The concept of a third gender is one that has been used within Anthropology and popular literature to help evoke better understanding and acceptance of individuals who don't fit within the binary heteronormative framework of Western society. By presenting a historical and global image of this concept, scholars hope to invoke an understanding of it as natural and normal. Towle and Morgan however, don't agree with this position. They caution against using this concept, which they consider just as constructed and restrictive as binary gender ideologies. Towle and Morgan instead champion for reexamination and understanding of gender identities within their own cultural and historical landscape.

As Towle and Morgan explain, since the mid 20th century, Anthropologists and Popular authors have used ethnological examples of what they call “third genders” in cultures around the world to argue for the naturalness and acceptance of non heteronormative individuals in other cultures. This issue is, they argue, third genders themselves are a constructed concept and the actual roles and identities of these individuals are examined in a simplistic and calculated way. Characteristics of their identities and roles in society are often ignored to put forward an image of utopian societies with acceptance for all. These identities are often more complex than they are presented as and are not necessarily a “third gender”. The authors claim the concept of a third gender itself creates even more liminalities than that

of a binary gender system, and thus is problematic.

Towle and Morgan also criticize Western individuals tendency to try and use these concepts of utopian native societies in order to lend understanding and acceptance to their own identities. They cite the case of Anne Ogborn, a transgender individual who traveled to India to adopt the identity of a Hijra. The authors explain how Ogborn felt she found acceptance and connection among the Hijra, but her texts show that she had little understanding of their roles and conception in larger society. This situation was an example of the ways in which Western individuals often romanticize and one dimensionalize the identity of these “third gender” individuals. The connection individuals feel may be real, but they don't truly comprehend or recognize the complexity of the identities of these “third gender natives”.

Towle and Morgan argue that instead of using this concept of a “third gender”, we should strive to understand all individuals within their own cultural and historical context. All individual's identities should be given full acknowledgment of their complexity and multi-dimensionality. They also call for the need to allow the voices of all people to be heard. They state that we should not focus so much on romanticizing others identities in order to try and create acceptance for our own, but rather than understand why there is the presence or lack of acceptance in relation to larger society.

This article was thought provoking and offered an interesting and fresh perspective on the concept of third genders. Being a student of anthropology, I have often encountered the third gender concept. However this is the first time that I have been presented with the potential negativity of this thinking. Presented with the author's argument, I can see both the positives and negatives in the use of this concept. Greater common understanding and acceptance of non heteronormative individuals is so necessary in this world, and can come about as the result of acknowledgment of cultures who have more than two genders. However, as is true of many other subjects we must continue to use caution to avoid romanticizing native cultures and ideologies.