

# Dynamic Taint Tracking for Domain Driven Security (DRAFT)

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## Abstract

## **Sammanfattning**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The creation of the World Wide Web (web) has caused a huge impact on today's society [40]. The web is a source for information and it connects the world through a unanimous platform. Many businesses have decided to take advantage of the web platform to share information and communicate with customers. However, this does not come without drawbacks. The information sharing is a weakness in the same manner as it is a strength. The web application is not only accessible for the targeted user groups but for anyone with access to the web. This entails that malicious users who wish to abuse and/or cause harm to other users have the accessibility to possibly do so.

There are several possible attacks that a web application is vulnerable to. The attack most frequently conducted today will probably not be the same as the most conducted in the future. The Open Web Applications Security Project, known as OWASP, is an online community which aims to provide knowledge about how to secure web applications [26]. OWASP have produced reports about the top 10 security risks for a web application and the latest was published 2017. In this report was Injection Attacks number one and Cross-Site Scripting number seven [28, 26, 9].

To minimize the risk of accidentally introducing security flaws in to the application have a variety of tools and methodologies been created. One of these is Dynamic Taint Tracking which marks input from the user as tainted through a taint variable attached to the input. This taint variable follows the input throughout the application and prop-

agates onto the other variables it encounters. It is possible to detain the input but this is only done after the input have been validated. The taint value is later checked in sensitive areas through something called sinks. Execution is halted if a tainted variable is detected trying to enter the sensitive area through the sink [29, 37]. One of the methodologies that have been coined is the programming paradigm Domain Driven Security. Domain Driven Security aim to secure applications by focusing on the core domain models and making certain that validation of the value objects is correct [39, 21].

The following sections of the chapter will aim to specify the why and how behind the conduction of the thesis. It starts with a section of *Definitions* followed by *Problem* description and explanation of the thesis *Aim*. These sections is then followed by *Related Work* in the field and a *Delimitations* section. Lastly, is there a section about the *Methodology* behind the thesis.

## 1.1 Definitions

**Definition 1.1.1.** Application is a computer process which is constructed to solve one or more tasks for the user.

**Definition 1.1.2.** Web Application is an application deployed with accessibility from the web.

**Definition 1.1.3.** Taint denotes marking data with a flag indicating possibility to be harmful for the application.

**Definition 1.1.4.** Detaint denotes the process of removing the taint flag from a value and therefore marking the value as safe to the application.

**Definition 1.1.5.** Source denotes an entry point to the system where the input is possibly malicious.

**Definition 1.1.6.** Sink denotes entry point to sensitive code areas.



**Definition 1.1.7.** Domain is explained in Secure by Design [24] as part of the real world where something happens.

**Definition 1.1.8.** Domain Model is a fraction of the domain where each model have a specific meaning.

## 1.2 Problem

*How can an implementation of a Dynamic Taint Tracking tool enforce the security gains of Domain Driven Security.*

Unwanted information disclosure is a growing problem today. Work towards protecting user data is needed and Domain Driven Security have been proven to secure applications from Injection and Cross-Site Scripting attacks. Is it then possible to achieve the security gains of Domain Driven Security through applying Dynamic Taint Tracking to web applications. What would the possible drawbacks and advantages be.

## 1.3 Aim

This thesis will implement and evaluate a Dynamic Taint Tracking tool to prevent confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities in web applications. The thesis will also evaluate the security benefits of Domain Driven Security, a programming paradigm which has been proposed to combat confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities. Concretely, we will benchmark our Dynamic Taint Tracking tool against injection, cross-site scripting and information disclosure vulnerabilities.

## 1.4 Related Work

Stendahl [34] wrote a thesis in 2016 where he evaluated if a Domain Driven Security can prevent Injection Attacks and Cross-Site Scripting. He concluded that there is a security gain towards Injection Attacks and Cross-Site Scripting by following the Domain Driven Security methodology. The gained security comes from proper validation of variables before propagating the data into the value objects.

Halдар, Chandra, and Franz [16] have written a report about Dynamic Taint Tracking in Java where they try to solve the problem of not properly validating user input. They managed to construct a tool that is independent from the web applications source code and the results from using the tool is a gain in security. Halдар, Chandra, and Franz [16] ran their benchmarks on OWASP's project WebGoat [5] but acknowledged in their report that benchmarks of real-world web applications need to be tested.

There do exist two Dynamic Taint Tracking tools where Phosphor [31] is one and Security Taint Propagation [11] is another. Both are open source projects and developed for Java applications.

## 1.5 Delimitations

The focus of the thesis lies on web applications security vulnerabilities. However, other application areas might be vulnerable to the same kind of vulnerabilities. Information and discussions about those areas will not be given.

Some delimitations for the applications is that it will only consist of a dynamic taint tracker and not in any form a static version. The application will as well only be developed for java application. Development will be conducted in Java with the help of the library Javassist.

## 1.6 Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. The first part of the thesis consists of a literature study followed by reasoning about tainting and detainting rules. This is done on quantitative research. The Second part of the thesis is to evaluate the implemented Dynamic Taint Tracking tool. This is done quantitatively where benchmarks evaluating performance and security gain functionality will be conducted and evaluated.

# Chapter 2

## Background

This Chapter will present background knowledge needed to comprehend conduction of the thesis. The chapter starts with a general description about *Web Application* structure and is followed by a section discussion common *Security Vulnerabilities* to web applications. After those follows two sections describing *Dynamic Taint Tracking* and *Domain Driven Security*. The last section is a chapter about *Java*.

### 2.1 Web Application

To make applications available for large set of people and make them accessible from now days almost everywhere do businesses deploy their applications on the web. The deployment of an application can vary a lot but the most common structure for a web application is based on a three-tier architecture. The first tier is the presentation which is the visual components rendered by the browser. The second is the logic tier which is the brain of the application. The last and third tier is the storage, where the second tier can store data as needed [7]. A illustration of the three layer architecture can be seen in figure 2.1.

It can be seen in figure 2.1 that the tiers only communicate with the tier closest to themselves. This causes the second tier to become a safe guard for tier three where the valuable and possibly sensitive information is stored. The storage tier contains all the information the application needs to provide the wanted service. Such information might for



Figure 2.1: Web application architecture [16].

example be name, email, personal number and credit card information [7].

The scope of the thesis lies in tier two where the brain of the application lies. The programming language for tier two might vary a lot but one common and the chosen language for this thesis is Java.

### 2.1.1 Structured Query Language

Communication between tier two and tier three is done through a standardize language called Structured Query Language, mostly known as SQL. SQL is created to anagrammatically manipulate and access databases. The clear majority of today's database uses SQL. The language works by building queries specifying the wanted information or task. The query will be evaluated and handled up upon by the SQL engine [10].

## 2.2 Security Vulnerabilities

The organization Open Web Applications Security Project, mostly known for its shortening (OWASP), is an online community which aim to provide knowledge how to secure web applications [26]. OWASP have produced reports about the top 10 security risks with a web application and the latest was published 2017. The report contains information about the ten most common application security risks that for the current year. Information such as how the security risk is exploited and possible prevention method is also presented. This thesis will look

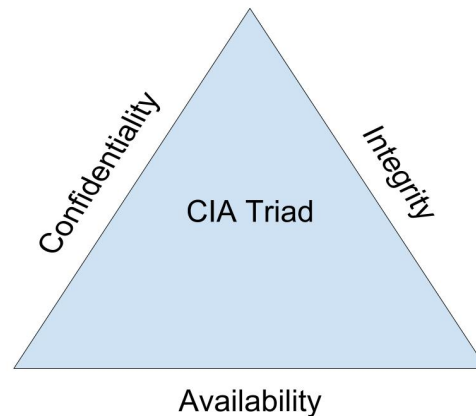


Figure 2.2: CIA Triad

at security risk number one and eight which is Injection Attacks and Cross-site Scripting [28].

### 2.2.1 CIA Triad

Discussions about application security often relies on the CIA Triad which represent the three primary concepts in information security. These three are confidentiality, integrity and availability. Confidentiality are rules that specifies the access restrictions to the application. Integrity specifies that application data should be accurate and not altered. Availability is about ability to access the application and application data [6]. This thesis focuses on confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities and how we can prevent them.

### 2.2.2 Injection

The most common security risk is Injection Attacks [28]. Injection Attack is any attack where the attacker's input changes the intent of the execution. Common result of Injection Attacks is file destruction, lack of accountability, denial of access and data loss [35].

Injection Attacks can be divided into two different subgroups. These two subgroups are SQL Injection and Blind SQL Injection [35].

## SQL Injection

SQL Injection is when a SQL query is tampered which results in gaining content from the database which was not intended. Listing 2.1 displays a SQL Query which is open to SQL Injections. This is due to the fact that the variable `UserId` is never validated before it is propagated into the query [7, 35].

Listing 2.1: Code Acceptable to SQL Injection

```
userId = userInput
"SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId = " + userId
```

The query will work as intended if the user input, notated with *userInput*, only is a valid Integer (since Integer is what we have decided that user id is in this application). But what happens if the user input is *10 or 1 = 1*? This user input would result in the query seen in listing 2.2.

Listing 2.2: SQL Injection

```
SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId = 10 or 1 = 1
```

This query would result in query that always evaluates to true. The result of this will be that the query returns the whole table of users. This problem can be prevented in a couple of different ways. The first is through validation of the input. By verifying the input as seen in listing 2.3 can we protect the query from being assessable to SQL Injection.

Listing 2.3: Preventing SQL Injection through Verification

```
userId = userInput
isInteger(userId)
"SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId = " + userId
```

A second more common alternative is to use SQL Parameters which handles the verification for the user. This leaves the verification and validation of input up to the SQL engine. An example written with SQL Parameters can be seen in listing 2.4.

Listing 2.4: Preventing SQL Injection through SQL Parameters

```
userId = userInput
sqlQuery = "SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId=@0"
db.Execute(sqlQuery, userId)
```

### Blind SQL Injection

Blind SQL Injection is very like SQL Injection. The only difference is that that attacker dose not receive the wanted information from the database. The information is instead received by monitoring variables such as how long time the response took or what kind of error messages it returns. An example of the first is a SQL query that tells the SQL engine to sleep depending on a condition. An example of this can be seen in listing 2.5 [7, 35].

Listing 2.5: Time Based Blind SQL Injection

```
SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId = 1 WAITFOR DELAY
'0:0:5'
```

The second variant of Blind SQL Injection, which is by analysing the error messages, and depending on what they return build an image of the wanted answer. This is mostly done by testing different combination of true and false questions [7, 35].

### 2.2.3 Cross-site Scripting

Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) have been a vulnerability since the beginning of the internet. One of the first XSS attacks was created just after the



release of JavaScript. The attack was conducted through loading a malicious web application into a frame on the site that the attacker want to gain information of. The attacker could then through JavaScript access any content that is visible or typed into the web application. To prevent this form of attack were the standard of Same-Origin Policy introduced. Same-Origin Policy restricts JavaScript to only access content from its own origin [14, 33].

But the introduction of the Same-Origin Policy did not stop the attackers from performing XSS attacks. The next wave of attacks was mostly towards chat rooms where it was possible to inject malicious scripts into the input of the message. Which would then later be reflected by the server itself, when displaying the message for other users, and thereby bypassing the Same-Origin Policy [14].

XSS can be divided into three different sub categories. Which are: reflected, Stored and DOM Based XSS.

### **Reflected XSS**

Reflected XSS is mostly conducted through a malicious link that an unknowing user clicks. The malicious link will exploit a vulnerable input on the targeted web application and though the input reflect back content to the user [35].

### **Stored XSS**

Stored XSS is when malicious scripts are stored in the targeted web applications database. This malicious script is then loaded and presented for each user which is trying to access the application [35].

### **DOM Based XSS**

DOM Based XSS is very similar to Reflected XSS but it does not necessary have to be reflected from the application server. DOM Based XSS modifies the DOM tree and can exploit the user [35].

## 2.3 Dynamic Taint Tracking

Taint tracking, also known as taint analysis, taint checking and taint propagation, is a tool to analyse the flow of information in a domain [29]. the goal of taint tracking is to prevent possible attacks such as Injection Attacks and Cross-Site Scripting. Taint tracking can be done in two different ways: static and dynamic. The static is an evaluation tool which is done statically before runtime. Dynamic Taint Tracking is a tool that is executed in runtime. The tool works by tracking data in runtime and actively blocking any data that is trying to enter the sink without being tainted through validation first. Perl and Ruby are two programming languages which have adapted to user Taint checking [30, 22]. There are some tools who enables taint checking for other languages such as TaintDroid [23] and FlexTaint [37]. This thesis will handle Dynamic Taint Checking and how it can increase the security of an application.

This is done by marking untrusted input from sources, which is a marking point where malicious data might enter the system, as tainted. This is done through a taint flag attached to the input. This taint flag follows the input throughout the application and propagates onto any other data it encounters. It is possible to detaint (remove the taint flag) tainted data but this is only done after the data have been sanitized through validation. The taint flags are checked in areas called sinks which are markings for entry points to sensitive code [29, 37]. The decision of what to do when a tainted variable try to pass through a sink might vary depending on the application. However, the common reaction is to stop the execution of the tainted code. Other actions such as logging or raising an alarm are also common.

An example of taint tracking can be seen in listing 2.6. In this example *getAttribute* is a source, *executeQuery* a sink and *validate* a sanitizer. On line one the input from the source is flagged tainted and the taint propagates onto *userId*. The sanitizer on line two validates *userId* and removes the taint flag. Lastly, the sink on line three execute since the argument is not tainted. If a user sends in a malicious *userId* containing "101 OR 1 = 1" the validator would either halt the execution or sanitize the String. However, removing line two would result in tainted data entering the sink. This would without a Dynamic Taint Tracking tool

result in giving the malicious user the entire list of Users. With a Dynamic Taint Tracking tool however, would result in the sink halting the execution therefore preventing unwanted information disclosure.

Listing 2.6: Taint Tracking

```

1  userId = getAttribute("userId");
2  validate(userId)
3  executeQuery("SELECT * FROM Users WHERE userId = "
    + userId);

```

The above described Dynamic Taint Tracking tool focuses on preventing malicious code to enter the application. There are security policies restricting input from sources to pass through sinks without first being sanitized through validation. The same application could however be used to enforce policies restricting sensitive data from sinks to pass through sources without being sanitized to not contain sensitive data.

This thesis will implement and evaluate a Dynamic Taint Tracking tool to prevent confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities in web applications. The thesis will also evaluate the security benefits of Domain Driven Security, a programming paradigm which has been proposed to combat confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities. Concretely, we will benchmark our Dynamic Taint Tracking tool against injection, cross-site scripting and information disclosure vulnerabilities.

## 2.4 Domain Driven Security

There exists a plethora of tools who aim to help in the process of developing complex domain models, but Domain Driven Design is not one of them [2, 20]. Domain Driven Design is more of a thought process and methodology to follow every step of the process [12]. In *Domain-driven design reference: definitions and patterns summaries* do Evans [13] describe Domain Driven Design through three core ideas:

- Focus on the core domain.

- Explore models in a creative collaboration of domain practitioners and software practitioners.
- Speak a ubiquitous language within an explicitly bounded context.

The core domain is the part of your product that is most important and often is your main selling point compared to other similar products [25]. A discussion and even possible a documentation describing the core domain is something that will help the development of the product. The idea is to keep everybody on the same track heading in the same direction [12].

The second idea is to explore and develop every model in collaboration between domain practitioners, who are experts in the given domain, and software developers. This ensures that important knowledge needed to successfully develop the product is communicated back and forth between the two parties [25]. The third idea is important to enable and streamline the second. By using a ubiquitous language will miscommunication between domain and software practitioners be minimized and the collaboration between the two parties can instead focus on the important parts which is to develop the product [13].

Evans [13] do as well argue about the weight of clearly defining the bounded contexts for each defined model, and this needs to be done in the ubiquitous language created for the specific product. The need of this exists because of the otherwise great risk of misunderstandings and erroneous assumptions in the collaborations between the different models [25].

Wilander [39] and Johnsson [21] created 2009 a blog post each in a synchronous manner where they together introduces the concept of Domain Driven Security to the public. They describe Domain Driven Security as the intersection between Domain Driven Design and application security. Domain Driven Design is about developing complex domain models and one of the most basic rule of application security is to always validate input data. Domain Driven Security in other hand, is about the importance of creating and maintaining domain models who are reflecting the product correctly and that they are validated so they can't be populated with erroneous data [39, 21, 1, 34].

## 2.5 Java

Java have been around since the early 90's. The founder's objective was to develop a new improved programming language that simplified the task for the developer but still had a familiar C/C++ syntax. [27]. Today is Java one of the most common programming languages [15].

Java is a statically typed language which means that no variable can be used before they have been declared. These variables can be of two different types. These are primitives and references to objects. Among the primitives dose Java have support for eight. These are byte, short, int, long, float, double, boolean and char [32].

### 2.5.1 Java Virtual Machine

There exists a plethora of implementation of the JVM but the official that Oracle develop is HotSpot [36]. One of the core ideas with Java during its development was "Write once, run anywhere". The slogan was created by Sun Microsystems which at the time were the company behind Java and the Java Virtual Machine, known as JVM. [8]. The idea behind the JVM was to have one language that executed the same on all platforms. And then modify the JVM to be able to run on as many platforms as possible. The JVM is a virtual machine with its own components of heap storage, stack and program counter, method area and runtime constant pool.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the architecture of the JVM. The compiled Java code that the developer creates is loaded through the Class Loader and added into the JVM Memory. [38].

### 2.5.2 Instrumentation

Java Instrumentation is a way to modify the execution of an application on the Java Virtual Machine (JVM) without having knowledge nor the need of modifying the application code itself. This makes it beneficial to implement for example monitoring agents and event loggers through Java Instrumentation. Instrumentation is a Java package that

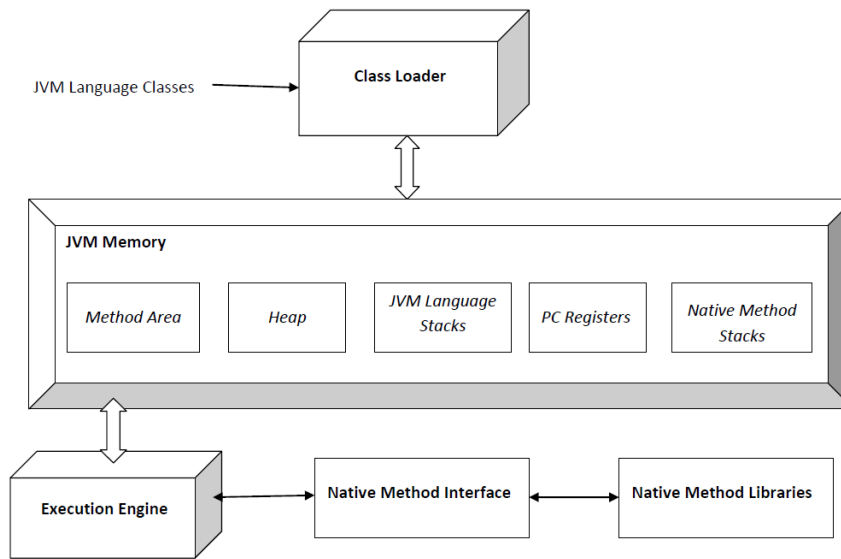


Figure 2.3: Java Virtual Machine Architecture

provides services for modifying the bytecode of the program execution. Instrumentation works by implementing an Agent that will have the possibility to modify any application loaded in runtime [18].

### 2.5.3 Javassist

There exist several libraries that can help the developer in the task of creating an Instrumentation Agent. The help comes in libraries of high level functions that later can be translated into bytecode that the JVM will understand. The library used in this thesis is Javassist. Javassist stands for Java programming Assistant and is a bytecode engineering toolkit. Javassist provides two levels of API where the one used in this thesis provides functionality of editing class files on source level which require no understanding of Java bytecode [19].

# Chapter 3

## Implementation

This Chapter presents the fundamental parts in the process of implementing the Dynamic Taint Tracking tool. The chapter starts with a section describing the *Policies* of the tool. This chapter is then followed by *Notable Problems* about the development and a explanation about the application *Software Architecture*.

### 3.1 Policies

The development of the Dynamic Taint Tracking tool relies on tainting, detainting and propagation logic. However, to implement the logic of the application need the security policies first be defined. Security policies are principles or actions that that the application strives to fulfil [3]. In the application developed in this thesis will these be based on two different aspects. These are *confidentiality* and *integrity*.

#### 3.1.1 Confidentiality

The confidentiality policies entailed that data given to the user should only be data that the user have the right to access. This gives us the policy below.

- No information shall be released to users without permission.

(??? Information from sinks should not go where ???)

### 3.1.2 Integrity

Integrity entails that users may not modify data which id dose not have permission to alter. This gives us the policy below.

- No information shall be altered without permission.

This entails that no information from sources shall gain access of a sink without first being sanitized.

### 3.1.3 Taint Checking

The policies above will be enforced by forcing validation of data that is or have been in contact with data coming from a source before they enter a sink. By enforcing this rule should preventions of confidentiality and integrity volubilities be reduces severely. One core policy preventing this is as well that no unintended code shall be able to execute.

The policies above can also be combine into tainting policies which are:

- Data passing through sources going into the domain should be marked tainted.
- No tainted data is allowed to pass through a sink.
- Data can only be detained by validation.



## Taint Propagation

### 3.2 Notable Problems

One of the first problems that was introduced during the development phase of the application is that some classes can't be instrumented during runtime. More precisely, the classes that the JVM relies on can't be instrumented in realtime. But there is a solution to this. The solution is to create a JAR file with statically modified versions of the classes. In this case is the String class one of these. This JAR file can then be loaded through the option `Xbootclasspath/p` that appends the JAR file to the front of the bootstrap path. Forcing the JVM to use our modified versions of classes [17]. Because of this limitation was the decision of instrumenting as many classes as possible statically. This is to keep the code consistent.

Another problem is that primitives can't be instrumented. This causes a problem since it opens the ability to miss propagation of tainted data if they ever pass through a byte- or char-array. The solution that can solve this is to create shadow variables that lie in the closest class or objective to the byte- or char-array. This shadow variable will contain the taint.

Possible solution to instrument primitives is to transform all primitives into their corresponding class, so call Unboxing. This logic is used in a similar manner called Autoboxing. This is used to transform the primitive, which only holds a value, into its corresponding object which contains sets of functions. An idea I had, to solve the problem with instrumenting primitives, is to Unbox all primitives in runtime and never use primitives. This would make it easy to instrument each of the primitives corresponding classes to propagate taint. However, this is probably not an optimal solution. The reason to this is the added overhead it would add to the execution [4].

Another problem that emerged was that operations with primitives are direct bytecode translations. Two examples of these are usage of `+` (addition) and `-` (subtraction).

### **3.3 Software Architecture**

# Chapter 4

## Benchmarking

### 4.1 Test Environment

The execution of the benchmarking is conducted on a MacBook Pro late 2013 model with the following specification:

**Processor:** 2 GHz Core i7

**Memory:** 8 GB 1600 MHz DDR3

**Operating system:** macOS High Sierra v10.13.3

**Java:** 1.8.0\_161

**Java Virtual Machine:** HotSpot 25.161-b12, 64-Bit, mixed mode

### 4.2 Evaluation

## **Chapter 5**

### **Result**

# **Chapter 6**

## **Discussion**

### **6.1 Domain Driven Security**

## **Chapter 7**

### **Future Work**

## **Chapter 8**

## **Conclusion**

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