Important Terms for Understanding Carl Roger’s Theory and Client Centered Therapy

1. **Organism** – The organism is the total individual, including thoughts, feelings, and physical well-being. Self-actualization is the main motivation of the organism. The organism is capable of allowing some experiences to be in your conscious awareness. The more you are aware of, the healthier you are.

2. **Phenomenal Field** – Your perceived reality. It is your ever-changing world of experience, both internal and external. It is what the individual perceives in the phenomenal field that is important, not actual reality. What you perceive is your reality. Counseling begins with the phenomenal field. Rogers begins therapy and teaching with the perceived reality.

3. **Self** – The center of the phenomenal field and is your inner most being. The self develops out of the interaction between the organism and the phenomenal field. The self is always changing and in motion. The self processes information through the phenomenal field in terms of its value system.

4. **Personality** – The first three items make up the personality.

5. **Organismic Valuing Process** – The person seeking to maximize the congruence between the self and its values.

6. **Conditions of Worth** – When a person alters the true self in order to receive positive regard from others. These people are incongruent with their true selves. An example is a person becoming a doctor to please their parents, not because he/she wants to be one. People learn to alter the self’s values at a young age if UPR is not received. Small children seek to please parents naturally. Parents either give a child UPR or they require conditions to first be met.

7. **Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)** – Valuing, or regarding positively, the individual (though not necessarily the individual's behaviors) unconditionally. Giving UPR is the responsibility of childrearing practices to make the self of a child congruent with their phenomenal field.

8. **Client Centered Therapy** – Rogers’ method of counseling. The client (not called a patient) takes responsibility for the direction of the therapy and is completely responsible for making changes. The therapist cannot make changes for the client. The counselor makes sure the conditions for change are present. No diagnosis is given to the client, as he/she is considered responsible and capable rather than sick. The client moves through the 5 steps to change, feeling free to express the self and move from blaming to making “I” statements.

9. **The Conditions for Change**
   a. **Psychological Contact** – The counselor makes sure a connection with the client takes place through empathy and respect.
   b. **Minimum State of Anxiety** – The client must experience some discomfort with present behavior and experiences or they will not make a change. Minimum state of anxiety is the motivation for change.
   c. **Counselor Genuineness** – The counselor’s own self must be congruent with the phenomenal field, without unresolved personal issues.
   d. **UPR** – See the above definition. Certain counselor behaviors show UPR such as 1) being a client advocate, 2) showing a willingness to work with the client, 3) assuming good will on the part of the client, 4) suspending critical judgment, and 5) encouraging the client’s constructive new actions.

10. **The 5 Steps of the Counseling Process** – 1) release of pent up emotions and irrational thoughts, 2) catharsis, the breakthrough period, 3) acceptance, 4) insight, and 5) the development of a framework for a positive self action.

11. **Humanistic Methods of Research** – Rogers was an advocate of non-experimental research methods. Rogers said that the better a therapist he was, the more subjective he became. The requirements of experimental methods make it impossible to verify non-directive counseling results. Instead, Rogers wrote case studies of clients based on interviews and tape recorded sessions. He often used a Q-sorting test to measure growth in
clients, but did not evaluate the results with experimental methods. Some correlation studies were published by colleagues to show growth, but these studies do not imply that the therapy caused the changes. Rogers said, “If I can provide a certain kind of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and development will occur”. In reply to criticisms that he provided no research for the validity of his therapy, Rogers maintained that there was no evidence that any therapy caused change in the long run.

12. Humanistic/Phenomenological Point of View - Works on the assumption that man is capable of being responsible for life choices. It is existentialist in the sense that the world is meaningless unless we make our own meaning. Man is responsible only to himself in an essentially purposeless world.

13. According to Rogers the nature of man is good. Badness is simply a person who is out of congruence with the self. This “bad” person shows maladaptive behavior by using defense mechanisms to shield the self from the anxiety of having to meet conditions of worth. Maladaptive people wear a “mask” and have a “façade” hiding incongruities between the self and the phenomenal field. The self shown to the world is inconsistent with the true self and designed to meet conditions of worth. The person is not aware of this. Rogers assumes that man’s natural goodness will surface if the conditions for change are present. Clients then work through the 5 steps to change and drop the masks to become more congruent and self-actualize.

14. Estrangement - The failure to be true to the self. The person is incongruent and may be meeting conditions of worth. This person is separated from the real self and overuses defense mechanisms.

Modified from J. Jamison at St. Petersburg HS, FL