

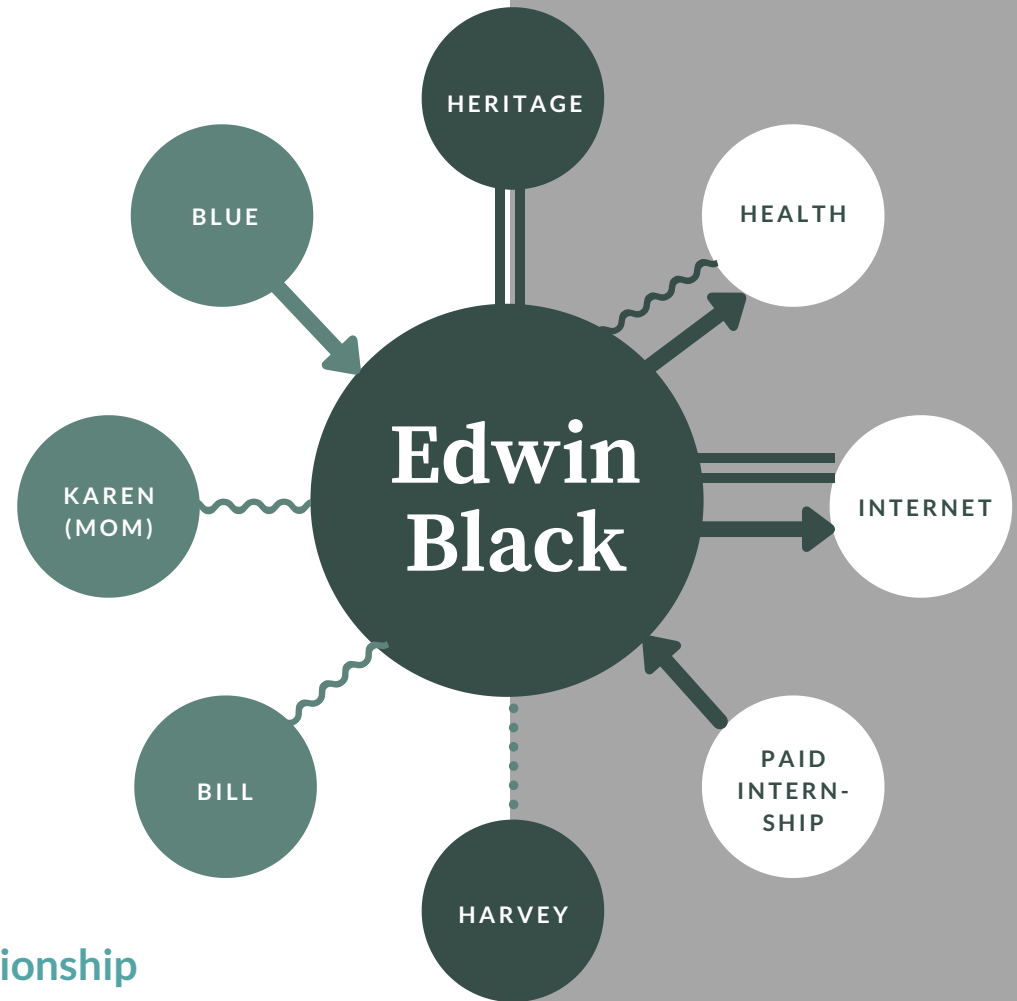
## ECO-MAP

# Edwin Black

by David Angell

The ecomap is a social work tool developed by Dr. Ann Hartman in 1975. Its purpose is to track and illustrate the relationships between a client and their environment, including interpersonal relationships and the flow of resources and energy from interaction with institutions and other systems.

Usually filled out by the worker in collaboration with the client, the ecomap can be used to organize and visualize the systems surrounding an individual in order to better draw conclusions about what aspects of a person's environment to focus on as targets for change.



Strong Relationship



Weak Relationship



Tense Relationship



Flow of Resources/Energy

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### Helping Edwin Black: An Ecomap for *There There*

In 1975, Dr. Ann Hartman developed the ecological-map, or ecomap, as a visual tool for social work professionals to explore ecological relationships within the ecosystem framework of social work. The ecosystem perspective posits that an individual is influenced by, as well as influences, a number of other people and systems in their life. Similar to natural sciences, where various ecosystems overlap to create unique relationships, Hartman wrote that, “human environments also include networks of intimate human relationships.” An ecomap helps the worker, as well as the client and/or the client’s family, to interpret and make sense of these relationships. Using an ecomap helps create a diagram illustrating the elements surrounding the client, the strength of the relationships to these individuals and systems, as well as the flow of energy and/or resources towards or away from the client. In this way, an ecomap allows all those who are helping the client to be on the same page and more closely examine these relationships to develop target systems for change in order to best help the client. Explaining the value of the ecomap, Dr. Hartman wrote, “such objectivity and visual portrayal can lead to new insights and to altered perceptions, of the complexity of human systems.”

Edwin Black, from the novel *There There* by Tommy Orange, has a number of relationships that contribute to his potential need for services in order to achieve meaningful success in life. His relationship with his heritage is one of the only strong, positive elements in his life, as he is clearly achieving a level of acceptance and understanding that he previously

demonstrated a desire for by studying Native American literature, by listening to Native music, being active amongst fellow Native people online, and especially through his paid internship helping the powwow committee. His obesity and lack of exercise has already affected his health and will continue to be a danger, as well as being detrimental to his self-esteem and ability to foster positive relationships. His paid internship and friendship with co-worker Blue are both clear sources of positivity and resources for him and are not only aspects that should be cultivated, but should also be celebrated as successes and models for future focus. His familial relationships have been strained. His mother, Karen, clearly means well, but her frustration manifests in her conversations with Edwin. He acknowledges the positives of his relationship with Bill, clearly stating, “Bill’s not an asshole. If anything he goes out of his way to be nice, to have a conversation with me.” Of course, Bill’s death will be a challenge for Karen, but also for Edwin, as he now has to come to grips with the loss of someone who was a part of his life for a long period, who he never got a chance to fully embrace. In the first chapter centered around him, Edwin’s relationship with the internet is very strong, but it also consumes what amounts to almost the entirety of his energy, while assuring that he gets very little in return. Edwin knows this, as he discusses the, “digital-detox retreats and underground desert complexes in Arizona.” However, his paid internship hopefully takes the place of a lot of his internet usage. So, the reader can hope that this has resulted in a very positive change in Edwin’s life, even though Orange does not specifically state this is the case in the novel. In using the ecomap, we are able to see Edwin’s relationships to his environment and relationships more clearly, as we might attempt to advise him on ways to further accomplish his life goals.

## Works Cited

Hartman, Ann. "Diagrammatic Assessment of Family Relationships." *Social Casework*, vol. 59, no. 8, Oct. 1978, pp. 465–476.

Orange, Tommy. *There There*. Vintage Books, 2018. Print.