CS 591: Introduction to Computer Security

Information Flow

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Background

- Denning and Denning, Certification of Programs for Secure Information Flow, CACM 20(7), July 1977
- Presentation summarized in Bishop Chapter 15

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Program analysis

- What if we try to track information flow within a program?
- We have access control for files, processes and users
  - what about variables?

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Explicit flows

- x := 17
- l := h
- h := l

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Implicit flows

- How can we write l:=h?
- Assume l and h are Booleans
  - if h then l:= true else l:= false
  - l := true; if not h then l:= false else skip
  - l := false; while h do l:= true

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Simple "while" language

- Sabelfeld and Myers Figures 2 and 3
  - C ::= skip
    | var := exp
    | C1; C2
    | if exp then C1 else C2
    | while exp do C

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Type system

- Judgment forms:
- Every variable in exp is at or below level
  |- exp: level
- Every assignment in C is at or above pc
  [pc] |- C

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Inference Rules

$$[\text{E1–2}] \quad \vdash exp : high \qquad \frac{h \notin Vars(exp)}{\vdash exp : low}$$

$$[\text{C1–3}] \quad [pc] \vdash \mathsf{skip} \qquad [pc] \vdash h := exp \qquad \frac{\vdash exp : low}{[low] \vdash l := exp}$$

$$[\text{C4–5}] \quad \frac{[pc] \vdash C_1 \quad [pc] \vdash C_2}{[pc] \vdash C_1 ; C_2} \qquad \frac{\vdash exp : pc \quad [pc] \vdash C}{[pc] \vdash \mathsf{while}\ exp\ \mathsf{do}\ C}$$

$$[\text{C6–7}] \quad \frac{\vdash exp : pc \quad [pc] \vdash C_1 \quad [pc] \vdash C_2}{[pc] \vdash \mathsf{if}\ exp\ \mathsf{then}\ C_1\ \mathsf{else}\ C_2} \qquad \frac{[high] \vdash C}{[low] \vdash C}$$

What is a flow?

- A variable of confidential input does not cause a variation of public output

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Simple Program

- Multiplication by repeated addition

```
{a,b >= 0}
x := a;
r := 0;
while (x>0) do
      x := x -1;
      r := r + b
{r = a*b}
```

Direct Flows:

a -> x
b -> r

Indirect Flow:

x -> r

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Exercise

1. h := not l
2. h := if l then false else true
3. if l then h := false
   else h := true
4. h := true;
   if l then h := false
   else skip
5. l := not h
6. l := if h then false else true
7. if h then l := false
   else l := true
8. l := true;
   if h then l := false
   else skip

Theoretical results

- Volpano, Irvine and Smith (JCS '96) showed Soundness
  - "If an expression *e* can be given a type τ in our system, then Simple Security says … that only variables at level τ or lower in *e* will have their contents read when *e* is evaluated (no read up)….
  - On the other hand, if a command *c* can be given a type [τ] |- *c* then Confinement says … that no variable below level τ is updated in *c* (no write down)."

Information Flow Languages

- Two serious implementations of information-flow languages
  - Jif = Java + Information Flow
    - Andrew Myers and others, Cornell
    - http://www.cs.cornell.edu/jif/
  - FlowCaml
    - Vincent Simonet
    - http://cristal.inria.fr/~simonet/soft/flowcaml/

FlowCaml

- An ML-style language with type inference
- Windows executable flowcaml gives an interactive type checker
  - Note: It does not execute the programs, batch compiler flowcamlc compiles them

Declaring values

```
let x = 1;;

let x1 : !alice int = 42;;

let x2 : !bob int = 53;;
```

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Anonymous functions and lists

```
let succ = function x -> x + 1;;

let half = function x -> x lsr 1;;

let l1 = [1; 2; 3; 4];;

let l2 = [x1; x2];;
```

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Defining functions

```
let rec length = function
    [] -> 0
  | _ :: tl -> 1 + length tl;;

let rec mem0 = function
    [] -> false
  | hd :: tl -> hd = 0 || mem0 tl
;;
```

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Demo

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Does it work?

- In practice it is not broadly adopted
  - Technical issue is the complexity of managing policy
  - I suspect there are social issues as well … the technical issues are not show stoppers

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Recall

- Consider an example (in no particular language)

```
H = readHighDatabase()

L = readLowUserInput()

If f(H,L)
     then printLow "Success"
     else printLow "Fail"
```

- Assume H is high and L is Low

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But!!!

- Consider an example (in no particular language)

```
H = readHighDatabase("passwd")

L = readLowUserInput()

If checkPassword(H,L)
     then printLow "Success"
     else printLow "Fail"
```

- We do this every day!

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Password checking paradox

- Why shouldn't we allow someone to write the password program?
- Why should we?

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Policy

- The password paradox is solved by explicit policy
- Similar issues arise with crypto algorithms
  - LoCypher = encrypt (HighClear, goodKey)
- Cf.
  - LoCypher = encrypt (HighClear, badKey)

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FlowCaml and Policy

- FlowCaml solves the policy problem by dividing the program into two parts:
  - Flow caml portion (.fml), with all flows checked
  - Regular caml portion with an annotated interface
- The downgrading of encryption or password validation queries is not done within the flow-checked portion

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Policy

- Zdancewic uses other techniques, including explicit downgrade assertions for confidentiality
- Basic philosophy: uniform enforcement with explicit escape mechanism
  - Focus analysis on the exceptions

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Further reading

- Dorothy E. Denning and Peter J. Denning, Certification of Programs for Secure Information Flow, http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~cis670/Spring2003/p504-denning.pdf
- Dennis Volpano, Geoffrey Smith, and Cynthia Irvine, A Sound Type System for Secure Flow Analysis, http://www.cs.fiu.edu/~smithg/papers/jcs96.pdf
- Steve Zdancewic, Lantian Zheng, Nathaniel Nystrom, and Andrew C. Myers, Secure Program Partitioning, http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~stevez/papers/ZZNM02.pdf
- Andrei Sabelfeld and Andrew C. Myers, Language-based Information-Flow Security, http://www.cs.cornell.edu/andru/papers/jsac/sm-jsac03.pdf
- Peng Li and Steve Zdancewic, Downgrading Policies and Relaxed Noninterference, http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~stevez/papers/LZ05a.pdf

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