About Ecomaps

"The ecological paradigm is supported by modern science, but it is rooted in a paradigm of reality that goes beyond the scientific framework to the awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations, and its cycles of change and transformation. Ultimately, such deep ecological awareness is spiritual awareness." - Fritjof Capra

An ecomap is a flow diagram that maps family and community systems' process over time. In the 1970's, Dr. Ann Hartman, a social worker, applied the concept of an ecosystem to human communities to "focus on the complex ecological system that includes the family and the total environment." In order to help caregivers "capture and organize this complexity", she developed an innovative diagramming technique called the ecomap. The ecomap is essentially a diagram of a social "solar system", in which a family genogram is placed in the position of the sun, at the center, and other important people and institutions in their life space are depicted with circles around the center, like planets around the sun. The ecomap shows the exchange of the social matter with energy that maintains and is exchanged by the family in their living social "ecosystem". As with Bowen, Hartman's work evolved in a climate of the work of many other theorists working in what is commonly called the "systems" or "systemic" school of family theory, which in turn grew out of general systems theory, which was being applied in many other fields, from physics to anthropology and biology.

Social workers began to focus on the potential for graphic aids, including ecomaps, social network maps, and genograms, in the 1970s. Meyer (1976) discussed assessment, as follows:

*The assessment of the unit of attention is in itself a process, the beginning of intervention. It can be concretized as the making of a true map of a situation, a map that should be drawn with the client himself. As an assurance of the contract, a mutual definition between social worker and client of the situation confronting them, the drawing of a map could elicit a joint understanding of the salient and relevant features of the client's story.*

(p. 177)

In subsequently describing how an ecological/systems approach might change the way a case is handled, Meyer described a mother and daughter "literally drawing the case for themselves" and showed what the map looked like. Meyer (1983) also
emphasized the conceptual use of circles rather than lines, favoring a contextual, ecosystemic approach over the linear for clinical assessment.

Ann Hartman has made substantial contributions to the development and use of graphic aids for practice. In an important early paper, Hartman (1978) discussed the utility of *ecomaps*, graphic tools for portraying family-environment transactions at a point in time, as well as *genograms*, a form of graphic family tree used to assess and coherently conceptualize the intergenerational life of a family. Hartman and Laird (1983) expanded on the use of these tools and demonstrated the use of *family mapping* to portray the inner workings of the family system, further developing Minuchin's (1974) *structural mapping* of families.

Perhaps the first major applications of images to clinical work emerged from psychology. In projective tests, like the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test, a patient's perceptions of ambiguous shapes or drawings are interpreted. In a third popular projective test, the Draw-a-Person test, diagnostic information is extracted from a drawing completed by the patient. Personality tests like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) produce scores on several scales; contemporary interpretation of these tests is not based primarily on scores on individual scales, but on the graphic profile of scores, emphasizing interactions among the dimensions. Personality tests can be of some utility, especially if the tester is familiar with recent empirical work. Still, a major limitation of these measures is that they are oriented to producing a personality description based on relatively enduring traits, an approach to assessment with serious limitations (Mischel, 1968; Stuart, 1970).

Nevertheless, these early efforts offer a number of important insights. For example, while the Draw-a-Person test may have only limited utility as a measure of personality, a worker can certainly develop genuinely useful clinical hypotheses from clients' drawings. For example, a 10-year-old girl, who was living in a foster home after being removed from her mother's care because of physical abuse, drew a picture of a young boy crying. She said it was her four-year old brother. When asked what made him cry, she said, "He's crying because he's being hit and burned a lot." After further
gentle probing and a protective services investigation, the girl proved to be correct. In this case, clearly, the client used an image to communicate.

![Eco-Map](image)

**FIGURE 7-1** Eco-Map

C. Family development history (see Figure 7-2)

This couple seems tightly tied to their parents. They adhere to the lifestyle with which they grew up. There appears to be little conflict between the lifestyle of the two families of orientation. Neither partner seems to have a sense of their grandparents, as all died when they were very young; they had little contact with aunts and uncles. They cannot identify any specific cultural influences, saying they are just

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References:

2. Welcome to Wonderware web site; [http://www.clark.net/pub/wware/wware.html](http://www.clark.net/pub/wware/wware.html)