn’t investigating other options,” including pushing for gender-neutral bathrooms.

The University of Otago Muslim University Students' Association, who opposed a policy change, did not respond to a request for comment before the deadline.

Sinead Gill, Co-President of Otago Women’s+ Club, is disappointed. She says the Women’s Room Policy “makes it clear that it is a safe space for all identifying women. Non-binary persons … suffer the inequalities and injustices that women do (and more so),” which should be recognised in OUSA policy.

Gill has recently joined the OUSA Welfare Committee that takes care of the Women’s Room. She says she wants to ensure “it doesn’t look so damn depressing. We've already hooked it up with artwork, an extra big table and chairs, and have a budget drawn up for the additions we want to make, like a ‘woman of the month’ feature and blackboard paint on the walls to write cute stuff on.” The Women’s+ Club also wants to make sure there are free sanitary products and tea and coffee.

She said that they’re hoping to bring “new life” to the room so that students “want to use the space” and it won’t “become a trash heap”.

“I think it’s been super neglected since the Women’s Rep position was abolished and absorbed into the Welfare Officer's duties,” said Gill.

The opening of the Women’s Room, banned to men, in 1983 was a major campaign initiative of Phyllis Comerford, the first female OUSA president. The room generated huge controversy, which resulted in bricks thrown through the windows and an attempt by campus conservatives to have Comerford removed from office.