**Final Report**

COMP520-18Y (HAM)

**Automated Searching for  
Differential Characteristics in SHA-2**

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**Abstract:** TODO

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# Introduction

## SHA-2 (Define terms)

Standardized under FIPS180-2 (currently FIPS180-4) by the NSA. Class of cryptographic hash functions superseding SHA-1. Used in a variety of applications such as digital signatures, proof of work, file integrity, and password storage.

## Motivation (Why is cryptanalysis important)

Many hash functions have come before SHA-2; many have been broken (MD5, RIPEMD, SHA-0, SHA-1). Hash functions are security-critical, we need assurance that a malicious actor cannot subvert them in a tractable amount of time / with a reasonable amount of computational power.

## Aim (Project statement)

Look at the existing framework that is differential cryptanalysis, determine problems or gaps of knowledge in the public sphere of research, and attempt to find solutions

## Importance (Literature Review)

Lack of public information on differential cryptanalysis of hash functions; most data is masters/PhD reports, or conference proceedings. Prior is indigestible in terms of content and sparse in terms of availability, latter does not have enough data and is not thorough in explanations. Difficult for new people to enter the field due to lack of knowledge.



## Overview (Description of remaining content in report)

Researched a whole host of current attacks on SHA-2 as well as past hash functions. Determined that differential cryptanalysis was promising, attempted to learn more about it. Fell flat when it came to finding any good material for it, especially delta-0. Working with SHA-2 is too extreme and difficult to manage; we create our own reduced SHA-2 variant which is both quicker to work with, and easier to understand. Attempt to use computational methods to find delta-0 for reduced variant with reasonable success. Hypothesis holds, but difficult to compare our actual fitness function to a “true” fitness due to tractability. Technique appears promising.

# Background



## Hash Functions

Hash functions are maps from . Effectively give a ‘fingerprint’ for the input ‘message’. Domain is infinite, codomain is finite, hence by extreme pigeonholing there must be at least one which map to the same output.

### Properties

Quick to compute; deterministic. Not required but sometimes assumed to be uniformly distributed, continuous, and non-invertible.

## Cryptographic Hash Functions

Strict subset of class of hash functions. Have stringent properties that make them more suitable for sensitive tasks.

### Properties

Uniformly distributed, non-continuous (avalanche effect), and the three resistances.

An ideal CHF cannot be constructed; it is a random oracle. No possible way to correlate an output with an input, and no possible way to correlate two inputs in any way; no better way to break the resistances than via brute force. Clearly not constructible. So, any CHF we construct cannot truly satisfy these properties, only get close to.



### Broken Cryptographic Hash Functions

A CHF is considered broken when at least one of its properties is violated.

## MD5

Was historically considered to be the first CHF up until 2004 (MD4 came before but was DOA). Broken by Wang et al using differential cryptanalysis.

## RIPEMD

Almost like running two MD4 instances in parallel and sharing data, arguably more complex than MD5. Also broken by Wang et al in the same year using differential cryptanalysis.



## SHA-1

Standardized by FIPS??? By NSA/NIST, broken by CWI/Google in 2017 as part of the SHAttered attack. Used differential cryptanalysis.



## Differential Cryptanalysis

A framework for breaking collision resistance (easiest of the three resistances arguably). Traces differences in inputs/outputs through each of the internal components. Aim is to find an output difference of 0 with high probability, find sufficient conditions for it to hold, and deal with contradictions.

## Optimization Algorithms

Finding delta-0 isnt obvious in many circumstances; can optimization algorithms be applied here?

### Heuristics

How can we determine the fitness of delta-0? Currently using zero/total and probability.

### Random Search

With no other information, can we guess-and-check values? This gives the added benefit of giving us an idea of what the search space ‘looks’ like, i.e. are there typically many ‘good’ solutions?

### Genetic Algorithms

# Design



## Propagations

Propagations refer to taking a set of input differences and determining the possible output differences, along with their frequency

### Component-wise

Let be the set of inputs (-dimensional) and be the set of outputs for a component given by . Say that is a difference. The propagation of is . We can count frequencies by determining how many times a particular term appears in this set. This is out of . Typically is too large to iterate over so random sampling is necessary in most non-trivial cases. Certain functions are linear in the sense that , i.e. they are -homomorphisms. In this case, , hence , so linear functions are constant on propagations. Such examples are the functions.

### Function-wise

A function is composed of many components, which will have inputs interlinked in various ways. All of these are ‘seeded’ by an initial difference, so the propagation itself is entirely deterministic. If we view our function as , propagation is as follows:

* Propagate the initial difference through to get a set
* For each element in , propagate it through to get a set
* Repeat until is obtained; this is the output.

### Caveats

Clearly this is an EXPSPACE problem. Along with issues with sampling, there are issues with actually propagating every possible value. As such we limit ourselves to ‘statistically significant’ results, i.e. output differences that have a frequency greater than some threshold probability.

As suggested by some papers, we should ensure that message expansion has a sufficient number of 0s in it [Schlaffer], and make sure our input differences only have bits set in the last few words.

## Heuristics

We need some way of determining how fit a particular value of is. We have two techniques; We can look at , which gives an indication of whether or not the number of zero trails dominates or not. Second technique is to look at the probability of any of these 0s actually being hit. Both heuristics have issues which will be explored later.

## Random Search

The first and simplest optimization algorithm in existence is random search, or guess-and-check. We randomly sample , attempt to propagate it, and then gauge its fitness.

## Genetic Algorithms

Assuming that the fitness function is typically not locally continuous, genetic algorithms will typically thrive.

- Approach to the problem – likely to refer to Background

- Overall Solution/Approach Design



# Implementation

- Technologies, libraries, schematics, data flow

# Evaluation

- Does it work, does it meet expectations/requirements

# Conclusion

- Drawing together outcomes and original plan. Future work.

1. References: Todo with Endnote
2. Appendices: Todo

# Project Source Code