EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
HALLOWEEN IRC, OCT 2013

PROJECT BACKGROUND

GutCheck led a discussion with a group of 20 mothers of school-aged children, specifically engaging with them on Halloween preparation and children's costumes. This research will aid in understanding parental attitudes and behaviors around the holiday and definitions of "appropriate" consumerism.

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand parental preparation for the holiday, including décor and candy
2. Identify budget, focusing on:
    a. Appropriate amount
    b. Homemade vs. Store-bought ethos
3. Understand costuming process:
    a. Ideas/Brainstorming phase
    b. Ideal Characters/Costumes
    c. Off-limits or Inappropriate Costumes

SCOPE

This research leveraged the GutCheck Instant Research Community offering, with a total of seven questions each seen by a total of n=23 respondents.

KEY FINDINGS

Objectives are shown in bold black text below, with a summary of key findings presented for each.

1. Preparation for holiday

Many respondents begin preparation in early October, first by decorating the house, then stocking up on candy, acquiring costumes for their children, purchasing pumpkins, etc. Several respondents mentioned either hosting or attending Halloween parties.

2. Budget Discussion

Most respondents are willing to spend anywhere between $50 and $200, with many citing financial difficulties as their reason for not spending more. Store-bought costumes are favored over homemade by mothers who do not feel confident in their ability to make a costume or who lack the time to make one. However, respondents tend to view homemade costumes as more authentic, and they often prefer homemade for older children and store-bought for younger.

3. Costume Considerations

Most respondents help their child with the brainstorming process, providing them with catalogs and access to online retail sites, as well as taking them to store racks. Additionally, ideal costumes provide warmth for trick-or-treating and allow child(ren) some self expression, whether by showcasing their interests or highlighting certain personality traits. Parents overwhelmingly associated inappropriateness in costumes with sexiness, gruesomeness or violence, though appropriateness was mainly concerned with female modesty.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section expands on Key Findings and includes verbatim responses from respondents. Findings are broken out by objective. All verbatims are (sic).

1. Preparation for the holiday

Many respondents begin the Halloween holiday in early October by decorating their homes, both inside and outside. Popular decorations include pumpkins (typically carved closer to Halloween), ghosts, and spider webs, with some concern over not making the decorations "too scary" for younger children. Additionally, respondents tend to purchase costumes earlier in the month, with some stating that earlier shopping provides for a better selection.

Other festivities mentioned include visiting a pumpkin patch and corn mazes, typically in the middle of the preparation timeline. Closer to the holiday date, many mentioned planning to host or attend a Halloween party, and a few mentioned preparing Halloween snacks such as S'Mores, punch, cupcakes, and "mummy hot dogs."

"We visited a pumpkin patch over the weekend and did a corn maze and purchased our pumpkins and cornstalks. This week we will carve the pumpkins and decorate outside with pumpkins, cornstalks and light up decorations." 46, PA

"semi-dress up the front porch of our house with pumpkins, spider webbing, etc. Nothing too scary due to the age of the kids." 32, NC

"Well since like the beginning of this month we started looking for costumes b/c if you wait till the last minute the good ones would be taken." 26, CA

"I have ordered a costume and accessories online for my daughter. Every year I buy halloween treat bags to fill and pass out on Halloween. I stay home to pass out the treat bags for trick-or-treaters. My husband takes my daughter trick-or-treating and then we all go over to a neighborhood church that has Halloween festivities." 45, AZ

"I usually prepare for Halloween by decorating my house both inside and outside. I usually do this about the beginning of October. I also shop for and plan Halloween costumes for myself and my children and sometimes my children. I purchase the candy to hand out for trick or treaters and purchase the Halloween cupcakes for my kids' school party. I also participate in a Halloween party at my church." 30, CA

Implications: Halloween preparation tends to be viewed as month-long process, beginning with decorations and costume purchasing in early October. For this reason, it may be beneficial to plan sales, promotions and brainstorming to correspond with consumer mindset along the preparation timeline.

2. Budget discussion

24 RESPONSES		
ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Less than $25	1	4
$26-50	3	13
$51-75	6	25
$76-100	4	17
$101-150	3	13
$151-200	4	17
$201-250	2	8
More than $250	1	4

When asked to share what they view as an appropriate budget for Halloween, most respondents answered somewhere between $50 and $200 was an appropriate amount, with none of the ranges in between more significantly represented than others. Many respondents cited financial difficulty for their decision to spend less, with some stating that they will seek out deals, use coupons, and make their own costumes. Others mentioned that they will buy decorations after Halloween in order to have them for next year, or that they often reuse Halloween decorations from previous years.

"Considering we host more than 1 event in the same day this seems like the proper amount for that one night out of the year" 53, GA, $201-250

"I usually would spend more but this year since I have been furloughed we really have to watch our money. However, the price above includes costume, candy, candy for trunk or treat at school as well as treat bags to give out to classmates." 32, MD, $51-75

"I have 3 children to get costumes for and I also have to factor in a few bags of candy (usually 3 bags). No budget for decorations this year unfortunately..." 34, FL, $76-100

"I don't normally spend much money on Halloween. Making my own costumes, I save a lot of money because I just have to buy the material. We usually use the same decorations, but I will buy maybe a new decoration or two after Halloween for the following year. We usually are not home to hand out candy, so I don't purchase much candy for handing out." 29, CA, $76-100

"As I mentioned earlier, my childrens are very young, so I try and limit their costume to around $10 - $15 dollar a piece. Shop at Dollar General or Family Dollar for their costume. Decoration cost around $10 and we buy candy with coupon throughout early October. Hubby and I don't wear costume, so save on the cost there." 33, SC, $25-50

"You can use the decorations each year, so this will be for candy and costumes." 51, IL, $101-150

24 RESPONSES

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
We're doing homemade this year and we usually have in previous years	2	8
We're doing homemade this year but we've also done store-bought	7	29
We're doing store-bought this year and we usually have in previous years	14	58
We're doing store-bought this year but we've also done homemade	1	4

Over half of the respondents said they are purchasing costumes this year and they do this most often. Most commonly, store-bought costume respondents expressed a lack of confidence in their creativity and in their ability to accomplish the technical aspects of costume making, such as sewing. Others stated that they lacked the time required to make their own costumes. A few even mentioned that their kids wear the costumes throughout the year, making store-bought costumes an economical choice.

"store bought is easier for me to manage, although it can be more expensive. My kids usually ask to be specific characters so it's easier to find that in a store. If I was more "crafty", I'd probably make more home made costumes." 52, CA

"We do store-bought because I don't have the time to spend construction homemade costumes. Work out side the home and the time is limited. I must be a bad mom. (Just kidding). Don't have the time." 32, NC

"They get store bought costumes every year, but then after halloween, they use them as dress up clothes. They will do this all year which makes it more worth it. We do not go the homemade route because I am not at all artistic and I am afraid of embarrassing the poor kids." 37, MI

Homemade costumes were viewed as more appropriate for older kids who want to be "unique" and "original," whereas it was seen as easier for younger children to be given clear options to choose from on a store's rack. Additionally, store-bought costumes tend to offer well-known fictional characters such as Disney princesses. However, homemade costumes tended to be viewed as more "authentic" than store-bought, providing a family Halloween activity.

"My boys will be doing homemade and my daughter is doing store bought. I think the younger kids are more drawn to the store bought stuff and older kids love putting together their own because its theirs." 38, MS

"I think the older the kids get, it is better to have homemade costumes. I think that homemade costumes are much more authentic that the store bought ones. I think storebought is more appropriate for younger kids. i don't think that homemade costumes are inappropriate at all. I think my family likes homemade over store bought because it is more authentic." 51, NJ

"We enjoy being creative and putting together items we already have and buy accessories to "snaz" up the costumes. It's an enjoyable activity for the family." 45, CA

"The kids are older and trying to win prizes at school for unique and original but my youngest wanted a Disney Princess costume. I don't think either in inappropriate but I think kids should use their creativity and be original - makes it more of a challenge and more fun." 41, NY

> **Implications:** While there are a variety of budgets around Halloween, respondents look for end-of-season sales and the ability to reuse not only decorations, but also costumes. While homemade costumes are "authentic" and "unique," they are easier for parents of older children who can construct their own looks. Parents of younger children appreciate the ease and selection associated with store-bought costumes, as well as access popular characters. Companies interested in encouraging the homemade ethos might generate content emphasizing the authenticity as well as the ease of DIY or homemade costuming for younger children (online tutorials, costume kits, etc).

3. Costume Consideration

The best idea generator for Halloween costume ideas tended to be other children, as respondents stated that their kids often brainstormed with their friends and siblings. Additionally, many parents let their kids search through catalogs, online retail sites, or the costume racks at the store to generate ideas. Others encouraged their kids to come up with ideas based on their interests, such as favorite musical artists, fictional characters, and celebrities. A few respondents said that though in-store racks offer a good variety, children often change their minds when faced with so many options.

"My girls usually get some good ideas just chatting with their friends. When they let me know what they are thinking that's when we jump on the internet and start looking for what's available and what's hot this year." 34, FL

"My daughter is obsessed with the band One Direction. Last year I printed and stuck labels all over her and made her face pale - like she has "One Direction Infection". This year, she and a friend want to dress up as two of the boy band members so I am trying to decide how to do this." 46, PA

"When it starts getting close to Halloween costumes hitting stores, my kids like to look online for costumes. They look on the Spirit Halloween site, Target.com and Amazon.com Often they find what they want online and we order it or they might decide to wait to check it out in store. They always get several ideas from browsing online though. We buy costumes as soon as they come out, so if we buy in store, there is still a lot in stock." 30, CA

"We typically look through catalogs from retail and online merchants to get an idea. More times than not we usually just go into a store and she picks what she likes off the shelf." 32, MD

Respondents tended to favor costumes that are "classy," "cute," "not too scary," and "age-appropriate," shying away from revealing costumes, not only for the sake of modesty but also for protection from the cold. Popular costumes included superheroes and zombies for boys, witches and Disney princesses for girls, while both genders showed interested in pop stars, televisions characters, and various monsters. Several respondents expressed that an ideal costume provides warmth and covers the child's body, while also expressing the child's personality.

"Costumes that a edgy and different, maybe even flashy (meaning bright, glittery, etc..). As long as my child is comfortable, happy, and covered is usually a good choice for us. Last year my 8 yr old was an angel and my little one was the devil. I loved it because my 8yr old is so sweet and my little one is extremely sassy, lol, it was perfect." 34, FL

"I like cute costumes, but I do not get my way, the kids are beyond cute costumes. They will pick out their own costumes and get to be whatever they want. I like warm costumes. There is nothing worse than being cold and miserable with crying kids on halloween. I really do not care what they are as long as they are tasteful and the kids are happy." 37, MI

"I typically let my children pick out whatever they want, as long as it isn't something too scary. I think it will be cute to look back on when they are older and see what they were into that particular year. This year, my two year old is Spiderman. He absolutely loves Spiderman, so it is cute to see him so excited about his costume. My older son was Buzz Lightyear when he was in Kindergarten and it was absolutely adorable. He was really into Toy Story at the time, so it was the perfect choice. Their personalities and likes really show through in the choices they make in Halloween costumes." 30, CA

I mean I'm not going to let my daughter wear something that looks like it was made for a hooker. But, beyond inappropriate costumes, she is free to choose. Same goes for my boys, as well. My boys love dressing up like monsters- they have went as Dracula and Frankenstein, but have also just gotten ugly masks and worn long coats. I'm fine with that. My daughter has gone as a princess and as a witch , that's ok too." 38, MS

"It has to be something age appropriate and acceptable to me. My daughter is doing Clawdeen Wolf this year from Monster High. Last year she was a zombie; the year before that she was Spiderella which I really liked because I did her make-up and it came out really good." 45, AZ

Respondents stated that they would not let their daughters wear "sexy" costumes that show skin and would not let their sons wear anything "too morbid," "evil," "gruesome," or that "symbolized" violence. Specific examples of off-limits costumes included Miley Cyrus, scary witches, zombies and devils, Bin Laden, Hitler, and the Disney princess Jasmine. Respondents tended to focus on revealing costumes for girls more so than gruesome costumes for boys, though they provided fewer examples of revealing girl costumes, focusing more on what is revealed or how ("low cut tops," "short skirts") rather than an actual costume.

"For my daughters, I won't let them wear anything sexy or too short. For my sons, they can't wear anything too morbid. Other than that, they are free to choose. They are all under 9, so they have never shown an interest in those types of costumes, luckily." 30, CA

"Definitely to much skin, or just completely inappropriate costumes. Anything that has "sexy" in it is off limits." 34, FL

"The Milye Cyrus costume, which they are promoting, unfortunately my daughter is waaaaay to young to even be considering that, but if she was a teenager and wanted to buy it, she would have to go earn her own money b/c I would not waste my money on that trash. jmho" 32, NC

"I do not allow my children to pick costumes that are scary or rooted in evil or sinful backgrounds. For example, no witches, zombies, devils, etc. I also do not allow my girls to wear anything that would be

considered "sexy." They are both still young, so it's not a problem now, but in the future, I will be making sure their costumes never give off the illusion of sexiness." 29, CA

"This isn't really a problem for boys for the most part-except for maybe dressing up like bin Laden or Hitler. This is a terrible trend I see getting worse every year for girls, though. My daughter will not be allowed to wear any skirt or dress that doesn't go at least to the knees. I see so many little girls and teeens wearing short skirts and low-cut tops, its really sad. It ain't happening here." 38, MS

"My 4 year old wanted to be Jasmine but husband thought there was too much stomach and it wouldn't be warm enough for New York." 41, NY

Implications: Parents are very involved in the process of finding an appropriate costume for their child, finding ways to guide them toward a decision such as providing them with catalogs, allowing them to browse an online shop, or taking them to the store. The parents surveyed have many opinions about what they will and will not allow their child to wear, with focus mainly on modesty in female costumes.

APPENDIX A: RESPONDENT PROFILES
TOTAL ANSWERING ALL QUESTIONS N=23

Parameter	
Age	25-34: 9 35-44: 6 45-55: 8
Household income	$30,000-49,999: 7 $50,000-69,999: 8 $70,000-99,999: 5 $100,000+: 3

Scope of Analysis

As with all qualitative research, the findings reported here should be considered directional and not serve as a means of statistical significance.