

A Discussion-Based Learning Session to Clarify Values Around Abortion

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Background

- Abortion is a common medical procedure, with over 800,000 performed in 2017.¹
- By the age of 45, 24% of women will have undergone an abortion.¹
- Exposure to general abortion education during medical school is scarce at both the pre-clinical and clinical level.
- A 2005 study reported that 44% of OB-GYN clerkship directors at medical schools stated there was no formal abortion training or session in the preclinical setting and 23% reported none during the third-year clerkships.²
- It is **imperative** for medical schools to develop tools to educate students about this impactful procedure.
- This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a small-group session at providing access to educational materials and facilitating conversations about abortion.

Materials and Methods

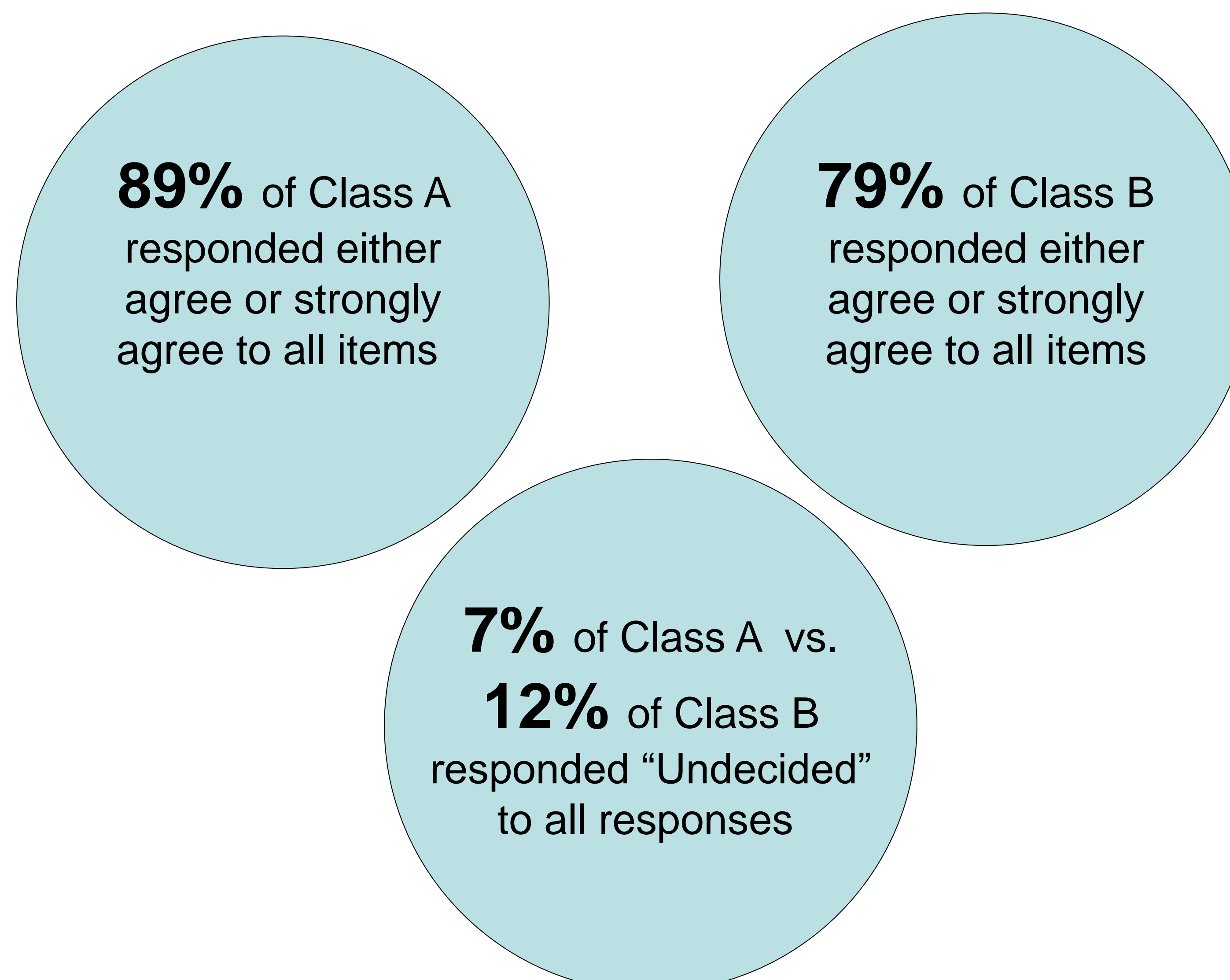
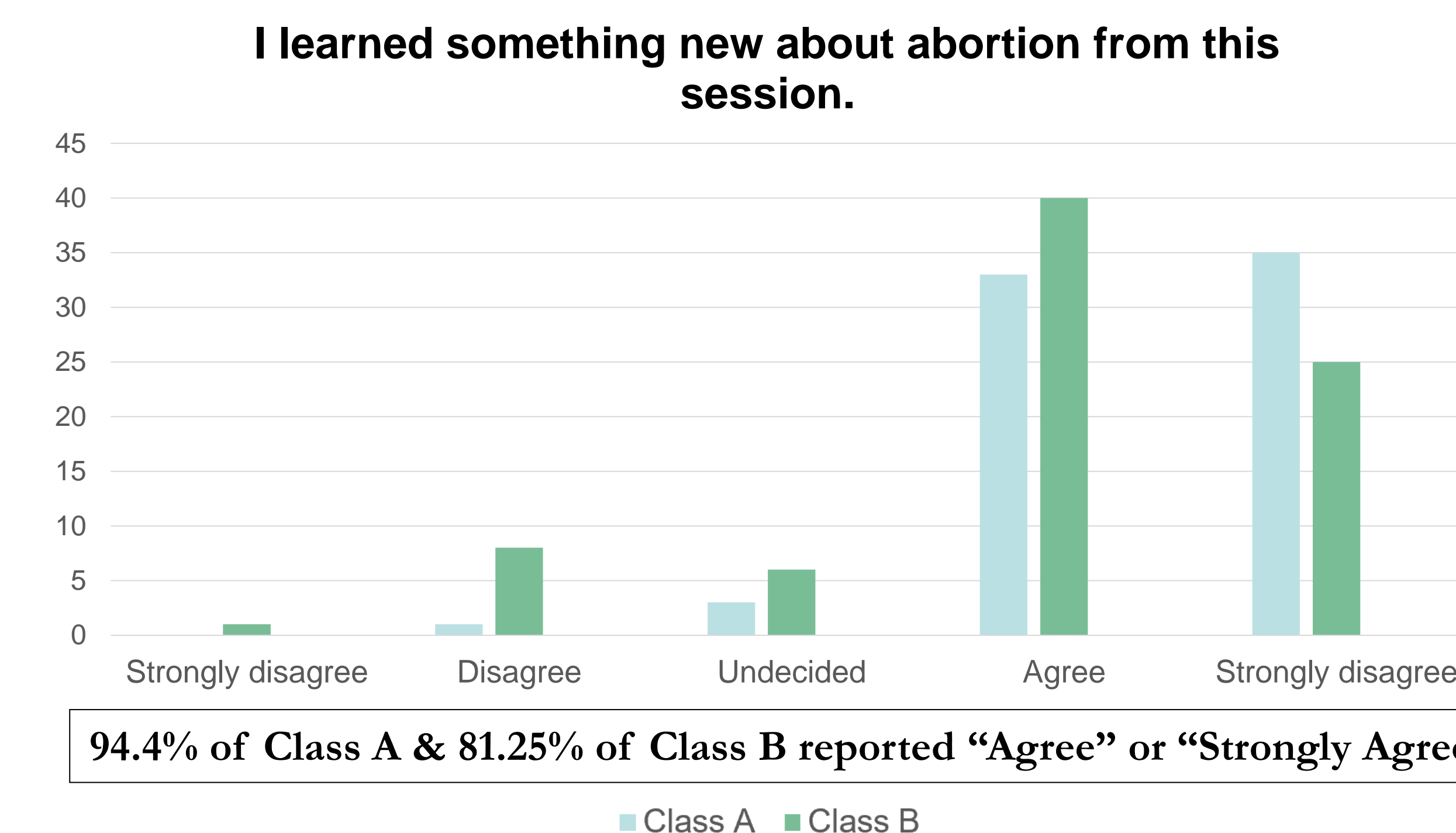
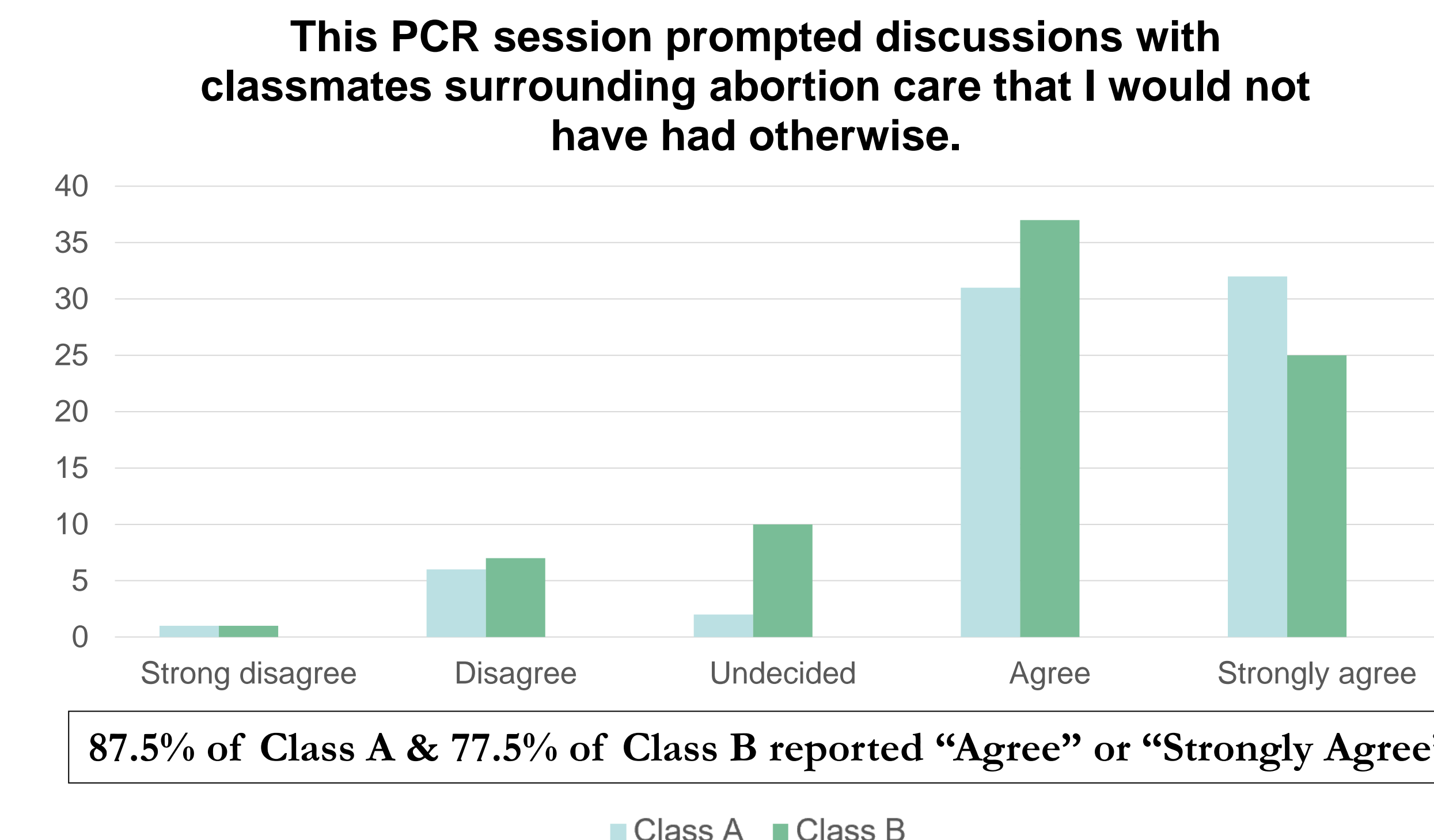
- 90-minute small-group session
- Materials: Pre-session questionnaire, an abortion fact sheet, an article representing a “pro-life” stance, a personal essay about an abortion experience, and a post-session six-item Likert-type questionnaire
- Structure: 30 minutes to discuss readings and survey results; 45 minutes to discuss different clinical scenarios, patient stories and pregnancy lengths; and 15 minutes to debrief

1. This PCR session prompted discussions with classmates surrounding abortion care that I would not have had otherwise.
2. The session activities helped me to clarify my own attitudes toward abortion.
3. The structure of the session helped me to voice my true opinions.
4. I found it valuable to listen to my classmates talk about their opinions in this session
5. Abortion is an important topic to approach in PCR.
6. I learned something new about abortion from this session.

Post-session questionnaire. Responses correlated on Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Results

- Two first-year Professionalism, Communication, Reflection classes (Class A: n = 72; Class B: n = 80)



“I elected not to attend this session for personal reasons. But you should know that the readings alone had a tremendous impact on me. I learned things I wouldn’t have known otherwise, which led me to some powerful personal realizations and empowered me to fully clarify my own beliefs and opinions personally and in my role as a clinician and advocate for my patients. I almost feel...uncloseted. It’s a new feeling and I’m not sure what to do with it, but I’m grateful.”

“It was one of the first times at Larner that I felt like I could actually voice my opinions without having to worry about offending someone, being judged, or assimilating to the values this school projects upon its students. It was refreshing to be able to actually have an opinion.”

“In many cases, a person’s spiritual beliefs presupposes any argument or statement about abortion. I think the curriculum did a great job of not debating the topic but simply examining the topic from 30,000 feet, allowing different viewpoints to converge at a very high level.”

“Would have been nice to talk more about how abortion actually works (the procedure). It was hard to talk about things like whether you would or wouldn’t perform abortions as a physician (question from the survey) if you didn’t really know what that required.”

“I wanted to hear more of the pro-life side. That perspective was absent in our group.”

Samples of post-session comments.

Discussion

- Students overall responded **positively** to the session.
- Thus, **this is an appropriate method** to deliver objective information regarding abortion as well as to stimulate thoughtful discussion.
- It is important to note the political and cultural climate of New England when viewing the data, as application of this session in other regions might yield different results.
- Limitations:
 - Only two cohorts were included in analysis.
 - Questionnaires and session attendance were not mandatory which could have resulted in more homogenous responses.
 - Could not guarantee all sessions were identical or all exercises were completed.

References

1. Guttmacher Institute. 2020. *Induced Abortion In The United States*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>> [Accessed 18 April 2020].
2. Espey, E., Ogburn, T., Chavez, A., Qualls, C. and Leyba, M., 2005. Abortion education in medical schools: A national survey. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 192(2), pp.640-643.